

Question on notice no. 58

Portfolio question number: SQ23-005164

2023-24 Supplementary Budget estimates

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee, Infrastructure,
Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts Portfolio**

Senator Bridget McKenzie: asked the Airservices Australia on 23 October 2023—

Senator McKENZIE: Snail's pace, this journey. Question 339 advised that 73 claims had been referred to Comcare by Airservices Australia staff in the 2022-23 financial year to date. Has the minister requested advice on the high level of Comcare claims within Airservices Australia?

Mr Harfield: No.

Senator McKENZIE: What action is being taken to address these high levels of Comcare claims?

Mr Harfield: There are a range of actions, depending on what the case is. As we have a high level of some of our activities, such as our aviation, rescue and firefighting services, and the physical activity associated with them, a lot of our Comcare claims are around soft-tissue injuries and those types of injuries-return to work and work-through arrange. We will have to give you on notice all the work that's being done across all those claims.

Answer —

Please find answer attached

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2023 - 2024

Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

Committee Question Number: 58

Departmental Question Number: SQ23-005164

Division/Agency Name: Agency - Airservices Australia

Hansard Reference: Spoken, Page No. 132 (23 October 2023)

Topic: AIRSERVICES - Comcare claims made by Airservices staff in 2022-23 financial year to date

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Answer:

Airservices takes its workplace, health and safety obligations very seriously and strives to provide a workplace free from the risk of physical or psychological injury.

It is important to note the context in which Airservices operates which includes the nature of the work performed as well as the size of its workforce, particularly if comparing Comcare statistics with other portfolio agencies or the broader Australian Public Service (APS). See table below for a comparison of Airservices Comcare statistics with other portfolio, Commonwealth and industry organisations.

Airservices is an operational agency providing air traffic management, aviation rescue fire fighting (ARFF) and aeronautical information, navigation and communication services. Given the nature of these operational and training environments, especially for services such as ARFF, staff are exposed to an increased risk of injury which could occur during training or in responding to emergencies. These risks are identified and mitigated to as low as reasonably practicable. However, incidents do occur, and Airservices is continually looking for improvements to its training, processes and systems in place to protect staff.

Currently, Airservices is undertaking several injury management actions with the intent of reducing compensation claims through preventive measures.

Short to medium term actions include the ARFF Health and Wellbeing Program, which is designed to reduce the risk of musculoskeletal injuries:

- delivery of education and training to minimise awkward postures and reinforce the use of protective equipment; and
- progressing uplift of the capability of Physical Training Instructors and standardisation of gym equipment (endorsed by the ARFF Physical Standards Specialist) to aid with management of musculoskeletal injuries.

Long term actions include reviews and change programs:

- Review of personal protective equipment and clothing;
- Facilities and Environment Change Program; and
- ARFF Capability Uplift Program.

Other actions include:

- The Direct Source Capture System (reported to remove 95% of diesel particulate matter and utilised by state fire services) will be implemented at ARFF stations;
- Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation teams provide support to impacted employees and leaders; and
- ongoing fatigue reviews, including the improvement of rosters.

Firefighters are also subject to presumptive workers' compensation legislation where a person who contracted a prescribed cancer and meets a qualifying period of employment is entitled to benefits without any question of liability. There is no statute of limitations for lodging such claims, some of which are made after employment has ceased. These claims may have a significant variance on claim numbers received year-to-year.

Workers' compensation claims per 1,000 full time employee (FTE): financial year 2022-23

Entity	FTE employees	Claims per 1,000 FTE (FY2022-23)	Claims accepted per 1,000 FTE (FY2022-23)
		Incidence per 1,000 FTE employees	
Airservices Australia#	3,280	23.5	19.5
Department of Infrastructure#	1,872	13.4	8.0
Australian Federal Police#	6,950	27.2	18.3
StarTrack Express Pty Ltd#	3,527	54.2	47.9
FedEx Express#	5,542	41.0	29.1
John Holland Pty Ltd#	1,034	122.8	111.2
NSW Rural Fire Service^	1,216	87.2	n/a
Fire Rescue Victoria^ **	4,473	76.0	n/a

Source: <https://www.comcare.gov.au/scheme-legislation/scheme-performance/claims-performance>

^ Annual report data converted to incidence per 1,000 FTE

** Data for FY 2021-22