



**From:**  
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## **PRIVATE and CONFIDENTIAL**

### **Senate Enquiry into Workplace Bullying**

#### **Submission**

This submission details my experience as a victim of Workplace bullying. I worked in local government for 19 years until made redundant which was in fact was a constructive dismissal for my daring to complain to put an end to the endless workplace bullying I was experiencing.

I have a military background (Army) that provided me with strong work ethics, of discipline and reliability. These qualities were not well received in my employment in Local Government and held as a liability against me, as my dedicated approach to my work created additional work for others. I worked hard in my position, always did my best and tried to establish a career. I was also conscientious, agreeable and a quiet achiever.

My position involved regular contact with the public for which I received regular abuse from the public. My employer cared little about this abuse against me stating that it goes with my position. The employer's only advice was to give back some abuse and when I did just that a complaint was lodged with the General Manager by an abusive complainant. I was threatened with dismissal and had to apologize. From that point on, I just had to take the abuse for fear of being dismissed, effectively I was unable to defend myself from this abuse.

#### **BULLY 1**

There was a bully in my workplace, he was my former supervisor and he was manipulative and cunning. I will call him bully 1. I now know that this person is most probably an "industrial psychopath". Bully 1 regularly bullied many people that were below his position or were no use to him.

Due to many complaints from various persons against bully 1, he decided his best defence was to become the union delegate, where his victims would have to rely on him if they had a workplace problem and he could decide if they received assistance or he could spread malicious rumours about them in an attempt to avoid them of assistance.

Once management became aware of this situation, management themselves were free to bully persons that they knew he would not receive help from him or the union. This is what happened in my situation.

Bully 1 was able to apply his charm and manipulation with everyone that mattered to him to better his position to portray a different image than that known by his victims. He was even cunning enough to regularly take the General Manager out fishing in his boat in order to afford him manipulation and protection in that he portrayed an image that he was very close to the General Manager, accordingly many victims were reluctant to raise complaints against him.

Management would dismiss or fail to properly act with any complaints made against him, as management never fully aware of the other dark side he had as they did not have to work with him unlike his victims, further management did not want any trouble with the Union, which he was also been able to manipulate. It was in this environment that this bully and other bullies at the council were able to operate effectively.

During the course of my employment at council Bully 1 was successful in destroying my career and the career of others. I believe he was even partly responsible or contributed to the death of a fellow employee. This occurred when that employee was feeling very ill and was so intimidated by Bully 1 that he was too frightened to take sick leave for fear of losing his job. The day before that employee told me he was feeling ill and too frightened to take sick leave. I advised him to take sick leave as his health was more important than his job.

The next day Bully 1 demanded that employee to unload heavy timbers off a truck. That employee was apprehensive about doing this because he was unwell and it was not his job, but complied and whilst unloading the timbers had a massive heart attack and passed away on the spot. I witnessed this and it was very distressing. At the funeral, his widow confirmed that he had been unwell and too intimidated to take sick leave for fear of losing his job.

I witnessed Bully 1 intimidate many people on council during my 19 years service. Bully 1 was only my supervisor for short period as I had complained to his superior at the time that Bully 1 had assaulted me and made various threats against me. Bully 1 had gone berserk over a council car parking issue, grabbed me by the throat up against a car, and continued severely choking me until several other employees psychically pulled him off me. I was groggy afterwards and nearly passed out. I was terrified and thought that I was going to die that day as he extremely vicious and totally out of control and if there had not been other employees nearby I am not sure what would have happened.

Bully 1 regularly bullied others and myself for a period of over 18 years. Some of his toxic conduct against myself included;

- Regularly screamed and abused me for any reason he thought up at the time, this abuse was more frequent during hot weather. It was generally accepted that you would keep well away from Bully 1 in hot weather.
- regularly made very derogatory remarks in relation to my physical appearance.
- made many threats that he would cause me physical harm outside the workplace.
- assaulted me on 4 occasions by dropping the shoulder into me when I was forced to pass close to me, he would then say in a derogatory manner “ sorry”.
- when these assaults became too much for me and I complained and management did nothing stating its his word against yours, some time after bully 1 then threw a chair from a second floor office at me narrowly missing me.
- as management where not going to act on my complaints, this was the green light for bully 1 to continue on with the assaults at a later time making certain there were no witnesses present.
- bully 1 then waited until we crossed each other up a set of stairs and leaned over and screamed as loud as he could in my ear, causing me extreme pain, dizziness and loss of hearing. Council’s doctor tested me and confirmed I had suffered a perforated eardrum.
- on a number of occasions bully 1 waited for me to leave work in my vehicle and followed me in his vehicle, screamed abuse and threatened me and on one occasion tried to run me off the road.
- on many occasions bully 1 would leave a truck engine running in close proximate to my office so that when I returned, there would be a build up of exhaust fumes. Many times I became ill with severe headaches. When I reported this to management they responded by installing air-conditioning to my office and directing bully 1 not to idle trucks for extended periods in the confined space near my office.
- bully 1 is alleged to have sabotaged my work vehicle and then directed the blame upon myself.
- Bully 1 regularly would park other vehicles in my allocated parking spot and when I was forced to park in other available parking spots, he would severely abuse me for parking in the wrong spot.

