

GM to Pull Manufacturing Facilities Out of Australia

(AP) – General Motors Co. will stop making cars and engines in Australia by the end of 2017, with nearly 2,900 jobs to be lost, because of high production costs and competition.

The decision could spell the end of car manufacturing in Australia as the industry will be too small for supporting businesses such as parts makers to remain economic. Toyota announced it is reassessing its future in Australia. A union said 50,000 jobs in the auto industry are in jeopardy.

GM's Australian subsidiary Holden once dominated Australian auto sales, but lost market share to imported cars. Ford, once Holden's major rival in Australia, announced in May that it was ending production in the country in 2016. Toyota is the only other auto manufacturer in Australia.

Australia had four car manufacturers before Mitsubishi Motors Corp. shut its doors in 2008.

GM's announcement has been anticipated for months. The Australian government has been under mounting pressure to offer increased subsidies to the Detroit-based company to keep it manufacturing in Australia for the sake of the auto parts industry.

The decision reflected the "perfect storm of negative influences" that Australia's auto industry faces, GM's CEO Dan Akerson said in a statement. Describing Australia as "arguably the most competitive and fragmented auto market in the world," he also blamed the sustained strength of the Australian dollar, high costs of production, and a small population.

Holden, which has manufactured cars in Australia for 65

years, would become a sales company, he said.

The announcement was made the same day GM revealed that Akerson will be replaced by Mary Barra on Jan. 15.

GM's Australia chairman Mike Devereux said GM cars rebadged as Holdens would continue to be sold and serviced in Australia after 2017. GM is currently selling the Australia-built Chevrolet SS in the United States. The car is called the Holden VF Commodore in Australia.

"Building cars in this country is just not sustainable," Devereux told reporters.

Industry Minister Ian Macfarlane said he was "floored" when Devereux phoned and broke the news and was disappointed that GM had made its decision before an inquiry had completed an analysis of government support of the auto industry.

Holden has received 1.8 billion Australian dollars (\$1.6 billion U.S.) in federal government assistance in the past 11 years.

"The task for the industry has got measurably more difficult as a result of Holden's decision, but it is not impossible to maintain a component and car industry in Australia," Macfarlane said.

Acting Prime Minister Warren Truss said the number of cars manufactured in Australia had declined by one-third in only six years.

Truss said there more than 50 car models available to a population of only 23 million people.

"While Australians say they want locally manufactured cars . . . the reality is they don't buy them," he said.

Automakers in Australia produced about 178,000 cars last year.



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