



THE HON TONY ABBOTT MP

MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Leader of the House of Representatives

Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service

PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA ACT 2600

The Hon John Howard MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

We wish to bring to your attention proposed changes to the policy framework for agreement making in the Commonwealth public sector to give effect to the Government's Defence Reserves policy objectives.

The Government's 2000 Defence White Paper, *Defence 2000 Our Future Defence Force*, states the Government will show the way as a major employer of Reservists by having leave policies and employment practices that support the release of Defence Reservists.

The Defence Reserves Support Council (DRSC), an advisory body established by the Government, has identified the importance of a uniform approach to the provision of Defence leave for Reservists working in the Commonwealth public sector. Late last year the DRSC endorsed a public sector leave policy as a basis for consultation. Key elements of the policy include a requirement for Australian Government employers to provide 4 weeks (20 working days or 28 calendar days) leave on full pay for Reservists undertaking Defence service and an additional 2 weeks paid leave to allow for a Reservists' attendance at recruit/initial employment training.

The policy developed by the DRSC has been discussed by portfolio Secretaries and the APS Round Table on several occasions. As a result of those discussions, the Departments of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) and Defence recently surveyed Australian Government employers regarding their existing Defence leave arrangements. In respect of Australian Public Service (APS) agencies, survey responses indicate variations in agency arrangements.

Against that background, it is proposed to expand the *Policy Parameters for Agreement Making in the APS (July 2002)* and the *Workplace Relations Arrangements for Commonwealth Authorities (December 2002)* to state that agreements are to include leave policies and employment practices that support the release of Defence Reservists for peacetime training and deployment. Supporting Guidance to both instruments will provide further detail on the preferred level of support to be provided Reservists.

It is also proposed to extend access to Employer Support Payments (ESP) to APS departments. APS departments are currently not eligible to receive ESP payments, though other Australian Government employers are eligible. As you may be aware, the ESP Scheme was introduced by the Government as a means of recognising the costs and disruption incurred by employers who release employees for Reserve service. The Scheme provides eligible employers with payments equivalent to Average Weekly Full-time Adult Ordinary Time Earnings once a Reservist they employ has been released and completed 14 days continuous Reserve service in any financial year.

These initiatives will provide visible support for the Government's Defence Reserves policy objectives and assist in increasing the contribution Reservists make to Australia's Defence capability. They should also result in a more consistent approach across Australian Government employment. The proposed implementation strategy also reflects the Government's devolved approach to pay and conditions.

Subject to any views you may have on these initiatives, we intend to jointly announce their implementation at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely

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TONY ABBOTT

DANNA VALE