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House of Representatives Standing Committee  
On Education and Employment  
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24<sup>th</sup> August, 2012

**Re: Inquiry into Workplace Bullying**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a former APS staff member. After being employed at the APS6 level for 3.5 years at \_\_\_\_\_, I was promoted to Assistant Director (EL1), Library & Information Services at the \_\_\_\_\_. After nearly 12 months at the \_\_\_\_\_, I resigned on 15/11/2011 due to the ongoing bullying and harassment that I was experiencing in the workplace. In addition, there was a distinct lack of support for me and the \_\_\_\_\_ did not uphold their duty of care towards me at all.

It is an unfortunate fact within the \_\_\_\_\_ that whilst policies and procedures are in place prohibiting workplace harassment, management will not do anything to stamp it out. Moreover, once I made an official complaint, my experience was that I was treated with contempt by management and not supported in any way, shape or form.

The Workplace harassment, discrimination and bullying \_\_\_\_\_ document produced by the \_\_\_\_\_ defines workplace bullying as “repeated unreasonable behaviour directed towards a person or group of persons at a workplace, which creates a risk to health, safety and personal wellbeing.”

Bullying may comprise a combination of behaviours including but not limited to **unwarranted criticism or insults, spreading gossip or malicious rumours, verbal taunts**, taking credit for someone else’s work, deliberately withholding information or resources and influencing others to exclude or isolate the targeted person or persons. Bullying can be overt or covert. Bullying behaviour can range from very obvious verbal or physical assault to very subtle psychological abuse. Bullying does not have to be intentional, conscience or deliberate.

On 28/09/2011 I contacted the People Helpline at the \_\_\_\_\_ regarding an employee (one of my direct reports) who had been behaving inappropriately in my area. I explained that I had also contacted \_\_\_\_\_ Concern, who referred me to the People Helpline to request a people management case officer.

I explained that I manage employee \_\_\_\_\_ and there was ongoing behaviour issues which myself and my manager were facing. I explained that the behaviour was ongoing and the most recent incident was on 26/09/2011 where myself, my EL2 manager and \_\_\_\_\_ had a meeting that was scheduled for 30 minutes, took one hour and was ended by the EL2’s request due to \_\_\_\_\_ continuing to talk over the top of both of us. I advised that I attempted to have a PDA discussion with \_\_\_\_\_ on 31/08/2011 and this was cut short as \_\_\_\_\_ was reacting badly to feedback and accusing me of being unprofessional. I advised that \_\_\_\_\_ was verbally attacking me and I felt the meeting was not being productive so cancelled it. I

advised that my EL2 manager completed this PDA discussion with [redacted] a few days later and it turned into a 3 hour meeting. I advised that I felt very uncomfortable, unsafe and physically intimidated when dealing with [redacted] and this was communicated to my EL2 manager a couple of months ago. [nothing was done about this].

I wanted to get [redacted] People involved for quite some time, however, my EL2 manager was reluctant to have the issue escalated. I explained that I was uncomfortable in signing off on [redacted] probation due to these behaviour issues, however, felt pressure from my EL2 manager to sign off on it. I went home from work on personal leave on 27/09/2011 due to this situation and my GP recommended that I stay off work on 28/09/2011 as well. I advised I would be returning to work the following day, as [redacted] was on leave and I would be comfortable at work.

The [redacted] People Helpline consultant advised me that she would escalate this report to CPR NAT for a case manager to be assigned in managing [redacted]. I was also advised that from what I described it appears there could be breaches in the APS Code of Conduct on many levels and is an avenue that needs to be looked into. The consultant advised someone from CPR NAT would contact me before the end of the week.

To cut a long story short, there was no official investigation into the behaviour issues of [redacted] (as illustrated above and the subject of this submission). Moreover, EL2 managers from the Library & Information Services area were given the responsibility of initially looking into this matter, thus it was essentially covered up. I was informed by [redacted] (EL2.1 Director) that management wanted to look into this matter informally, and refused to conduct an official investigation or even investigate the numerous breaches of the APS Code of Conduct (as highlighted by the [redacted] People consultant).

In desperation, I suggested that I would like to be transferred to another business unit (at level) within the [redacted]. My request was denied, and I was informed that I would have to undergo mandatory mediation with [redacted] for a 3 month period. Due to my anxiety and depression I could not contemplate this mediation process with [redacted], who was displaying all the behaviours of a workplace psychopath. The only option available for me at the time was to resign to remove myself from this detrimental situation.

As a result, I was then unemployed until 28/05/2012 when I secured casual employment (after submitting over 50 job applications) in a university library (working an average of 12 hours per week). On 27/07/2012 I was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent emergency surgery on 08/08/2012. Certainly, the link between physical and mental health has been well established and as such I question whether all the stress and anxiety may have been a factor in my developing this serious health issue.

**Please refer to the following for an overview of the situation as taken from my diary.**

**This is by no means all of the incidences I endured, but hopefully it will put things in context and provide a snapshot as to the dysfunctional nature of this organisation.**



with [redacted] I was told by [redacted] (EL2.1) in no uncertain terms that probation needed to be signed off. After this point in time, “behavioural issues” would then become a “Performance Management” issue.

[redacted] suggested I hold a separate meeting with [redacted] (on the same day as probation sign-off), which I did. I let [redacted] know that disrespect towards myself as her manager would not be tolerated, not is acceptable behaviour in the APS. [Email sent to [redacted] and cced to [redacted] in HR as record of this discussion, no reply received from [redacted]].

