

Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience

Parliament House
ACT 2600

Dear Senator Jacquie Lambie,

I read your newspaper articles about the ADF's employment in Disaster efforts and fully agree with your sentiments that the ADF had become an almost 'National SES' which seriously detracts from its primary role of the defence of our country. My background is of over 30 years in the Army Catering Service both on overseas deployments and with the old 'Support to the Civil Power', where I was heavily involved in coordinating Army support to fighting bush fires in Victoria in the 1980's. My personal submission is this:-

The ADF, and the Army in particular, does not have the equipment, training and manpower to support the ADF Catering Service either on operations overseas or in domestic emergencies like major floods and bushfires. The Army Catering Service does not have the capacity to independently feed our troops in the field or domestic emergencies for any period of time.

This is the result of many years of 'Contracting Out' our in-barracks catering service to overseas "for-profit" businesses on the mythical grounds of 'efficiency' which has decimated the manpower of the Army Catering Corps. It no longer is able to fulfil its intended role of providing balanced and nutritious meals in all weather and operational conditions at home and abroad. This was forcefully demonstrated in Afghanistan where our troops were reported to be losing weight at Tarin Kowt because of the totally inadequate and unsuitable meals provided by so-called joint logistic support. I know from my contacts with ex-service groups, that during the Bushfires in Victoria and New South Wales in 2019/20 the Army was forced to rely on civilian Volunteer services to feed our troops during initial deployments. They also became a burden to our local and State organisations during the ADF's Covid 19 support efforts.

The Army Catering Corps has been reduced from over 2,000 personnel in the 1990's, fully capable and resourced to feed all our Army in barracks and on operations, to a rump of less than 300 caterers who do not have the equipment, training and/or experience to readily support our troops during national emergencies. Lack of trade positions sadly diminish the possibility of a reserve of capable unit caterers who can be called upon to support emergency situations. This also results in a lack of career progression which in turn leads to low levels of retention by the few skilled unit cooks and caterers available. The trade of Army Catering Operators who set up and operated field dining services was disbanded a few years ago; obviously if you don't intend to feed our soldiers in the field, you don't need field dining rooms!

I believe your Committee should investigate the capacity of the Army logistic services to independently support our troops during national emergencies, in particular the ability to feed our soldiers in the field during protracted operations. Without this there is no resilience in any kind

Yours Sincerely
Lt Col (Retd) Brian C. Kay
Director of Catering -Army, 1983-86, 1990