

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Senator Brian Greig

Democrats' Spokesperson for Law & Justice; Sexuality Issues.

Homophobia in the ADF

While supporting the thrust of the Chair's report, my particular interest in this inquiry (ADF personnel), is the ongoing discrimination against lesbian and gay personnel, and its negative consequences.

Although the ban on gay and lesbian people serving in the forces was removed in 1992, the then Labor Government's promise to introduce assimilation procedures and Equity/education programs on sexuality, was never honoured.

As a consequence, homophobic harassment, both overt and covert, is a serious and ongoing issue without any adequate response and resolution either by the Forces or the Government. Each seems to blame the other for this failure.

During the time that passed for this inquiry, three gay members of the ADF contacted me to say they were resigning from the forces following long periods of psychological harassment over their sexuality from colleagues. I can confirm that all three have since resigned. I am firmly of the view that homophobia in the forces is a serious problem that contributes to poor recruitment and retention rates of otherwise diligent and competent members.

I therefore find it difficult to accept the claim by Major General Simon Willis, "that harassment of any kind is not tolerated."

Without exception, every gay or lesbian ADF member I have spoken to (about eight in total), said their working environment remained very difficult for them, and that Equity programs were "utterly useless" at acknowledging the problems of sexuality discrimination or even addressing it.

Gay and lesbian ADF members have told me that the Army has the most acute problems with homophobia, and that the Air force and Navy, by comparison, were often more accepting places. I was also informed that anti-gay attitudes were more often than not the product of particular and specific senior personnel, and that some sections of the Army were more accepting.

The evidence suggests the problems with homophobia lay as much with individual Officers than with the system.

I believe the underlying causes of homophobia in the ADF must be addressed with a comprehensive internal education program.

It is unacceptable that after almost a decade has passed since the lifting of the ban, many gay and lesbian personnel still feel that the ADF is hostile to them, and that leaving is the only alternative.

Reform must be complimented with unambiguous harassment polices that deal with sexuality discrimination, and Equity Officers trained at dealing with the issues. I suspect that not until this matter is given the imprimatur of very senior members of the forces, will it be acknowledged and taken seriously.

I note the Committee's comment (5.16), that advocates a review of "spousal recognition", noting that some other Commonwealth Departments recognise same sex couple entitlements. However, this comment does not appear as a Chair's recommendation to Government in the final report. My concern therefore, is that this side-issue reflection does not in any serious way adequately address the issue or its immediacy.

Gay and lesbian personnel continue to experience discrimination in relocation expenses, accommodation, Superannuation, grief counselling and other related "relationship" matters with the ADF.

