

CSIRO Staff Association Member poll on ES Survey focus groups

Background

CSIRO staff are now facing the agency's worst job cuts since 2014 with somewhere between 375-500 roles forecast to go in Enterprise Services (ES) alone. These cuts will deeply impact research output and scientists will have to scramble to cover support gaps.

Staff Association members and staff have been calling out the recent ES Survey focus assessment group process as unrepresentative, rushed, and not fit for purpose.

According to reports, only three per cent of CSIRO staff were given the opportunity to take part in the focus group process, where participants were asked to rank 135 services currently offered across ES Functions on their importance and quality in a very restricted time period; translating to less than one minute per ES unit service.

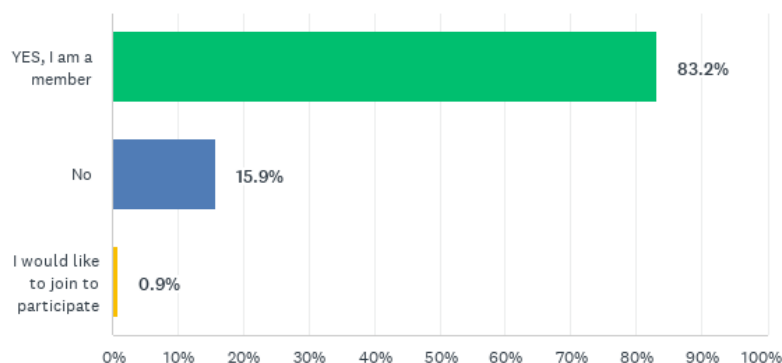
While CSIRO Executive have stated this is the first step in determining which services are 'non-negotiable' or 'things we can stop doing' at the same time ES Unit Directors have already been provided 'indicative ranges' to decide the size of ES units and future viability. In some cases, Directors have already announced these unit sizes to staff while the assessment process takes place.

Despite staff calling for an improved approach to ES unit assessment, CSIRO Executive continue to resist adopting a process that would deliver genuine assessments and meaningful consultation to ensure services critical to science delivery are prioritised.

Over the first week of September 2024, Staff Association members were asked to participate in a poll seeking feedback on the ES Survey focus group process.

Participation

Q1 This poll closes 5pm (AEST) Friday 6 September and is open to union members, only.
Are you a member of the CSIRO Staff Association?



More than five hundred and fifty (573) Staff Association members participated in the exercise, a number in the vicinity of ten per cent of the total CSIRO workforce.

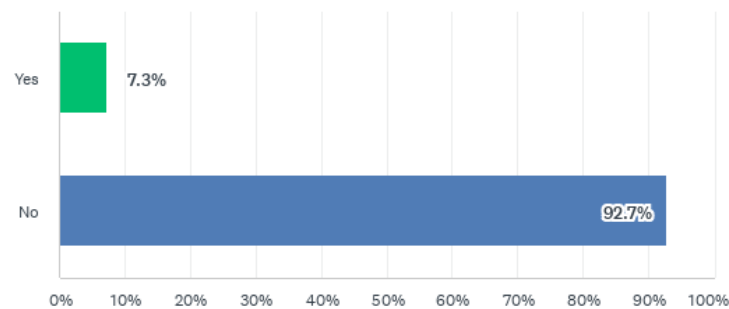
Authorised by Susan Tonks, Secretary CSIRO Staff Association



CSIRO Staff Association Member poll on ES Survey focus groups

ES Survey Focus group

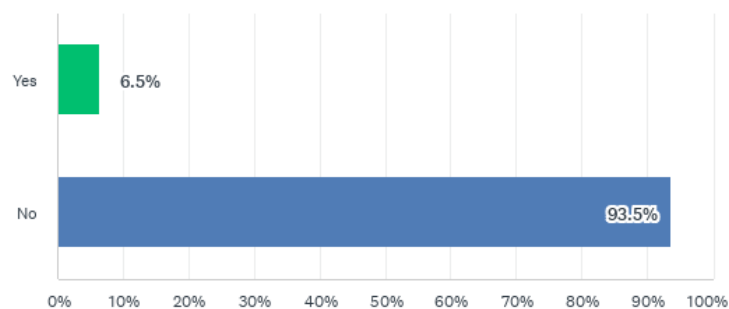
Q2 Have you completed the ES Survey focus group?



Less than ten per cent (7.3%) of respondents participated in the ES Survey focus group exercise.

Baseline data

Q3 If you didn't complete the ES Survey focus group, do you think that the views of 3 per cent of all staff will provide enough baseline data to inform which services are critical to science delivery?

