Impact of the ASL Cap Survey Report
July 2018

From May to June the CPSU invited members and interested employees to feedback on the impacts of the Turnbull Government’s staffing cap (ASL cap) on our workplaces and for the communities that rely on the policy, enforcement and services you deliver.

Members know first hand the impact of funding and staffing cuts and this was an opportunity to tell that story on what is really happening in the APS.

Feedback received from 920 people across more than 50 Agencies will help inform future CPSU submissions on resourcing, staffing and related matters. Below is a brief summary of results.

SURVEY RESULTS

1. In the 2015-16 Budget, the Coalition committed to capping the size of the APS around or below 2006-07 levels regardless of operational requirements. **How has the volume and scope of your Agency’s work changed since 2006-07?**

![Pie chart showing the percentage of respondents for each category of volume and scope change.]

*Of respondents that answered this question (23% did not know).
2. **What impacts have the Average Staffing Level (ASL) cap had in your Agency?**

![Graph showing impacts of ASL cap](image)

3. **What example(s) have you observed where work has been outsourced to get done, or is no longer being done, because of the ASL cap.**

Respondents provided a range of examples of work being outsourced because of the ASL cap:

- **Administration**
  Specific examples cited were that the Business Services Wage Assessment Tool (BSWAT) Payment Scheme team are contractors and that the wildlife permits team now engage contractors for data entry and for permit processing under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act.

  In addition to work such as data entry and transactional work, normal day-to-day Departmental work is being outsourced. A common role that was mentioned was Business Support Officers as was secretariat support to Reference Groups.

- **IT**
  Respondents stated that contracted IT developers and project managers were being brought in at almost twice the cost of using ongoing staff.

  Another example was the team responsible for maintaining the Digital Service Standard being unable to scale up the team (in line with demand) from within the agency and therefore the work has to be put on hold while they procure external contractors who do not have agency knowledge.

- **Policy**
  Respondents stated that research and analysis work was being outsourced and that key data analysis and support functions have either been handed to contractors or simply scrapped due to insufficient staff. This included both strategic and technical advice as well as more business as
usual work that could be done in-house. Consultants have also been employed to undertake reviews of certain operations because there is no capacity for staff to undertake it.

The Department of Jobs and Small Business was cited as one agency where this is occurring. The respondent stated that “Many important policy areas no longer are covered by ongoing staff and arguably the department has nil capability on many areas tasked under administrative orders, with a high risk of giving poorly informed and inaccurate advice to government.”

Not only is labour hire being used for policy positions, but it was now creeping into specialist positions including scientists. Specific mentions were made of scientific analysis that could be undertaken internally and consultation for a threatened species recovery plan.

- Frontline service delivery
  Some examples of frontline service delivery being outsourced was provided. For example, a respondent stated that investigators for the Anti-Dumping Commission was through labour hire organisations.
  The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) was also mentioned with work increasingly sent to Local Area Coordination (LAC) partners and there being a reliance on outsourced labour hire. A respondent stated that “There are entire teams now that are full employed by Hays etc.”
  Other examples included labour hire used extensively in our warehouse and the outsourcing of maintenance leading to a deterioration of infrastructure and assets through lack of reasonable attention.

- Program management including grants assessment and evaluation
  A common theme was that many aspects of program management, including drafting grant agreements, designing grant rounds, basic transactional work such as “acquittals”, grants assessment and evaluation all have been outsourced to contractors.
  In one agency, a respondent commented that the “assessment of applications has been largely outsourced to external experts and we act as a clearing house rather than a regulator. “
  Another respondent commented that their agency “outsourced part of the grant application process to private company, to help with process because don’t have staff numbers/funding to do it ourselves.”
  Several respondents commented about the Department of Social Services (DSS) Community Grants Hub. One respondent stated that up to a third of delivery in the DSS network of state and territory offices is now being done by staff through labour hire agencies. One respondent stated that the “Community Grants Hub in Adelaide received grants to manage from Department of Health (DoH) however the only staff received were contractors, who have now been terminated.”
  An example from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) highlighted the absurdity of the ASL cap and how it has forced the outsourcing of basic program management work: “One of my agency’s key statutory obligations is the assessment and issuing of permits for commercial operations in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Earlier staff cuts and diminishing budgets had
Results of CPSU Survey on the impact of the ASL cap in APS Agencies, July 2018

resulted in a significant backlog of permits to be processed. After a long overdue injection of funds to the agency, the ASL cap prevented those funds being used in a useful way to fill much needed ongoing positions, so a number of permit assessment and support positions had to be filled by two year non-ongoing contracts through labour hire companies. After two years of unprecedented bleaching events on the Great Barrier Reef, the Government has started throwing huge volumes of money at the Great Barrier Reef, but has had to give it to a private philanthropic organisation to be able to spend it on protecting the Great Barrier Reef because my agency doesn’t have the capacity to expand because of the ASL cap. If it wasn’t so serious it would be laughable.”

• Regulatory roles
Some examples of regulatory assessments being outsourced were provided including the outsourcing of ecological community assessment, passport eligibility assessment and land management work due to not being done due to not filling permanent positions.

• Legal
Respondents spoke about how legal work is outsourced to private firms, AGS or OPC because of a lack of in-house capacity, at an increased cost to the Department.

• Communications and media work
Examples provided included media advisors being contracted instead of hired, design requests being contracted out where previously the Department's in-house team had capacity or could have been done in-house if there was adequate staff resourcing. A respondent in DSS also stated that the DSS Communication Services Branch “no longer do stakeholder engagement”

• Corporate
A range of examples were provided including property services, strategic work such as the development of basic HR policies and frameworks, procurement, PMO and accounting in the passport office and internal audit functions.

➢ “The cap has had a negative effect on our ability to deliver a good education to our students and we cannot meet our responsibilities” (Australian Film Television and Radio School - AFTRS)
➢ “Collection management normally done by APS Curators is now being done by external employment agencies. Outreach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples doesn’t occur to the levels it used to.” (National Museum of Australia - NMA)
➢ “IT work is being outsourced for projects and then there is no skills transfer at the end of the project. Service delivery then suffers while overworked staff reverse engineer what the contractors did.” (Department of Jobs & Small Business)
➢ “Threatened species recovery plans are not being done, recovery actions to recover species are not being funded or appropriately identified and deadlines for threatened species listing assessments are not being adhered to by the government.” (Department of Environment & Energy)
➢ “Paying excessive fees to consultants to produce work that does not meet requirements and then requiring existing staff to re-do the work. This has happened on two occasions.” (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade - DFAT)
4. **In your opinion, what public sector work that has been outsourced or contracted-out should be brought back in-house to rebuild public sector service delivery and/or policy development capacity?**

The specific areas mentioned by respondents included:

- Administration
- IT
- Policy
- Call centres
- Business support
- Service delivery roles
- Anything that involves handling personal data
- Contract management
- Project management
- Legal
- NDIA planners

There were also a number of respondents who stated they believe all work outsourced should be brought back in-house.

5. **Do you agree with the CPSU that the Commonwealth should scrap the ASL cap?**

![Pie chart showing 95% Yes, 1% No, 4% Unsure]