

**SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE
REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO RECRUITMENT & RETENTION
OF DEFENCE PERSONNEL**

SUBMISSION

Submission No: 30

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Reference:

A. Senate inquiry into recruitment and retention of ADF personnel

1. As a serving member of the ADF I am honoured to have the chance to offer my opinion to the Senate inquiry into the recruitment and retention of personnel in the RAN.

My current employment

2. I am a Warrant Officer Combat Systems Manager (WOCSM) currently serving in the RAN as the category sponsor for the Combat Systems category; therefore I will address the Senate's Terms of Reference (TOR) from my category's perspective. However, I know from various discussions with my fellow category sponsors that many of the issues I will discuss here affect other categories.

Whether the current recruitment system is meeting, and will continue to meet, the needs of the ADF.

3. The current recruiting numbers for the CSO category in the recruiting year 2001/02 is set at 150, subsequent recruiting years will see this number decrease to 145 new recruits per year. If these recruiting targets were reached the CSO category would have more SMNCSOs than it could comfortably employ at sea. However, historical data indicates that the desired targets will not be met and a more realistic number to work with is about the 115 to 120 per year. Given this reduced target it is still above what the CSO category can comfortably handle as the recruiting figures, supplied by the Navy Workforce Planners, does not take into account the limitations of the CSO category training pipeline.

4. The Combat Systems Faculty¹, located at HMAS WATSON, can handle 220² new trainees per year. However, anecdotal evidence indicates that the Fleet can only handle approximately 100³ new SMNCSOs per year. Any additional SMNCSOs above this 100 requires the category to either employ them ashore or reduce their seatime. Neither of which is the preferred option for the service or the individual.

5. Leading directly on from the number of personnel recruited, the Navy is not adequately addressing the number of females joining the CSO category. The Navy prides itself on being an equal opportunity employer. However, Female LSCSOs are competing for the same bunks that are needed for the category's new female SMNCSO to be at sea consolidating their training. The current policy of having

¹ The main CSO training organisation for the RAN

² Based solely on instructors billeted and classroom facilities currently available

³ Based on an initial 2 year sea posting for each new entry

gender specific Mess decks limits the ability of the service to offer all CSOs equal employment opportunities, the current policy places an additional HR management burden on all Navy's HR area in particular Director Sailors Career Management (DSCM). Rather than going away, I believe similar problems will be experienced at the Petty Officer Combat Systems Supervisor (POCSS) and Chief Petty Officer Combat Systems Manager (CPOCSM) ranks as the female CSOs progress through the ranks.

The impact of the Defence Reform Program (DRP) on retention levels and recruiting.

6. There is little doubt⁴ that personnel serving today believe that the DRP has had a significant negative impact on the retention of personnel, a discussion in any mess deck will support this statement. The frustration of having the service's 'can do' meeting the civilian's 'I'll get around to that shortly' attitude causes friction. This can be further compounded when the lines of supervision and responsibility are not clear. The Navy has improved in this area and is now trying to ensure that our people are not placed into the Defence Corporate Support (DCS) organisation without adequate support. Basically, as a member of the RAN I feel that I have the right to expect to answer to and be supervised by a Naval Officer not a civilian equivalent.

7. The 'esprit de corps' of the service, this intangible spirit gained by being part of something unique, in this case, a call to service in the ADF has taken a battering under DRP. It seems an almost daily occurrence as personnel in uniform are being seen as, and treated like, another arm of the public service. If that is what the government wishes/wants then that is what the Government will get. However, the Defence White paper does state 'The Government recognises the unique requirements of service life and that being part of the ADF is more than just another job'⁵. Well now the words are right, but will actions, or more words follow them up.

8. The retention problems currently plaguing the CSO category or indeed the RAN is not new and that is the most frustrating thing about the focus that retention is now receiving. For far to long the Navy (read Government) has been relying on the good will of its members with the continual catch cry, particularly over the past 10 years, of 'We must do more with less'. Well people, you cannot do everything with nothing. Let's face it the only reason retention is now such an issue is that the Government finally realised, during East Timor, that the ADF could do it once (and do it very well) but would be hard pushed to sustain operations over the longer period.

9. While recruiting is important, retention particularly for the CSO category is even more important. I would say critical, to the long-term viability of the fighting capability of a modern warship. The skill required to competently operate and manage a complex environment such as exists today in a modern warship's Action Information Organisation (AIO) has to be instructed, constantly exercised and most importantly of all grown, as personnel progress through the ranks, from within the service. The RAN cannot laterally recruit or headhunt the CSO skills we need, we

⁴ This maybe a perception, but to the individual their perception is their reality and should not be dismissed

⁵ Section 3 Paragraph 7.19

must retain enough of our personnel to ensure the training, lessons learnt and experience gained over many years and needed within the AIO are kept in the service.

