

Chapter 4

Administrative system

Redress of Grievance

4.1 In its first progress report the committee noted the concerted effort by Defence to expedite the redress of grievance (ROG) process and to remove the backlog of grievances. The committee commended Defence for its work to address failings in the ROG process. Defence has continued to reform this process.

4.2 During the committee's recent public hearing, the Acting Commonwealth Ombudsman informed the committee that based on the insights gained through investigative work there had been a marked reduction in the number of complaints received by the Ombudsman's office. She explained:

While the numbers are quite small, we are seeing fewer complaints relating to internal inquiries and investigations and fewer complaints relating to adverse administrative action, termination of service and the conduct of others. Our general assessment and sense of the progress of the implementation of these recommendations is that Defence has demonstrated an appropriate level of commitment to improving its military justice systems in the ways suggested through the recommendations from both reports.

It is also apparent, through our investigative work with Defence, through our interaction with staff from the Fairness and Resolution Branch and the Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force, that the department has entered into a spirit of change through action taken to this point. From the Ombudsman's perspective, this is evident in a greater degree of trust, more open dialogue and willingness to engage with our office on key issues. Our requests for, and Defence's willingness to agree to, suspension of executive action in discharge action is a good example in this regard. In summary, it is our general view that the military justice systems in place within Defence have improved.¹

4.3 The committee drew attention to a survey published in Defence's most recent annual report which showed that 39% agreed, 8% disagreed and 53% were uncertain whether the adverse administrative action process takes too long. This survey was conducted in 2005.

4.4 According to the Acting Commonwealth Ombudsman, these statistics did not reflect findings of the Ombudsman's Office over the last 12 months which showed a decrease in complaints overall and delay not being a particular cause of complaint.²

1 *Committee Hansard*, 26 February 2007, p. 2.

2 *Committee Hansard*, 26 February 2007, p. 4.

Committee view

4.5 The committee endorses the approach taken by Defence in publishing the results of the Defence Attitude Survey in the department's Annual Report. It provides the type of information that allows parliamentary committees to carry out their monitoring function. The committee would be interested in the results of the next Defence Attitude Survey to establish whether they align with the observations of the Acting Commonwealth Ombudsman.

4.6 In the meantime, the committee welcomes the preliminary indications that the ROG process is much improved.