

## **CIVILIAN EMPLOYERS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF DEFENCE PAYMENTS**

South Australian employers of Defence Reservists are benefiting from increased financial assistance to offset the cost of releasing employees for Defence service.

A total of 92 South Australian employers have received Employer Support Payments (ESP) totalling almost \$700,000 from the Federal Government in the past financial year.

During the 2005/06 period more than \$13 million was paid to Australian employers under the scheme.

ESP is paid at a set weekly rate regardless of the employee's salary and there are no restrictions on the way employers can use the money.

The weekly rate is equivalent to the average weekly full-time adult ordinary time earnings and is currently \$1035.90 a week. This figure will again be reviewed before 1 July 2007.

Royal Adelaide Hospital (RAH) employs 12 Reservists in trauma care alone and is one of the South Australian employers currently receiving ESPs.

"The Employer Support Payment is important because individuals are not carrying a financial burden for the hospital and they also feel better about going on leave when that's the case," said RAH Chief Executive Officer Associate Professor Kaye Challenger.

WGCDR Andrew Pearce, whose medical Reserves work has taken him to East Timor and the Solomon Islands, said that ESP was vital to helping the hospital cope with service absences.

"I'm a big supporter of the ESP scheme," WGCDR Pearce said.

"It's one of the most important aspects that encourages the hospital to let us go.

"Now that the qualifying period has been relaxed and the application process simplified, ESP has made a substantial contribution to the hospital's support for its many reservists on staff," he said.

Major Wendy Rydon, who works at the Defence Reserves Support Council (DRSC) office at Keswick Barracks, said more employers were becoming aware of the Employer Support Payment (ESP) Scheme.

"Our organisation has been heavily promoting the scheme to Reservists and their employers and it seems to be working," said Major Rydon.

"Reservists play a key role in safeguarding Australia's security. Support from employers is critical as it allows Reservists to maintain their contribution.

"We recognise that releasing employees for Reserve service has an impact on employers, so the ESP scheme helps to compensate them for that period."

Employees qualify for ESP for Defence service periods of five consecutive days or longer after serving a qualifying period of two weeks Defence service (in a single period or blocks of five consecutive days or longer) while employed by their organisation in the current financial year.

Claim forms must be submitted within six months of the first day of service for which the claims are being made. Claims submitted outside this period require special justification. Furthermore, employees jobs must be protected while they are released on Defence leave or leave without pay and they must not be made to use their own leave entitlements.

For further information about ESP go to [www.defence.gov.au/reserves](http://www.defence.gov.au/reserves) or call 1800 803 485.