

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

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

SUBMISSION

Submission No: 94

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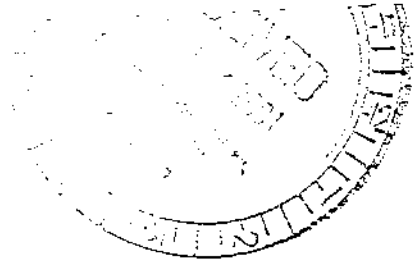
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The Secretariat
Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade Senate Committee
Inquiry into "Recruitment and Retention of ADF Personnel"
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Sir,

In this submission, I will be concentrating on reasons for poor retention in the ADF rather than recruiting issues. There are many and varied reasons why in a competitive labour market, recruiting quality personnel is a difficult and continuously arduous task. May I say, that almost universally, new members pre-enlistment expectations are not fully met. This occurs, not because the ADF falsely represents itself in its recruiting advertising, but rather because information available at the time (by some necessity) is incomplete and fails to paint an accurate picture of ADF life. Having said that, the majority of ADF personnel do have satisfying and rewarding careers but their continued retention is often cut short because personal needs and expectations eventually overcome the altruistic notions of service which the ADF seeks to inculcate.

My experience within the ADF was an officer career spanning 33 years of service in a wide variety of ADF appointments, several in sub-unit and unit command. I served in the field army, training environments and policy areas of the Department of Defence. My years of service in the ADF and a particular interest in personnel matters have allowed me to form a number of opinions as to why retention rates in the ADF are not as good as they may be. Of course, reasons for poor retention are as many as reasons for difficulties in recruiting. In this submission I want to concentrate on one particular area of concern as I am sure that the many other areas will receive adequate attention in other submissions. My submission applies to the Reserve forces as well as the full time components and as I will mention, some discriminatory practices particularly affect the Reserve forces. I would hope that the committee will take note of these comments at a time when Reserve recruiting and retention is at an all time low.

My issue of concern is the discrimination between married and single members within the ADF. Whilst in recent years there have been efforts to address these issues, progress has been extremely slow and there are still areas of academic discrimination. New recruits to the ADF have expectations that they will be treated fairly and equally. Many are dismayed and become disillusioned when they discover that discrimination is entrenched in certain areas such as housing, financial entitlements and travel. There is still, within the ADF, a belief at senior levels that single members have no special relationships, no requirements for housing other than a single room space and can be moved with virtually no notice. There is no recognition of the diversity of valid relationships which 'single' members (or 'Members Without Family' as the ADF euphemistically calls them) can have. Regrettably, these entrenched discriminatory views tend to be at the most senior levels where influences of organised religions tend to cloud free and intellectual thinking of many members who are in positions of influence. I would not wish the committee to think that I am against any religious or secular group, but my long experience indicates that these undercurrents are very strong in the ADF and negative in their impact.

I will illustrate with two examples:

Reunion Travel is an ADF entitlement provided to personnel on declared operations where, when practicable, married and recognised defacto members ('Members With Family') are entitled to travel back to visit their families after serving on operations for three months. This entitlement is not provided to single members or members whose relationships are not officially recognised. Thus we have the situation where one group of members is entitled to a substantial personal and financial benefit and another group is considered to have no need for this. This creates resentment amongst the non-entitled group as many of these members have just as much need for a break from operations and requirements to visit relatives, non-recognised partners etc. To further illustrate the issue, many Reservists are now deployed on operations. A single Reservist has no entitlement to Reunion Travel yet he has long term developed relationships and dependencies in his home location. To suggest that these relationships and dependencies do not exist is very demeaning to the member. Anecdotal evidence indicates that this has been a substantial issue on recent operations and has had a substantial effect on retention. The mindset of categorising members into these two convenient boxes is outdated, invalid and results in a far higher level of dissension than senior members will openly admit. The ADF should provide Reunion Travel entitlements to all members on operations regardless of marital status.

The second example relates to recognition of same-sex relationships. Whilst the ADF has broadened the definition of 'Members With Family' in recent years to include those in bona fide defacto relationships, it saw fit to specifically

exclude valid same-sex relationships. Thus again, the ADF is deliberately discriminating against a number of members and demeaning their relationships which are as equally valid to them as to any opposite-sex couple. I personally know of at least 10 members whose service was highly regarded and who could not accept any longer the entrenched ADF attitudes of non-recognition of their relationships. Because of the closeted nature of these relationships, they are more widespread within the ADF than most people care to admit. These people were a significant loss to the ADF and in most cases, have moved onto other professional areas where their whole lives were recognised as significant. Whilst the corporate attitude of the ADF has a bad track record in terms of 'homophobic' attitudes, I have found when discussing these issues with many and various individual members that they are at a loss to explain the hard-line attitude of those in power. The Defence Equity Organisation blames general government attitudes for failure to address this discrimination and indicates that Defence will not be a 'pacesetter' in this matter. The existence of same-sex relationships within the ADF are often denied to exist. Over the years, I have known of a number of very senior officers within the organisation who (understandably) chose to remain silent about their relationships rather than face the indignity of public opprobrium. There is no valid ADF reason for non-acceptance of same-sex relationships. There is no valid operational reason for non-acceptance of these relationships. Continuing denial of these relationships is contrary to United Nations human rights covenants which the government purports to support.

In these two examples, there is strong anecdotal evidence and factual written evidence from Defence Committees which I have sighted that indicates ADF concern of giving full and equitable entitlements to all members in terms of the monetary cost. Several initiatives to improve equality within the ADF have been deferred or shelved because potential increased budget expenditure. This, in my opinion is an appalling admission of the continuing discrimination within the ADF and does not take into consideration the substantially increased costs of replacing quality manpower who become disillusioned by the endemic discrimination.

Until the ADF removes discriminatory provisions as in the examples above, it will continue to suffer increasing retention problems as the community at large which the ADF purports to represent further diverges in opinions and attitudes.

Yours faithfully,