

Connecting Us is a newsletter sponsored by the COO Committee for all APS staff, sharing stories of your successes and highlighting useful resources.

Message from the Deputy Chair

Mary

Mary Wiley-Smith is the Deputy Chair of the Chief Operating Officers Committee, and Deputy Australian Public Service Commissioner.

A consistent highlight from the annual APS employee census is just how engaged public servants are in the work that they do. Our APS colleagues understand the part they play in serving the Australian public, with the vast majority willing to go the extra mile when circumstances require it – and the APS response to COVID-19 has confirmed this to be the case.

This edition of *Connecting Us* showcases a few examples of this commitment to service. However, I'm sure there are many more examples across the breadth of the APS, as our colleagues have found new and innovative ways to deliver on the high expectations of the Government and the community. We should all be very proud of what we have achieved.

As the Government reshapes priorities and programs to support the COVID-19 recovery, we will need to continue to maintain the positive momentum that the last few months have generated. With this in mind, at the COO Committee we are already discussing the APS reform agenda, including a 'deep dive' into workforce planning and capability issues at our most recent meeting. Our immediate focus will be on clear and practical actions that support the COVID-19 recovery and meet longer-term APS reform ambitions.

I hope you enjoy reading about how your colleagues have been contributing to the COVID-19 response in this edition of *Connecting Us*.

Virtual delivery now a reality for the APSC's online learning catalogue



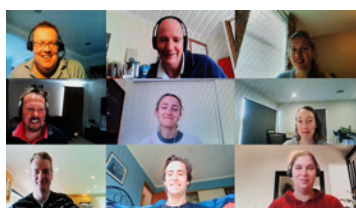
James facilitating a course

COVID-19 has changed many things about the way we work, including the way we learn. As you would expect, online courses are proving a great opportunity to connect APS staff from across Australia without them needing to come to a training room in Canberra. To support learning – even more important in this period of change – the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) has recently launched an APS Online Learning Catalogue to help people develop their skills, wherever they are working.

The most recent *EL2 Leadership in Practice* program, which started in a classroom in Canberra just prior to COVID-19, held a second virtual workshop a few weeks ago. The workshop had learners joining from office desks, meeting rooms and lounge rooms from across Australia. Participants are embracing the opportunities presented by remote learning as Lisa reflects. 'As a State officer and due to budgetary requirements, the ability to go to Canberra and participate in training is non-existent. This is one of the best things that has come out of COVID-19.'

You can explore the APS Online Learning Catalogue via the [APSC website](#), [APSLearn](#) or [GovTEAMS](#). You will find curated articles, videos, eLearning and podcasts available on a range of topics for all APS staff to access, expanding your skill sets and developing future opportunities.

Technology helps ABARES to continue a half century tradition of delivering on time



The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) produces *Australian Crop Report* and *Agricultural Commodities Report* on a quarterly basis. For the forecasting team, this cycle involves long hours at desks in Canberra – running models, analysing results and preparing reports – to deliver against a strict schedule of releases on the ABARES website.

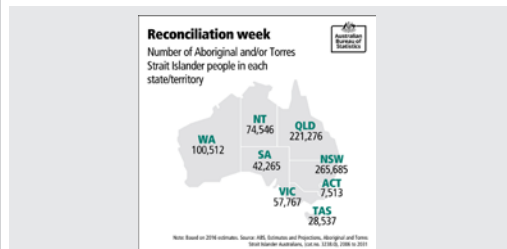
With COVID-19 and working remotely, the team quickly embraced collaboration platform GovTEAMS. 'We've learned new ways to communicate, to share data and documents, and to attend video meetings with stakeholders. And all without affecting the production timeline for two reports which have not missed their release deadline in more than 50 years,' Program Lead Dr Rohan Nelson said.

APS Socials

#Workwithpurpose



For National Reconciliation Week, Canberra's National Carillon was lit up with artworks and stories from Indigenous artists from around Canberra and Australia. #NRW2020 #InThisTogether #APSMobility



To mark #NationalReconciliationWeek the ABS acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands across the country on which we live and work, and pays respects to Elders past, present and emerging. #InThisTogether #NRW2020 #Reconciliation

The expected challenge was data management. The commodities database, at the heart of both reports, is a huge dataset. The team needed to maintain the dataset remotely, with the department's IT specialists opening new pathways for remote access. 'This meant that production of data products and analysis – which we know are in high community demand based on our website metrics – has not missed a beat,' Rohan said.

