

# National Australia Bank axes 2,500 jobs as unemployment rises

Martin Scott  
20 October 2026

National Australia Bank (NAB) announced Tuesday that it will axe up to 2,500 jobs, around 6 percent of its workforce. Up to 1,500 workers will be sacked before the end of this year, with the remainder to be thrown on the scrapheap by June 2027.

The mass sackings are being imposed by one of Australia's largest and most profitable corporations. In the six months to March, NAB recorded a net profit of \$2.75 billion on net operating income of almost \$10.9 billion.

The announcement comes just five days after Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures revealed an increase in the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate to 4.7 percent, 0.3 percentage points higher than a year ago and its highest level since October 2021.

The number of workers employed dropped by 39,300 in September, while the number of officially unemployed workers increased by 8,900 to 732,000. Underemployment increased to 6.3 percent, bringing total underutilisation to 11 percent.

The NAB sackings point to the processes underlying this broader deterioration. Major corporations are carrying out sweeping restructuring operations, using artificial intelligence (AI), automation, outsourcing and offshoring to slash labour costs and intensify the exploitation of the remaining workforce.

NAB chief executive Andrew Irvine stated the cuts would be concentrated in corporate functions and senior management, claiming there would be no "material impact" on customer-facing banking roles.

The assertion that 6 percent of the workforce can be eliminated without a significant impact on services or workloads should be treated with contempt. The Finance Sector Union (FSU) says NAB workers are already confronting "unbearable workloads" as a result of previous cuts.

In September 2025, the bank announced 410 job cuts. In

March this year, it proposed 447 redundancies and 277 new Australian positions, a net loss of 170 domestic jobs, while adding 237 roles offshore, mainly in India and Vietnam.

While the FSU bureaucracy denounced the latest cuts as "disgraceful," the union is promoting illusions that they can be "challenged" through a backroom meeting with Irvine.

The reality is that the FSU bureaucracy continues to enforce the destruction of jobs throughout the banking industry. ANZ announced in September last year that it would cut 3,500 staff and more than 1,000 contractors. Late last month, it began a further restructure affecting more than 400 roles, about 100 of which are to be eliminated outright through offshoring and redundancies.

Commonwealth Bank has cut more than 1,000 roles since January, including a further 232 to go by the end of the year. Westpac confirmed this month that 102 redundancies will result from 174 roles affected in its risk, institutional banking and finance teams, as part of a restructure led by consultancy firm Bain.

The destruction of all those jobs, and thousands more, has been allowed to take place without a single day of industrial action called by the FSU bureaucracy, which has not led a strike in more than two decades.

NAB cited "rapid technological change" among the conditions driving the restructuring. While Irvine denied the job cuts were "fundamentally linked to AI," his comments at a NAB Business Summit just two months ago would appear to tell a different story.

Irvine described AI as "the fourth industrial revolution," declaring that it would be "as consequential to how we live and work as the steam engine, electricity and the computer."

Significantly, he added: "Just like with previous industrial revolutions, some roles will go. Some roles will change. And new roles will be created."

Swinburne University corporate-governance expert Helen Bird questioned NAB's failure to explain the role of new technology in the restructure, pointing to "the use of technology, including AI, to replace staff involved in administrative, monitoring and oversight functions."

"This is no doubt an early example of the large-scale employment cuts we will see in the coming years," she warned.

The trade unions are actively facilitating this process. In January, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) signed a framework agreement with Microsoft to oversee the implementation of AI in workplaces across the country.

The deal imposes no limits on the company's capacity to eliminate jobs. Instead, it commits the union bureaucracy to consultation processes designed to give sweeping restructuring a false imprimatur of worker approval, to upskilling and retraining schemes that divert anger over job losses, and to joint lobbying with Microsoft to ensure any AI regulation is compatible with corporate profit demands. The agreement was hailed by the Labor government and business groups as a model for how unions and corporations can jointly impose the AI transition.

The federal Labor government is spearheading this mass job destruction. Its May budget foreshadowed the elimination of around 28,000 federal public sector positions over four years, with departments imposing hiring restrictions and pushing workers into supposedly "voluntary" redundancies.

Workers are being told that jobs and essential services must be sacrificed while unlimited resources are made available for the military build-up, including the hundreds of billions of dollars committed to AUKUS and preparations for US-led war against China.

Artificial intelligence and automation are being seized upon as a means of restructuring workplaces. These technologies have the potential to enormously reduce the burden of labour. Increased productivity could allow workers to produce the necessities of life while working substantially shorter hours.

Under capitalism, the opposite takes place. Every technological advance is judged according to whether it increases profit. The capacity to perform the same work with fewer labour hours therefore becomes the basis for eliminating jobs, increasing workloads and enriching shareholders.

NAB exemplifies this contradiction. Thousands of workers are being told their positions are no longer

required, not because the bank faces collapse, but amid the continued accumulation of billions of dollars in earnings.

The Finance Sector Union (FSU) has responded to successive rounds of bank job cuts with denunciations while advancing no perspective for a unified struggle against them.

The same basic role is played by the trade union apparatus throughout the economy. For decades, the unions have collaborated in restructures imposed in the name of making Australian corporations "internationally competitive," isolating workers company by company and workplace by workplace.

NAB workers should reject the conception that even a single job must be destroyed to increase corporate profitability. They should appeal to workers throughout the banking sector and to those at Telstra, Woolworths, the universities, the public service and every other workplace confronting sackings and restructuring.

This requires the establishment of rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracies, to organise a unified struggle against job cuts, offshoring and the use of AI and automation to destroy workers' livelihoods.

Such a struggle necessarily raises a political issue. Workers' jobs cannot be defended while the economy remains subordinated to corporate profit, and they cannot be defended through appeals to union-backed Labor governments, which are imposing the mass destruction of jobs, wages and conditions.

The fight against the evisceration of jobs requires a political break with Labor and the union apparatus and the building of an independent political movement of the working class.

The major banks and corporations must be placed under public ownership and democratic workers' control. The immense advances in AI, automation and productivity must be used to shorten working hours, guarantee secure employment and raise living standards as part of the socialist reorganisation of economic life.

*Authorised by Cheryl Crisp for the Socialist Equality Party, Level 1/457-459 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills, NSW, 2010, Australia.*



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**