- Bully 1 decided his best form of defence was to make up malicious complaints against myself to our common manager.
- That manager aware of all the problems and unable to determine who was at fault told bully1 and myself that if any more trouble occurs he will dismiss the both of us.
- I was very happy with this action, as I knew the bully 1 would now have to stop or risk losing his position. Bully 1 stopped immediately.
- The bullying was minimal for around the next 12 months then that manager passed away with cancer and bully 1 quickly resumed his toxic conduct against me.
- As bully 1 was the Union representative when I had a pay dispute with council he painted an unfavourable picture of me to the union in that he claimed I was a troublemaker. The union did little to assist me with this matter and management knew it.
- During the pay dispute appeal process Bully 1 was allowed to attend the appeal as my union representative despite my objections. I was not allowed to attend to explain my position. Obviously, the appeal was of no benefit to me.
- Bully 1 then organised with the union to have my position made redundant who had consultation with council behind my back. Union stated to council that they would not oppose my redundancy.

Bully 1 severely damaged my mental health by his actions

## **BULLY 2**

Bully 2 was a short time bully but never the less did some damage to me. Bully 2 was also an “industrial psychopath. Bully 2 was a new council engineer determined to make his mark by any means. He started assessing every section of council one by one. When he assessed my section and found no problems and that everything was running very well he was not satisfied.

He asked me to consider a redundancy package and when I declined, he became very angry with me and stated he would then set out to get rid of me and that I would be leaving one way or another.

When I confronted him why he acted this way he told me that he needed to make changes to justify his appointment and I been employed here to long and had to go.

Later he called a staff meeting and in front of everyone he stated that everyone needed to be nice to me, as I would be losing my position shortly because of new technology arriving and that I did not have the necessary qualifications for that technology. I confronted him later and stated that I do have the necessary qualifications for the new technology as I have completed successful tertiary studies. I asked why he did not ask me what qualifications I had. He became very upset, abused me, and said anyway he did not like me and I will be going.

A few weeks later Bully 2 resigned and went to work for a regional council where I understand he continued on with his toxic behaviour until one of his bullied victims cracked, got a gun and shot him or attempted to shot him. I understand the police charged the bullied victim with attempted murder.

## **BULLY 3**

Bully 3 was the most dangerous of all the bullies, he was also an “industrial psychopath”. Bully 3 was very covert, very cunning, very polite and very manipulative.

Bully 3 was my supervisor for 9 years. When he first became my supervisor the very first thing he did was to not replace the required staff in my section and cut all overtime. When bully 3 found out that, I had problems with bully1 he decided to move my office closer to bully 1 which I strongly objected to.

Staff level dropped to myself and one other employee from the previous level of 4 employees plus overtime when required. He further went on to delegate extra duties not in my employment contract without additional pay. When challenged he stated he would give substantial pay rises and these would be backdated. However, he never did, he just keep increasing my workload piece by piece by stealth.

After a few years, the only other employee had had enough and resigned and I was left on my own with a burdensome load of work to complete. I complained that I was unable to continue on my own as my health was badly suffering. Bully 3 said he would employ additional staff but did not and I was forced to work very long additional hours to complete my work without any overtime or other assistance. Due to my work ethics, I just worked harder and harder hoping things would improve but they did not. Eventually I became very stressed and started to fall into depression. When it became too much, I attempted suicide but thankfully, a friend intervened and assisted.

I returned to the workplace and Bully 3 could clearly see that he had pushed me until I broke, at that point, he started advertising for additional staff, as other people were now aware of the situation.

I was mentally exhausted, I lost a lot of my memory and concentration as well as my self-confidence and had continual chest pain and trouble sleeping. I was admitted to hospital for an angiogram that found no problem with my heart. The specialist stated that my pain was most probably a gastro reflux resulting from long periods of work related stress.

A new employee was appointed who gave me additional support and I was able to continue. This employee was very supportive of me even thought I was his supervisor. He was an ex union delegate and could see that management were screwing me as well as him. I was only able to continue at council with his support, effectively an employee that was under my supervision was looking out for me against toxic management of which he had experience with from his union activates.

