



# Operation and Management of Department of Parliamentary Security Services

## SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION

**Community and Public Sector Union (PSU Group)**

June 2021

# Introduction

As noted in our previous submission, CPSU members are proud of the work they do supporting the functioning of our Australian Parliament and the work of parliamentarians. This work covers a broad range of areas from research and library services, to building security, visitor services and maintaining the Parliament's vast art collection. Along with the work of the Departments of the Senate and the House of Representatives, it is an important part of our democratic institutions.

This supplementary submission is based on further feedback received from CPSU members working in DPS's Parliamentary Security Service which have further illustrated significant issues with many of the management and workplace relations practices of the DPS. These are not only impacting negatively on staff morale and the effectiveness of the agency but causing serious workplace health and safety concerns.

We welcome this opportunity to shine a spotlight on those matters and establish a constructive way forward to address these issues.

As the primary union representing staff at Department of Parliamentary Services, the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry into the operation and management of the Department of Parliamentary Services.

The CPSU is happy to provide information on the matters raised in this submission and supplementary information on other relevant issues.

## **Beth Vincent-Pietsch**

Deputy Secretary

Community and Public Sector Union

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## Workplace culture within Parliamentary Security Services

There has recently been a spotlight on Parliament House revealing a troubling level of power imbalance that extends beyond politicians and their staffers. Within DPS, CPSU members report a lack of organisational justice, accountability and transparency that is out of step with the Australian Public Service standards, particularly in Security. This worker sentiment is expressed well by this member quote:

“Toxic to point of where it is making employees ill. Employees are too scared to speak out due to reprisal and what they have seen happen to others for voicing their views. DPS are not accountable and there is no transparency about decisions made which affect employees. Given the current climate with Covid people need their job security which is further compounding employees not speaking out. Employees feel their livelihoods are under threat and with no open-door policy or an avenue to speak out employees will remain silent.”

### **Bullying, harassment and cover-ups**

Bullying and harassment continues to be an issue within the Department. In a 2020 CPSU survey, a majority (54%) of respondents reported an increase in bullying or inappropriate behavior.

When asked about one thing that would improve DPS, addressing problems with management culture was commonly mentioned. It was summed up by one member who recommended DPS:

‘Restructure management to change culture to improve morale and eliminate the culture of bullying and intimidation from management’.

### **The weaponising of disciplinary action**

In March this year PSS CPSU member Nikola Anderson appeared on 4 Corners to tell her firsthand account of the cover-up of the rape of Brittany Higgins in Lisa Reynolds office. Ms Anderson told 4 Corners she was speaking up because she feared she was going to lose her job and become the scapegoat for the Government. Despite the fact that the Prime Minister stated Ms Higgin’s alleged rapist was dismissed for a security breach nobody had spoken to Ms Anderson as the security guard that was on duty.

The CPSU believes Ms Anderson was right to be concerned as PSS staff are frequently threatened with disciplinary actions (the use of a Code of Conduct) and sometimes dismissed for raising questions or issues.

For the 2019-20 Financial Year DPS had 12 matters formerly referred for consideration for potential breaches of the Code of Conduct (CoC). Of these reported CoC's some were investigated resulting in 3 staff being reprimanded, 1 having contract not renewed, 1 resigning before sanction and 2 being terminated.

The CPSU understands that 2 of these 12 cases were still under investigation into the 2020-21 financial year, where 4 more were added. Two staff have been terminated so far this year and another is awaiting a sanction.

CPSU members in PSS report the heavy-handed use of CoC. Members hold the view that anyone who questions management or raises a complaint will be targeted and find themselves on a CoC for any small breach of protocol or mistake.

Also worrying is the open threat of CoC that is wielded to prevent people speaking out and that the CoC investigations often take an unreasonably long time. Affected staff report severe mental health impacts from extended delays to knowing if they still have a job.

All of this results in PSS members reporting that going to work is like walking on eggshells, the threat of CoC and the extra scrutiny make working life unpleasant.

Our members express frustration and bitterness over the treatment of staff when middle management are often witnessed behaving poorly and acting inappropriately without any sanction or consequence.

## **The disconnect between workers and senior management**

The CPSU has previously reported that there is a fundamental issue with the consultative mechanisms the department has created. The department has an expectation that all consultation and communication will flow from supervisor to the worker. In a workplace where workers are not prepared to raise issues this results in a very one-sided affair.

Consultation mechanisms require a legitimate input from the workforce and a normal two-way system of communication that is currently not present within the department.

Workers, particularly in security, are not prepared to speak to their individual manager or line supervisor for fear of repercussions. Members tell us that they do not have confidence that complaints will be handled appropriately, fairly and in a timely way.

