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ATO in crisis, lacks leadership, says retired officer

SYDNEY: The Tax Office is in crisis, losing staff and focused on protecting revenue instead of revamping the tax system, says a newly retired assistant tax commissioner.

The shortfall in staff is so severe that for months, employees highly skilled in law and accounting have been forced to man a call centre, and senior staff have not taken a holiday in five years.

In an article in The Public Sector Informant newspaper, John Passant warned that the Australian Taxation Office lacked strategic thinkers, wasn't facing up to international tax issues and ageing staff presented it with a demographic time-bomb.

Mr Passant, who retired in June, said the present leadership had little vision, The Sunday Telegraph reports.

"They can become obsessed with protecting the revenue and miss the bigger picture of creating a more productive and globally competitive tax system," he said. "Some in the ATO see the international tax reforms of the past six years as the devil's spawn and talk about rescuing the system and saving the government's revenue flows."

Attracting quality staff was becoming increasingly difficult because the pay was a pittance compared to accountancy and law firms, he said. "Up to 50 per cent of our new graduates have left over the past five years."

Source: AAP