



# Inquiry into the current capability of the Australian Public Service – additional information

23 September 2021

*On 14 September 2021, The Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee requested information on APS Surge Reserve*

## APS Surge Reserve

### 1) Could you please provide some information on this initiative, including:

#### a. What are the goals of the Surge Reserve?

- The APS Surge Reserve provides the capacity to rapidly mobilise Australian Public Service (APS) volunteers in large numbers in response to a crisis. The APS Surge Reserve complements, rather than replaces, existing agency specific and well established disaster response and management arrangements. Surge Reservists will deploy for short periods (initial terms of up to eight weeks) to help colleagues address a surge in demand for government services or support.
- The Surge Reserve is a collective initiative of the APS with every portfolio contributing to the Reserve.
- Surge Reservists may be asked do a range work carried out by government, depending on the need.
- Surge Reservists will be able to contribute their efforts to help Australians in a time of crisis.

#### b. How are the arrangements for the Surge Reserve progressing to date?

Arrangements for the APS Surge Reserve were settled in early 2021, with Secretaries agreeing to arrangements for the Surge Reserve in April 2021.

#### c. How many APS employees have volunteered to join the Surge Reserve?

As at April 2021, 2091 APS staff have nominated for the Surge Reserve.

**i. Please provide a breakdown of the volunteers by portfolio.**

**Surge Reserve Nominees by Portfolio, April 2021**

<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>Nominees</b>
Agriculture, Water and the Environment	70
Attorney-General's	143
Defence	56
Education, Skills and Employment	109
Finance	127
Health	66
Home Affairs	349
Industry, Science, Energy and Resources	89
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications	20
Prime Minister and Cabinet	50
Social Services	511
Treasury	427
Veterans' Affairs	74
<b>Total</b>	<b>2091</b>

**ii. Please provide a breakdown of the location of the volunteers by state.**

**Surge Reserve Volunteers by State, April 2021**

<b>State</b>	<b>Nominees</b>
New South Wales	502
Victoria	334
Queensland	314
Western Australia	105
South Australia	146
Tasmania	63
Australian Capital Territory	606
Northern Territory	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>2091</b>

**iii. Please provide a breakdown of the volunteers by APS level (e.g. APS1 to EL2 range)**

**Surge Reserve Volunteers by APS Level April 2021**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Nominees</b>
SES1	1
Executive Level 2	147
Executive Level 1	388
APS6	543
APS5	378
APS4	370
APS3	170
APS2	81
APS1	8
Not known	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>2091</b>

**iv. Is the APSC seeking a target number of volunteers?**

An APS Surge Reserve of 3,000 to 4,000 staff is expected to be established over time, with the expectation only a subset will be available in a significant crisis. APS Surge Reservists are volunteers who have roles across the APS and Australia. In response to a given crisis, portfolio departments and agencies, would be asked to advise which of their reservists are available for deployment, based on business need and staff availability.

**d. Is the Surge Reserve currently operational?**

- i. If so, please provide details of current/recent deployments, including numbers mobilised, to which agencies, a general description of the work being carried out, the geographical location (e.g. in Canberra) and for what period of time.**

**Activations of the APS Surge Reserve**

Month	Host agency	Description of work	Geographic location	Period of time	Number of APS employees mobilised
Mar – 21	Department of Health (a)	Assist with COVID19 Vaccine Rollout	Canberra, ACT	Up to 8 weeks (b)	45
Jul-21	Services Australia	Assist in the delivery of COVID19 Disaster Payments	Canberra, ACT with surge centres established nationwide	Up to 4 weeks(b)	449(c)

(a) This was a small scale deployment to test key elements of the APS Surge Reserve model

(b) Extensions to the deployment may have been agreed through home agencies, host agencies and employees.

(c) Total does not include deployments managed under bilateral agreements between Services Australia and APS agencies.

**ii. If not, when is it expected to become operational?**

Not applicable.

**e. What kind of training do volunteers receive before deployment?**

APS Surge Reserve nominees are not required to undertake mandatory training at this time. It is assumed APS Surge Reservists possess core knowledge such as code of conduct, and workplace health and safety, generally conducted by APS agencies upon their engagement to the APS. Generalist training, such as integrity and values, risk, security, and privacy awareness, have been made available to Surge Reservists to enhance their skills.

**f. Have you received any feedback from agencies receiving assistance, or from APS employees deployed, on the operation of the Surge Reserve?**

The APSC conducts surveys of APS staff who have deployed on the conclusion of each deployment. Post-deployment surveys provide insights and feedback on ways to improve the experience for nominees, and the efficiency of activation and mobilisation arrangements.

Some of the results from a survey of the first deployment to the Department of Health:

- 86% of respondents were able to identify positive elements of the deployment (including the opportunity to try new work, learn new skills and broaden networks).
- 77% responded they were satisfied or very satisfied with the deployment.

**g. Does the APSC have plans to evaluate and review the operation of the Surge Reserve?**

As the APS Surge Reserve is a relatively new initiative for the APS, the APSC expects to continue to evaluate, review, and refine the arrangements for operation of the Surge Reserve. A review of the operation of the APS Surge Reserve deployment to Services Australia from July 2021 will be conducted, with further enhancements to the APS Surge Reserve arrangements to be considered in early 2022.