'The ability to share information, whether it's a link to a website or database or document, has made a big difference. Text chatting in GovTEAMS has replaced informal communication between desks and over partitions.'

BoM videos continue without a hitch, despite remote working

The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) uses videos to share information and engage citizens to make informed and timely decisions. But with many staff working from home due to social distancing measures, how could it make quality videos without a production studio or a broadcast quality camera?

With innovative solutions, patience, teamwork – including GovTEAMS – and attention to detail; that's how!

Since late March, nearly 20 BoM videos have now been filmed from homes or from the office but with remote support. 'The weekly ABC Landline videos, on-demand Severe Weather videos, and fortnightly Climate and Water Outlook videos have all been delivered on time,' said BoM National Video Manager Andrea Peace.

The mid-month [Climate and Water Outlook](#) video was probably the most impressive adaptation, involving Dr Lynette Bettio and Dr Robert Pipunic conversing via their webcams at home.

Planning and testing started early. 'We made sure staff took home quality headphones and webcams. We tested all the IT supported video equipment available to staff, to find a simple yet effective and sustainable option for recording remotely. And we have adapted the scripts to minimise presenting on screen,' explained Andrea.

'We also helped presenters to find the best lighting and backdrop in their homes, which has occasionally involved some tidying up and finding a nice pot plant.'

You can [subscribe](#) to all of the BoM's e-newsletters and updates. You can receive notification each time BoM publishes a video by subscribing to the [YouTube channel](#).



In brief: short stories Covidsafe app update



Since launching in late April, more than six million Australians have registered the COVIDSafe app. The app complements manual contact tracing already undertaken by state and territory health officials. Its effectiveness was shown early on, through an [example in Victoria](#) where COVIDSafe helped identify a person who would not have otherwise been found through manual tracing.

The development of COVIDSafe has been a genuine cross-APS effort. The Digital Transformation Agency led the technical

development of the app, working closely with the Department of Health and Attorney-General's Department to adopt a privacy-by-design approach.

This has been a great example of how quickly and collaboratively the APS can operate. 'While COVIDSafe is a great example of rapid, user-focused delivery, our broader pandemic response has truly embodied the 'One APS' vision,' said DTA CEO Randall Brugeaud.

The DTA is releasing regular updates to the app to build on the strong security, privacy, performance and usability foundations already established.

As our lives begin to return to normal, the app will play an important role in helping us contain the spread of COVID-19.

Leading from isolation

As part of the Assessment Services team at Services Australia, Rebecca's job involves coordinating employment assessments for job seekers and Disability Support Pension claims.

Two weeks quarantine in a room at the Hilton, Sydney, couldn't stop her from helping Australians and doing her job – and it didn't occur to Rebecca to take leave.

'I was one of the people on the first flight back to Australia to be sent into mandatory isolation in a hotel. I could see on the TV how many people needed help from Services Australia, and I wanted to be useful. So I had my laptop and a mouse delivered and I just logged in. I've always done a lot of my work online as I coordinate a team spread across five different worksites. There are tougher places to Skype from than a five-star hotel!'



Useful Links and Resources

- The Prime Minister flagged skills and industrial relations reform to rebuild the post-pandemic economy in his 26 May [address to the National Press Club](#)
- In the latest IPAA 'Work with purpose' podcast episodes hear from [Greg Moriarty and General Angus Campbell AO DSC](#) on 'how can the ADF help?' and [Reece Kershaw APM and Michael Outram APM](#) on fighting crime during COVID-19
- Download the Australian government [coronavirus app](#) to stay up to date with official advice

All important information for APS staff is available from the [APSC COVID-19 portal](#).

We want to hear from you!

We'd love to share your stories in upcoming editions. If you have a story about how your department or agency is adapting where and how you work, please get in touch.

Email us at: CooCommittee@pmc.gov.au

Nel from the Department of Defence in North Queensland wrote to us:

'While we are of course 'One APS', I have found that there is often a disconnect between agencies. I just love how 'Connecting Us' bridges that gap, and how it is doing so in a way that, while related to work, is social, friendly and collaborative rather than strictly professional. We are a big 'family' in the APS, and I love reading about the work happening in other agencies and how they are supporting our community in these difficult times.'