Furthermore, CPSU delegates refuse to participate in scheduled consultative forums because they are not seen as effective vehicles for positive workplace change.

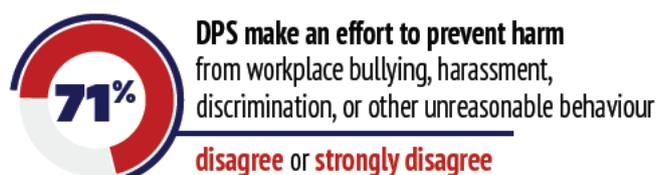
DPS has repeatedly failed to adequately respond to the CPSU over member concerns in a timely and transparent way. There were several interactions within the last 18 months that evidence this:

- Failure to address staff concerns around the air quality issue from bushfires early 2020.
- Poor consultation and late decision regarding a determination for DPS staff pay and conditions, resulting in a lower pay outcome for staff.
- The department's COVID response including:
  - Slow facilitation of working from home and lack of technical capability,
  - Poor communication around public access to Parliament House and closures, and
  - Poor management of the secondment of many staff to Services Australia.

The CPSU met recently with DPS Secretary to discuss the discrepancy between the feedback members have given the CPSU and the feedback management have received via the staff census. We have raised our concern that people are scared to speak out and have disengaged with management feedback mechanisms. The CPSU recognises that our member concerns may not be held by all DPS staff but are concentrated in pockets such as Security and are of enough number and significance that they need to be recognised and addressed.

## Current survey results – as at 15 June

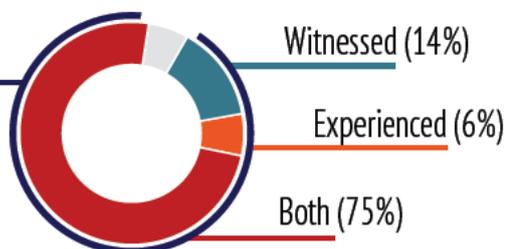
### TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?



## EXPERIENCE OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

**94%**

of repondents experienced or witnessed **workplace bullying at DPS**



**49%**

of repondents **did not have confidence** in systems to report their experiences



**89%**

of those that did report assessed the response as **insufficient** (42%) or **negligible** (47%)



## Conclusion

Both this supplementary, and our original submission have raised significant issues with communication, workplace culture, some management practices and ICT capacity. These have affected the ability of DPS staff to carry out their roles to the best of their ability. To address some of issues raised we have previously made the following recommendations:

- DPS reinstates regular and structured staff consultation processes and ensures thorough and consistent staff consultation over all change management.
- DPS makes the outcomes of departmental staff surveys available and uses them to inform improved workplace strategies.
- DPS takes seriously the problems of bullying and harassment and nepotism that exist and work with the CPSU to address these with good policy, manager and staff training, improvement targets and regular reviews to get results.
- DPS prioritise staff workplace safety in the planning of all capital works.
- There is significant investment in upgrading Parliament House IT capacity.
- DPS utilises its full ASL allocation, and that a review of staffing levels to ensure adequacy is undertaken.

Since this submission was made in October 2020, the CPSU would like to note that DPS has made progress against a number of these including improved consultation with different areas. DPS has reinstated the PSS open forum which is a positive move towards open dialogue and are returning to regular meetings with the CPSU. DPS have also provided better census data, particularly regarding PSS. Furthermore, they have provided data on the number of Code of Conduct complaints, investigations and resulting terminations that the CPSU requested.

Acknowledging these positive steps and some of the significant developments within Parliament house in 2021, the CPSU would like to add these further recommendations.

- That DPS implement the recommendations of the Foster Review for an independent, confidential complaints mechanism and support systems, open to all workers and not just Ministerial staffers.
- That DPS seek to further improve cultural change with whole of Department statement that reflects their duty of care to provide a safe and respectful workplace and that they will take a 0% tolerance to bullying and harassment in the workplace.
- That DPS take on board the prevailing message that has been expressed to the CPSU that individuals are scared to speak up which results in consultation processes not being a true and fair representation of the workforce. Review the current consultation mechanisms.
- DPS should create transparency and accountability through regular reporting on the number of Code of Conducts and bullying and harassment complaints to track results and share these with staff.
- DPS should provide training in bullying and harassment that focusses on safe and respectful workplaces. Training must focus on unacceptable behaviours and make clear that DPS will hold all level of employees accountable, provide clear instruction and obligation around reporting and responding to complaints and take a victim centric approach so that people are supported and not targeted for speaking out.
- To avoid miscommunication, suspicion and confusion regular staff updates should be provided in email as well as in staff briefings for PSS. Senior management currently rely on branch managers ensuring staff are updated on latest developments, but this is not consistent.