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## Rio Olympics: ASADA hit hard by budget cuts months out from Games

By Mary Gearin

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**Just two months from the Rio Games, there are calls for a funding boost for Australia's drug testing agency, which has been cut by 20 per cent.**

ASADA has confirmed that budget cuts have affected all areas of its operations.

"In the financial year ending 2014, ASADA had a total of 78 staff. By 2017, this will drop to 50," the agency says.

"This has had impacts across all of ASADA's functions, including our testing, investigative, education and administrative units."

Money is not the only measure of an anti-doping agency's proficiency, but with the cuts coming as drug scandals continue to rip through the sporting world, the need for rigorous anti-doping regime has never been stronger.

While this year's federal budget allowed \$1.4 million for additional testing in the lead up to the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games, it is understood that, overall, there is less funding for regular operations in real terms.

The cuts came with ASADA still shaking off its controversial and expensive investigation into the doping scandals engulfing the Essendon and Cronulla, which cost \$6 million and a lot of time.

Sports lawyer Catherine Ordway worked for ASADA for two years till 2008, and says the budget cuts have hit ASADA quite hard due to the small size of the government agency.

"The last couple of years must have been really been extremely difficult for ASADA to manage given the limited resources and the turnover of staff they've had during that period," she said.

Ordway says ASADA had to take up the costly AFL and NRL cases because of its obligation under WADA's strict code, but there should be a re-think for the future.

"ASADA has been under siege and undoubtedly feels like been under siege since the Essendon matter was thrust upon them."

"I suspect it might be, for future reference, something they would have to go back to WADA and say 'was prosecuting the Essendon and Cronulla matters through the Court Of Arbitration For Sport, and the other courts processes, the best way of spending our finite resources?'"

A government department spokesman says staff numbers have been reduced because the Essendon and Cronulla sagas were winding down, because of a shift towards more targeted anti-doping strategies and efficiencies achieved within departments.

"Education, intelligence and testing is ASADA's number one priority this year and we are satisfied the authority is conducting a high-standard, rigorous anti-doping program in the lead up to Rio," a spokesman for sports minister Sussan Ley said.

The agency itself would insist that despite the cuts, it has maintained its standing as one of the world's leading anti-doping agencies.

Ordway says if ASADA is to remain so, it needs proper support.

"ASADA's been leading the way in that model of being intelligent in their testing approach and with their collaborative efforts with Australian Customs and law enforcement agencies," she said.

"And that's good, but we still need to have a decent amount of funding, and perhaps the level is not quite right yet to make sure we can have the confidence that our athletes are clean."

That's the least one would expect in an Olympic year.