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## House of Representative House Standing Committee on Education and Employment Inquiry into Workplace Bullying

### Summary

I am a victim of bullying in a volunteer charity organisation. It has 3000 volunteers and a number of paid employees. It lacks transparent processes to assist victims. No support is provided by the organisation. Workcover refused to assist me when I approached them for help because I am not a paid employee. There are no other organisations to assist mature volunteers. All structured organisations should come under the same anti-bullying regime.

### Submission

I am a victim of bullying while a volunteer with a charity, namely NSW. For more than two years I have been attempting to bring my bullying situation to the attention of the senior management in Sydney. The Deputy Commissioner initially noted my concerns and committed to do something but in fact he was ineffective and the bullying continued with increased vindictiveness. After raising the situation again he dismissed my concerns and put the obligation on me to solve the problem.

At the end of last year, a year after I lodged a written submission, I escalated my issues through a grievance process and brought it to the attention of the . The Commissioner became involved but took an aggressive stance demanding a further more detailed written submission naming the individuals, places, times and outcomes of the bullying. I submitted the information and met a nominated person to attempt to resolve the issue. That person had not even read my submissions when I met them nor did they understand the workings of the organisation! It became obvious to me that I was now under investigation and not the victim of bullying.

During the whole process no support was offered or provided to me. The internal grievance process was not followed and the investigation phase took more than five months to conclude. I received a letter from the Commissioner based on the investigation (I have not seen the full investigation report) which stated that no bullying had occurred. I have described his letter as based on lies, distortions, poor logic and can best be labelled as a lynching whitewash.

Furthermore the Commissioner initiated a disciplinary process against me regarding an alleged innocuous comment I made to one of the bullies during the grievance process. The result of his procedure would have been that my membership of would have been terminated. I resigned after 7 years of voluntary service to the boating community. The bullying continues within the Unit where I was a member and more and more people leave as a result of the toxic environment.

NSW is a charity staffed by over 3000 volunteers and a few fully paid employees. It was formed in July 2009 by the NSW Government through the amalgamation of three volunteer organisations. It received an initial seed funding of \$3 million from the state government to establish the organisation. More money went into boats and equipment than into procedures and processes

to assist the members. It now receives funds from a levy on NSW licences and should therefore be subject to public scrutiny.

The organisation is still going through many far reaching changes in education, training and organisational structures but it is slow moving and vested interest always seem to get their way.

The organisation has more than 53 units usually based in small communities. It is this small town syndrome that supports the bullying culture. Entrenched local interests form a crony culture which resists change, accountability and transparent democratic processes. The organisation is further staffed by mature age men many of whom have a police or service background. The few women members are in the catering sections. The Commissioner and his deputy each have more than 20 years with the Army or emergency services sectors. The previous Commissioner was a policeman.

During my ordeal I twice contacted Workcover believing the new Work, Health and Safety Act 2011 applied to and that Workcover would assist me. On both occasions I was told that they only support paid employees and not volunteers. I had no one to turn to for support or advice. This affected my health and outlook.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Volunteers organisations and paid workplaces should fall under the same laws regarding bullying and discrimination.
2. NSW should be forced by law to comply to the measures of transparency and process required of any organisation receiving funds from the public purse.
3. An investigation be initiated to establish the extent of bullying within volunteer organisations especially mature aged bullying.
4. Workcover should be required to assist volunteers in the areas of bullying and discrimination and to take up a legitimate cause against the volunteer organisation including initiating compensation claims.
5. The Federal Government should include volunteer organisations no matter how small, in any initiative to stop bullying in the workplace.

I trust this assists the committee.

Your sincerely

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