### **25<sup>th</sup> August, 2011**

[redacted] stated to me that her EAP counsellor said to her during one of their counselling sessions, **“You are a ticking time bomb just waiting to go off!”** I consider this to be a veiled threat towards me and this belief was also held by my GP [redacted] said he would like to refer me to counselling with [redacted] (psychologist) to assist me to deal with the bullying and harassment I was experiencing at the [redacted]. As a result I do not feel safe around [redacted].

### **31<sup>st</sup> August, 2011 – PDA discussion held between [redacted] and [redacted]**

I curtailed this meeting after only about 10-15 minutes duration, due to [redacted] saying to me (repeatedly), “You’re unprofessional, you’re unprofessional”. In response, I replied to her, “I am stopping this meeting as we are not being productive, you are verbally attacking me”. I was visibly shaken up, my hands were shaking and I felt like I was about to have a panic attack. I walked back to my workstation, and [redacted] saw the state I was in. [redacted] said to me “I’ll deal with her later”. I went and had a walk outside for 45 minutes (as per suggestion from [redacted]), and then continued with my next scheduled PDA discussion [with [redacted], Librarian, APS5], this discussion went as planned.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2011 – PDA discussion held between [redacted] and [redacted]**

This meeting was scheduled to go for 1 hour and instead went for nearly 3 hours. [redacted] informed [redacted] that she needed to “moderate her behaviour”.

### **5<sup>th</sup> September, 2011**

[redacted] had previously told me that I should document everything in writing to [redacted] (due to continual “misunderstandings”). Conversely, today [redacted] informed me that I should instead issue verbal instructions, as [redacted] responds better to verbal cues.

There was also some consternation between [redacted] (Senior Librarian, APS6) and [redacted] relating to the proposed Wollongong site visit. [redacted] was involved in trying to sort out this matter. Afterwards, [redacted] said to me, “It appears last week wasn’t just a bad week after all”.

### **14<sup>th</sup> September, 2011**

[redacted] stated to me that she thinks [redacted] has a “mental problem”. [redacted] said that both [redacted] (Senior Librarian, APS6) and [redacted] (Senior Librarian, APS6) had related incidences of inappropriate behaviour to her relating to [redacted] – their concerns have been noted. [redacted] had been

voicing her complaints loudly and it was now considered to be a possible breach of the APS Code of Conduct re: vilification and/or lack of respect for her co-workers.

also mentioned that any future meetings conducted with in the future that she will request that a representative from the HR department also be in attendance.

said that both of us need to provide “support” for and and that we cannot “force” them to work with . went on to say that both of us need to “protect” and from

### **23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2011**

Client Relationship Meeting held with Sydney staff. was playing a passive/aggressive role, refusing to make eye contact with me and refusing to get involved in our team discussions. It would appear that was attempting to sabotage my role as the leader of this project. The atmosphere at this meeting was tense as a result. was freezing me out and ignoring me, which constitutes bullying behaviour.

### **26<sup>th</sup> September, 2011**

sent both and me a meeting request (30 min meeting) to discuss the “Mutual Expectations” section of PDA agreement and to endeavour to come to a mutual understanding on a way forward with our working relationship. (n.b.

had not sent me a Weekly report since 26<sup>th</sup> August, 2011 and this was one of the Mutual Expectations of all of my seven direct-reports).

said that in her opinion “the problems we have are greater than this”. stated that I ( ) am an ineffective manager and she feels like she has no manager. This is a personal insult to me, which also constitutes bullying behaviour. said nothing to defend me. I was too shocked to say anything at this point and was visibly shaken. refused to come to any agreement and after one hour called a halt to this meeting. was talking over the top of , and had to continually ask her to stop doing this. also asked that refrain from having impromptu meetings with other staff. It was my role as Assistant Director within the Library & Information Service team to decide whether or not to conduct staff meetings and when and where any meetings would be held.

finalised the meeting by letting know that she would be in contact with HR, as we clearly require their expert assistance to deal with this situation and we were unable to resolve anything at this meeting.

Afterwards had a private meeting with me, where she revealed that she had big “question marks” over the appointment of as during her interview (at the ) she spoke ill of her current employer, severely criticising her former manager at said problem was that she thinks she is better than everyone else (who works in the Library), so I am in good company.

**27<sup>th</sup> September, 2011**

Visited my GP, \_\_\_\_\_ who initiated a GP Mental Health Care Plan (Item 2710) for me in light of the “bullying up” behaviour towards me by \_\_\_\_\_. Under details of complaint, it states: Depression and anxiety. Recorded under details: Reverse workplace harassment, Bullying Up.

**4<sup>th</sup> October, 2011**

\_\_\_\_\_ sent me an email requesting my assistance in navigating the e-forms (submitting a claim for travel expenses). I did as she requested however in doing so \_\_\_\_\_ conducted a conversation with me whereby she ridiculed me due to my lack of legal qualifications. In my current role, I do not require a legal qualification so this was another unwarranted personal attack.

I could write numerous more entries on this topic, but will finalise it here.

Can I respectfully suggest that (whilst it is out of the terms of reference) an enquiry or investigation be undertaken into the Library & Information Services (Law & Practice) at the \_\_\_\_\_ ? I have it on good authority that staff turnover is extremely high, essentially because of mismanagement and overall dissatisfaction with the prevailing dysfunctional workplace culture.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present my experience and I hope that something is done to change the bullying culture that is prevalent in so many government departments.

Yours sincerely,