Some time later Bully 1 started his toxic behaviour on another employee who was the fishing partner of Bully 3. Bully 3 responded by creating a new position for his friend that effectively made that employee my additional supervisor with the associated increases in pay. The position was not advertised and I was unable to apply for this position. The new position involved bully3 delegating part of his own duties to his friend and other parts of his work to myself. I received no compensation but his friend did. When I complained that I had been working many years exposure to the sun and that this was a serious risk to my health from skin cancer and I should have been able to apply for this position that would have allowed much more indoor work. I was told that I could apply for the position in the future if it came up.

I have recently been diagnosed with Melanoma. The insurer has accepted a workers compensation claim for that injury.

Of further concern about injuries, bully 3 arranged removal of asbestos roofing from the workplace near where my office was located and failed to warn me of this. When the contractors threw the sheets off the roof into a skip bin I inadvertently walked around a corner when several of the sheets landed in the bin breaking up and I was covered in asbestos dust and inhaled some of that dust. This was very upsetting I have notified the asbestos register and now live with the constraint threat of becoming ill at any time. I understand that Bully 3 had taken a roster day off that day so he certainly was not going to be exposed to the asbestos.

In 1996, new workplace policies and procedures were introduced and training was provided for all employees. Finally after training, I realised I had rights and when I exercised those rights that is when my troubles started. I went to council's employee assistance external psychological service for counselling. They confirmed that I was in a toxic work environment and that they would approach council to sort things out. The council personal manager was not very responsive of this as Bully 1 and 3 had manipulated her into believing I was just a troublemaker. The employee assistance service advised me to find new employment. I was unable to do this as my mental condition had me padlocked to the job and was mentally too weak to find new employment.

Bully 3 continued covertly with his bullying by doing little things that were so small it was difficult to understand what was happening. Things like not informing me of training opportunities, forgetting to claim allowances for me, denying me a modern computer that worked properly when everyone else had the latest easy to use type, failing to rectify any concerns I had to name a few.

Bully 3 continued on with the bullying ever so covertly together with bully1, until I bully 1 attempted to assault me again and I obtained medical assistance and then unable to work due to psychological injury. Together with bully1 doing some of bully 3's dirty work they had been successful in finally breaking me.

Bully 3 was successful to misrepresenting the facts in my workers compensation claim in order that the insurer rejected my workers compensation claim for psychological injury.

Eventually I was forced to accept redundancy as my health was severely suffering and I was no longer able to continue with any employment.

My workers compensation claim went before the courts and I was successful in gaining compensation for the three months I was off work. The personal manager and bully 3 were caught out in court misrepresenting the facts in a final attack on me even though I had left the employment years earlier. The whole court process was very stressful and further aggravated my condition.

I have made many attempts to return to employment with every attempt just further aggravating my condition.

I have been unable to work for the last 13 years due to my mental condition arising out of that toxic workplace and my future does not look good.

This workplace bullying over a long period of time that brought about my injury has destroyed my life. I have been unable to trust people or form relationships. I have been denied the opportunity to have a family or children. I have been alienated from my family. I have lost my friendships. I have been denied a career. I have been denied financial independence. I have been denied a future. I live in a workplace bullying hell with memories constantly dominating my life.

From my experience, the government needs to put in place much better assistance to victims both medically and legally.

The laws need to be substantially strengthened to protect victims from bullying. Special Legal assistance or tribunals with regard to a victims mental anguish in appearing before the courts should be made available to victims at no cost in order that the offenders or their insurers pay for their actions and not the taxpayers who fund centrelink recipients who are mentally unable to pursue their rights.

A fully independent body should be set up to respond specifically to reports of bullying and thoroughly investigate and have the ability to prosecute the perpetrators.

When training in the workplace about bullying is carried out it can reduce the amount of overt bullying that it apparent but it can also just inform and educate the bullies of what they can't do but it can increase the amount of covert and more insidious bullying. It would be beneficial if training included how to recognize the traits that are apparent in people who tend to be bullies such as sociopaths and psychopaths. This would help people recognize them in the workplace and help others deal with them.

A Bully registry or database of proven offenders or offenders that have several unproven complaints made against them should be available to all employers prior to employment in order that they are aware of any previous suspect bully's entering there employment. This would be to ensure those employees could be monitored and not going from workplace to workplace undetected applying their bullying tactics in order to promote their career and reign havoc on their victims before moving on to the next workplace.

There is not enough being done now to protect victims from bullying. It is noted that billions are being allocated to the protect the rights of illegal refugees and at the same time there appears very limited resources available to ordinary Australians with mental injuries resulting from bullying who are also at risk of with severe injuries and even face death from suicide.

I have written this submission in the hope that my experience may help you make changes that will reduce the likelihood of other people going through the trauma I have been through. I hope this information is helpful but I would like to advise that I still feel mentally fragile and so not wish to appear before the senate committee if I was required.