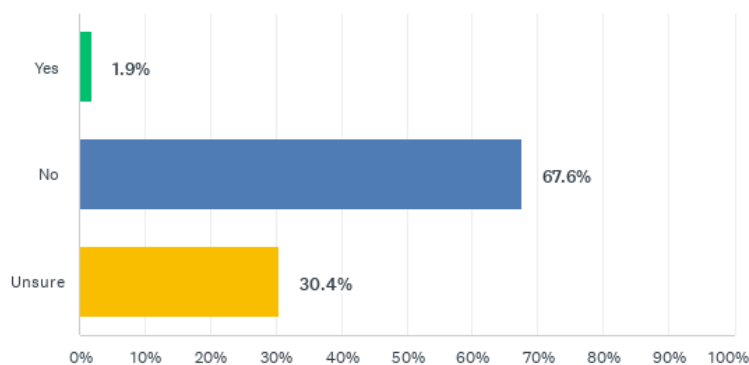


Even fewer respondents (6.5%) believe the low participation rate will provide enough data to inform an accurate judgement on ES functions critical to science delivery.

CSIRO Staff Association Member poll on ES Survey focus groups

Assessment accuracy

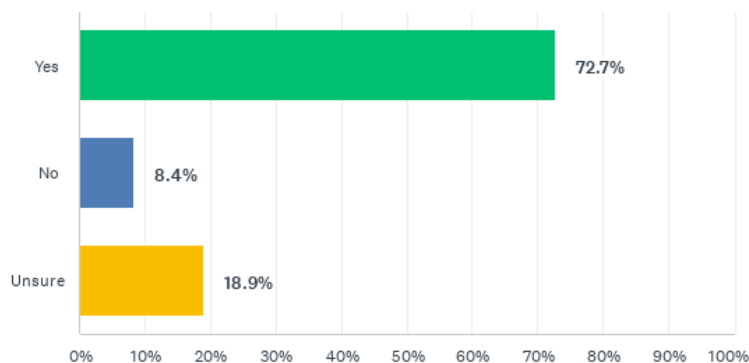
Q4 Do you believe the current ES assessment process will accurately identify and assess the necessary support for Research Units?



In response to a related question, more than two thirds of participants (67.6%) believe the current ES assessment process will fail to accurately gauge necessary support levels for Research Units.

Alternative process

Q5 Given the complexity and variety of ES Unit functions, should each ES Unit be assessed on its research support service and viability individually?



Nearly three-quarters (72.7%) of respondents agreed that bespoke, individual assessments for ES units would better represent a better, more accurate process.



CSIRO Staff Association Member poll on ES Survey focus groups

Suggestions and comment

“I am concerned that more staff will need to take on more work leading to increased workloads and stress. I don't think there is enough support being provided particularly in the Indigenous Science and Engagement program team.”

“If the ES process is about science support, we need a review of functions and how they support science. Many ES people 'direct' scientists, rather than enabling them. Within BU staff such as finance and contracts are critical to science delivery.”

“Consult more staff. Start from a position of good faith investigation rather than manufacturing consent. Speak with actual affected scientists rather than management types. Assess each unit on its own terms.”

“As a frontline research scientist I am already taking on a significant workload of admin type tasks once done by ES capability. This cuts directly into my ability to do science. These are tasks that I do not do regularly and therefore I'm nowhere near as efficient or effective as a dedicated, trained ES person.”

“Consultation needs to better involve research staff who depend on support services (not just 'potentially affected' ES staff), because service availability will be compromised.”

“I'm not sure that people appreciate some of the work that the ES units do, and the implications the reductions may have on them, as it happens in the background.”

“It is impossible for a small group to comment significantly or knowledgeably about the wide breadth of CSIRO's ES services.”

“CSIRO Executive need to be more transparent on how the current workload of the ES staff is going to be fulfilled with so many job losses and what areas will be most affected.”

“Maximise transparency, consult in a meaningful way and act decisively, in a timely manner, in line with clear terms and values, to reach the communicated goals. Identify as far as possible what information has influenced those decisions.”

“Will more ES-appropriate work be forced onto research scientists? That will just further decrease our ability to do science and achieve impact.”

“Cutting too hard will dramatically decrease the ability of CSIRO to operate effectively (less revenue for researchers, more admin time imposed on researchers, poorer decision making) and undermine commitments Executive have made to the Board and Minister.”

“Too few people have consulted. Major concern is that lack of ES staff will result in a decline in ability to do research. Process should be halted to properly consult and discuss implications for research credibility and feasibility with such deep cuts.”