Reserve shuffle a windfall

THE Air Force is about to make significant changes to the way it relies on its Reservists to achieve the Air Force Mission.

The Government has provided extra funding to allow the Air Force to restructure its Reserves, including the raising of new High Readiness Reserves (HRR) for both active and Specialist Reservists, together with significant enhancements to Reserve pay and conditions.

The creation of an HRR of about 1,400 active and Specialist Reserve members will significantly strengthen the Air Force, with members trained to the same skill levels as the Permanent Force, and all Reservists posted to the wartime establishment positions where they will be employed in a Defence contingency.

The HRR will comprise fully-trained active and Specialist reservists who have volunteered to transfer to the HRR and have made a commitment to fulfil their HRR obligations, including a commitment to be as ready for deployment as Permanent Air Force personnel.

Chief of Air Force AIRMSHL Geoff Shepherd said "This is the most significant change since the 1960s in the way the Air Force Reserves will be employed and represents the biggest step taken in recent times to improve Reserve capability in direct support to meet Air Force outcomes in times of defence or other emergencies."

Director-General Reserves – Air Force AIRCDRE Peter McDermott said the new structure followed a review of manning a few years ago.

"The FEG Commanders told us we needed about 6,000 Reserves to supplement the Permanent Air Force. They also told us how they needed them grouped in terms of readiness requirements, down to category and mustering," AIRCDRE McDermott said.

"From that demand, we are building a Reserve structure that has moved from the traditional one of people used for supplementation to one where Reservists are embedded in Permanent Air Force and tri-Service units, trained at differing levels of preparedness to support contingency operations."

AIRCDRE McDermott also said that the greatest need in Air Force was for personnel to support aircraft operations, particularly in a forward-operating environment and that this would be a very important role for Reservists. He went on to say that in terms of the HRR, Reservists had asked for increased job satisfaction and conditions of service.

"They want meaningful jobs, good leadership and a feeling they are contributing to the organisation.

"They also want access to health support and better pay. We believe the new structure and conditions of service will help Air Force to achieve this," he said.

The enhanced remuneration package is designed to attract and retain Reservists, particularly to the HRR.

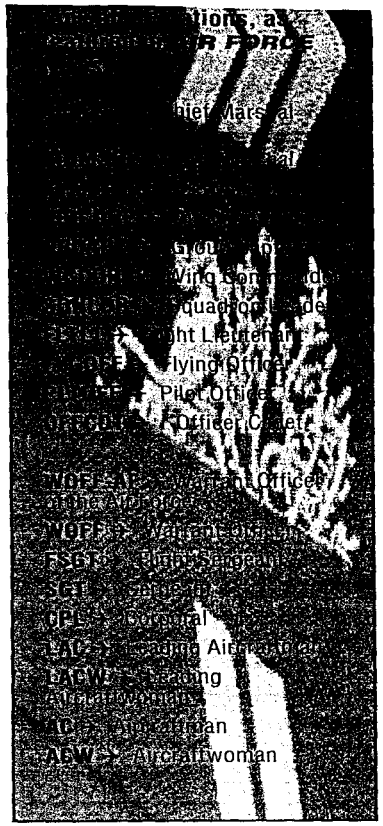
Incentives for Active and Specialist Reservists to move into the HRR include an annual completion bonus of $5,000 to be paid to members upon completion of their High Readiness service of one year, and an annual health support allowance of $2,500 to assist in maintaining members' health status at a deployable standard.

Non-HRR active and Specialist Reservists will be eligible for a $600 health support allowance.

With respect to the health support allowance for HRR personnel, WGCDR Thomas Buckham of Reserve Policy said: "Those who sign up will only need to prove they have private top level hospital and ancillary benefits cover to qualify. That can be as a single member or a family membership."

The HSA cover is based upon an average annual cost for private health insurance of $1200 per year, the remainder intended to cover the costs of keeping fit and such incidentals as optical and dental needs.

Reservists will be invited to sign up to new wartime establishment positions in the Reserves and can expect postings to those positions to be issued later this year.



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