

CIVILIAN EMPLOYERS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF DEFENCE PAYMENTS

Victorian employers of Defence Reservists are taking advantage of the financial assistance scheme designed to help offset the costs of releasing employees for Defence service.

A total of 260 Victorian employers and self-employed Reservists have received more than \$2.3 million in Employer Support Payments from the Federal Government in the past financial year.

More than \$13 million has been paid to Australian employers and self-employed Reservists under the scheme during the 2005/06 period.

Defence Reserves Liaison Officer, Major Robert O'Brien, said more employers are becoming aware of the Employer Support Payment (ESP) Scheme.

"We have been heavily promoting the scheme to Reservists and their employers and it seems to be working," said Major O'Brien.

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

ESP Director, Mr Doug Stedman said that keeping the ESP in line with average weekly earnings adjusted annually on July 1 was integral to enhancing employer support and sustaining a viable Reserves force.

"Releasing Reservists from their civilian roles for extended periods can sometimes cause staffing problems, particularly for small businesses," Mr. Stedman said.

"This recent increase to the ESP on July 1 will help employers to bridge any gaps created by regular staff taking time off from their day jobs to serve their country," he said.

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 be reviewed again before 1 July 2007.

CEO of Transport Driving Australia, David Roberts, who employs six ex-army staff and two Reservists at his Dandenong business, said ESP was vital to his company's continued support for his Reservist staff.

“I’ve been getting ESP for 18 months to two years now,” Mr. Roberts said.

“One of my blokes went away to Butterworth Air Base in Malaysia for three months last year and the ESP payments allowed us to cover his absence by employing casual workers.

“The application process was very simple and now that it’s in place it means that we can let our reservists go on deployments and training with minimal disruption to our business,” Mr. Roberts said.

ESP has been particularly helpful for self-employed Reservist Corporal Steve Linane whose Ballarat-based business sells products over the internet.

“ESP is a brilliant scheme. It allowed me to go to Malaysia for a three month deployment without interrupting my business too badly,” Corporal Linane said.

“I’ve been doing internet sales since 1999 selling health products and other specialist goods and the ESP has provided support that’s allowed me to struggle through business downturns and continue serving in the reserves,” he said.

Employers and self-employed Reservists qualify for ESP for service periods of five consecutive days or longer after serving a qualifying period of two weeks 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 employees must not be made to use their own leave entitlements.

For further information about ESP go to www.defence.gov.au/reserves or call 1800 803 485.