10. A consequence of the CSOs continual high wastage rate, that is not readily appreciated, is the cost involved in training an individual to a certain rank/experience level (I am not even sure if the Navy has this data, but it should). Every CSO regardless of their rank at discharge has required the Navy to invest heavily in time, money and training assets. There is an associated cost that may well be hidden or simply not understood, regardless of this it still exists and when the RAN loses a member then the RAN also loses everything that it has invested in that individual. Make no mistake here the RAN (and the ADF) has no options in this area. We must invest in the training of our personnel, but more importantly we must then keep them, if we are to ensure that an individual can perform their required tasks in all situations and often under extreme and sometimes hazardous conditions. To do other wise would be negligent and in the worst case could threaten the safety of Australia.

The impact of changes to ADF conditions of service, pay and allowances on retention and recruitment of personnel.

11. As a sailor with over 20 years service, I have witnessed many changes over the years. Some positive the standard of Defence Housing and support for families, for example, has vastly improved. However, on a professional note I have served with personnel who are second to none in Fleet units that I know are not as capable as they should be but some how the people manage to get the best out of themselves and the equipment.

12. Personnel serving in the RAN want to be there; after all we are a volunteer force. Therefore, it is safe to assume that we are loyal to our country and our elected representative. It is unfortunate that this loyalty is often one way and not reciprocated by those who have in the past, and will again in the future call upon us, or those who replace us, to protect Australia's national interests.

13. If your sole reason for joining the RAN was to earn your millions then you are probably in the wrong career. The pay has never been particularly generous, however, the conditions of service (subsidised housing, free medical and dental, duty free goods when serving at sea, isolated establishment allowances, travel allowances, a retirement fund that offered a 'carrot' to stay around and job security etc) offered some compensation. The conditions of service are no longer enough and have often been targeted by poorly informed political figures that see the ADF as a soft touch. After all we do not have a union. So who is going to complain? If the ADF has to give up established conditions of service so that we can have our 10% productivity increase pay rise, which by the way will be, spread over three years. The short answer is no one and so ADF members do or take the only option they see available to them they vote with their feet.

14. If the Government of the day wants loyalty then it must realise that loyalty goes both ways. While the Defence White paper is saying the right words, that is all they are, words and frankly words are no longer enough. Action is required now to address the current short-term retention problems and then longer-term strategies put

in place that will ensure this recruitment and retention problem can never happen again.

Current levels and categories of specialist personnel in the ADF compared to the organisation's requirements.

15. I have been directly affected by one major review, the Seaman Category Rationalisation Study (SCSR), which was implemented in 1993. I witnessed the destruction of three smaller functioning categories into one large category (the CSO category) and while I agree with the reasons behind why the amalgamation was necessary the implementation process, was a total disaster that forced highly trained personnel to cut their careers short. As a direct result of SCRS the CSO category is still dealing with many issues and underwent one 'mini' rationalisation in 1997 to address shortfalls in SCRS. However, while the CSO category is improving and is starting to regrow the AIO skills lost shortly after SCRS (due to high discharge rates). Any future category rationalisation must be implemented as evolutionary (let personnel grow into it), not revolutionary (force people into it).

The impact of current career management practices on retention of personnel

16. Due to the high wastage rates currently being experienced the pendulum seems to have shifted here to the personnel and not the needs of the service. In the past this was not the case and the contingencies of the service came first and far to often the personnel issues received 'lip service only'. Even today it could be argued that this is still the case for despite the best of intentions by the naval hierarchy. The RAN's Human Resource Areas such as DSCM are under staffed and lack the resources for the level of service that the sailor of today is demanding. Despite the best of intentions and the name change that gives the illusion of career management the reality is that DSCM do not have the personnel required to administer and manage personnel on a more personal basis. Therefore DSCM remain as the Poster in reality and a career manager in name only. Again the Navy has the right idea and the correct motivation in trying to offer a more personal approach to career management however the funding required to properly implement and resource a true HRM area falls well short of the required amount.

Closing statement

17. In closing I thank you for the chance to have my say and I take this opportunity to acknowledge that at times the RAN has been its own worst enemy. Indeed I agree that the DRP was necessary to reduce wastage and stream line ADF activity (it is a pity the necessary funding was not available, when required). However, the RAN has improved and is continuing to improve in all areas. While I believe that CN has a vision, which is well documented, of where he wants the Navy to be in future years and I do not doubt CN's commitment and loyalty to the RAN and the personnel who serve in it. I must admit that I hold reservations about whether or not the Government has the same level of commitment and loyalty that will allow CN to do what is necessary to ensure the long-term viability of the RAN.

18. Let's face it, without the support of our political masters it does not matter what CN wants to do, it is not going to happen.