

National Service, 1951–59

In the context of the intensification of the Cold War in Europe, Communist insurgency and success in South-East Asia, and the declaration of war in Korea, the Menzies government sponsored the *National Service Act 1951*. The legislation provided for the compulsory call-up of males turning 18 on or after 1 November 1950, for service training of 176 days. Trainees were required to remain on the Reserve of the Commonwealth Military Forces (CMF) for five years from initial call up. Men could nominate the service in which they wished to be trained. Those nominating the Navy or the Air Force were considered only if they volunteered for service outside Australia. The first call-up notice was issued on 12 April 1951.

Between 1951 and 1959 over 500,000 men registered, 52 intakes were organised and some 227,000 men were trained.

In 1957 National Service with the Navy and the Air Force was discontinued. Registration remained compulsory but the intake to the Army was cut to almost a third (12,000 trainees) by instituting a ballot for selection. On 24 November 1959 Cabinet decided that National Service call-ups should be terminated and that arrangements for the January 1960 intake would be cancelled.

Records about the 1951 National Service held in Canberra

Records in our collection document the scheme from many angles – the development of legislation and policy, the liability of aliens and immigrants for service, exemptions, compensation, casualties, statistics, and conscientious objectors and other opposition to the scheme. The items listed here are only a selection.

Collection references

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>National Service – report by Defence Committee</u>	1947–50	A5954, 1884/3
<u>Recruiting – correspondence from Sir Edmund Herring to the Prime Minister</u>	1950–51	A462, 431/1/2
<u>Senate Select Committee on National Service in the Defence Force</u>	1950–51	A663, O180/2/147
<u>National Service – policy – file 1</u>	1950–61	A816, 44/301/151
<u>National Service – policy – file 2</u>	1950–61	A816, 44/301/158

<u>National Service – policy – file 3</u>	1950–61	A816, 44/30/168
<u>National Service – policy</u>	1950–60	A4940, C162 Part 1
<u>National Service – legislation</u>	1950–53	A5954, 1884/2
<u>National Service – Defence Committee report to Council of Defence</u>	1950	A5954, 1884/4
<u>National Service – Council of Defence conclusions to Cabinet</u>	1950–52	A5954, 1885/3
<u>National Service Legislation – consequential amendments to Defence Act, Air Force Act and Naval Defence Act</u>	1951–56	A705, 3/1/192 Part 1
<u>National Service Legislation – consequential amendments to Defence Act, Air Force Act and Naval Defence Act</u>	1951–56	A705, 3/1/192 Part 2
<u>National Service Legislation – consequential amendments to Defence Act, Air Force Act and Naval Defence Act</u>	1951–56	A705, 3/1/192 Part 3
<u>Court of Inquiry. Conduct of National Service Training at RAAF Richmond</u>	1953	A705, 108/3/259
<u>National Service Policy</u>	1953–56	A816, 44/301/185

Records held in other offices of the Archives

Records about the implementation of the 1951 National Service scheme are held by all offices of the Archives. Our collection is particularly strong in Melbourne as the central office of the Department of Labour and National Service was based there. The Department was responsible for the registration, medical examination, exemption, deferment, selection, call-up, allocation to the Services and reinstatement in civilian employment of National Service registrants.

For more information

Other fact sheets relating to compulsory military training are:

- *Fact sheet 160 - Universal military training in Australia, 1911–29*
- *Fact sheet 161 - Conscription referendums, 1916 and 1917*
- *Fact sheet 162 - National Service and war, 1939–45*
- *Fact sheet 164 - National Service, 1965–72*