

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**Finance and Administration Portfolio**

**Department of Human Services and agencies**

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2005-2006, 1 November 2005

**Question: HS49**

**Outcome 1, Output 1**

**Topic: Centrelink - Staffing**

**Hansard Page/Written Question on Notice: Written**

**SENATOR EVANS** asked the Minister for Human Services, upon written notice:

The following questions (1 to 18) are in relation to the department and each agency:

1. By classification, how many staff are currently employed by DHS?
2. How many positions by classification are currently unfilled? Why are these positions unfilled?
3. What changes have occurred during the last financial year? What are the reasons for these changes i.e. retrenchment/redundancies/retirement etc.?
4. How many staff are employed under a) Australian Workplace Agreements; b) certified agreements; c) individual contracts?
5. Please advise current levels of a) sick leave; b) stress leave by month? What are the reasons for any increases/decreases in sick or stress leave from month to month?
6. Has there been any legal action taken by employees against the DHS?
7. How many cases in total during the last financial year?
8. How many are now complete?
9. How many still outstanding?
10. Please provide an outline of each case, i.e. reason and outcome of each action?
11. What is the total cost of such action? What is the cost for each individual case?
12. What is the cost of external legal advice or other advice needed for each action, a) in total; b) per individual case?
13. Have any cases related to stress of staff dealing with clients?
14. Has there been complaints/incident made by staff relating to stress? Please provide details of each complaint/incident.
15. Has there been any staff resignations relating to stress? Please provide details.
16. Have there been any physical altercations between staff and clients reported? Please give details of each case.
17. How many staff are entitled to performance bonuses?
18. What was the amount paid in 2003/2004 compared to 2004/2005 in performance bonuses a) in total; b) per classification; c) give explanations of each on how the bonuses calculated.

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**Answer:**

1. See Table 43, page 245-46 of the Centrelink Annual Report 2004-05.
2. This information is not collated centrally.
3. At 30 June 2004, Centrelink staffing numbers were 25,448. At 30 June 2005 Centrelink staffing numbers were 25,290. The difference in these numbers is 158. Fluctuations in staffing numbers are related to workloads. Workloads rise and fall depending on many factors, including budget initiatives and customer numbers.
4. a) AWAs - see Table 67 and paragraph immediately preceding Table 68 on page 258 of the Centrelink Annual Report 2004-05.  
b) Certified Agreement - see Table 64 on page 255 of the Centrelink Annual Report 2004-05.  
c) Individual Contracts - Nil.
5. Centrelink employees receive an accrual of personal leave each year for the circumstances where they are sick, caring for family or other persons, attending the birth of their partner's child or for emergency reasons considered appropriate. There is no category of stress leave. There are seasonal variations such as flu and other illnesses in the winter months which is consistent with APS norms.

The current level of personal leave (sick) leave is 11.44 days per person per year.

6. Yes, there has been legal action taken by employees against Centrelink.
7. 26.
8. 21.
9. 5.
10. a) Of the 21 completed cases:
  - eight cases related to unfair dismissal claims made by former employees;
  - three cases related to disputes about eligibility for leave or allowances;
  - two cases related to claims for damage to a private motor vehicle;
  - two cases related to claims of discrimination;
  - one case related to a claim for loss of earnings;
  - one case related to a claim for financial loss;
  - one case related to an allegation of a denial of natural justice and harassment;
  - one case related to an allegation of a financial loss related to superannuation;
  - one case related to an allegation of a denial of natural justice; and
  - one case related to an allegation of a breach of the Privacy Act.
- 10 b) Of the above cases, eight were rejected with no payment of compensation. Of these:
  - two cases related to claims of unfair dismissal;
  - one case related to an allegation of financial loss related to superannuation;

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- one case related to a dispute about eligibility for leave or allowances;
  - one case related to a claim of discrimination;
  - one case related to an allegation of a breach of the Privacy Act;
  - one case related to a claim for damage to a private motor vehicle; and
  - one case related to an allegation of a denial of natural justice.
11. Total cost for the 21 cases finalised last financial year was \$172,231. On average this equates to \$8,201 per case.
  12. The total cost of external legal advice on 21 cases finalised last year was \$59,738. On average this equates to \$2,844 per case.
  13. None of the cases related to stress of staff dealing with clients.
  14. Nil. Centrelink does not have a leave or incident category called stress. Our insurer, Comcare, does not recognise stress as an illness.
  15. Employees are not required to provide a reason for their resignation.
  16. Yes. For the period 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005, 272 assaults were recorded. The detailed information required to answer the question is not readily available. To obtain this information would be highly resource intensive and I cannot justify the level of expenditure that would be required to obtain it.
  17. See Table 67 for Non-SES staff and at Table 69 for SES staff, in the Centrelink Annual Report 2004-05 (pages 258-59).
  18. Performance pay amounts in total and by classification appear at Tables 76 (Non-SES staff) and 74 (SES Staff) in Centrelink Annual Report 2003-04 (pages 305-06) and at Tables 67 (Non-SES staff) and 69 (SES staff) in the Centrelink Annual Report 2004-05 (pages 258-59). Performance pay has been generally four per cent per annum subject to meeting performance measures.