



## **Royal Commission Update - Sydney Day 17 - 8 March 2022**

### **RSL References**

Positive:

NA

Negative:

NA

### **General Summary**

- Lived experience of sexual assault in the Navy
- Expert witness testimony on military suicide and military sexual violence
- Discussed Navy cultural change process
- Discussed Navy approach to suicide and sexual violence

### **10.00 - Ms Danielle Wilson - Lived Experience - Navy**

- Joined at 18 - Cook - HMAS Cerberus
- During a fire drill, was sexually assaulted - reported this and was dismissed - didn't know the perpetrator as it was smoky - felt she couldn't trust anyone, including superiors - didn't feel she could take the matter further, didn't know her options - didn't tell anyone because she was proud of joining the Navy
- 1987 - Superior Officer during drill - threatened to make her 'lose her sex life forever' in front of other recruits - addressed as WRAN - targeted at women - humiliating and scary - difficult to talk to family
- 1988 - HMAS Penguin - Physically assaulted in galley by seamen who 'didn't like women in the Navy' - 19 years old
- 1988 - denied sick leave - hidden in a room all day - had bruised kidneys - threatened with being charged
- Constant humiliation and sexual comments
- Didn't have friends or anyone she could trust - isolated and alone - separated from family - 'nobody cared or listened'
- Reported this abuse - nothing was done - told to 'suck it up' - unaware of external supports

- Couldn't quit because of 6-year service, so got pregnant instead
- Left and became depressed, anxious, panic attacks, suicidal ideation - wanted to erase all trace of being in the Navy - not comfortable alone in public - impacted career
- Joined NSWPF - was again sexually assaulted - bystander officer reported the incident - perpetrator was fired - better, more supportive process
- Ombudsman investigation into Navy complaints - vindicated - restorative process commenced through the Navy - good process - received Navy apology 30 years later
- Women treated atrociously in the Navy - need better education and reporting

### **11.30 - Expert Witness - Professor Megan McKenzie - Military Suicide and Military Sexual Violence Expert**

#### Military Suicide

- Data and definitions of suicide are important - data is difficult to compare across jurisdictions - process of declaring a death a military suicide is difficult
- Need to collect comparable and usable data to understand scope of the problem
- Data gaps for ADF - suicide for females, consistency in definitions - data is difficult to attain for the ADF
- Little evidence deployment or exposure to combat contributes to suicide
- *Risk factors* include: PTSD, involuntary stress, sexual assault, alcohol abuse, mental illness, lower ranks, victimisation, access to lethal means
- *Protective factors* include: spirituality and religion, social support, meaning in life and resilience

#### Military sexual violence

- Unwanted sexual activity by members against other members
- Need for a change of terminology - sexual misconduct makes it difficult to understand problem and make comparisons - sexual misconduct is not relevant in legal terms - focused on the institution, not the victim
- Military sexual violence is rising in the ADF - estimated underreporting of 80% - reasons include being labelled a whistle blower, act was committed by a superior, won't be believed, hurts career prospects, sexualised behaviour has been normalised
- Male sexual assault - often characterised as hazing behaviour
- Those who experience sexual violence are more at risk of suicidality - more than double as likely as other vets
- ADF data on sexual violence is collected in inconsistent and baffling manner - not publicly available, confusing reporting, changes in survey types - make collecting adequate data difficult
- Can't solve this problem if you don't know its nature
- Hard to understand why the ADF hasn't acted on collecting this data
- Cultural change is important in addressing military sexual violence:
  - Changed idea of the good soldier - remove hypermasculinity
  - Leadership and accountability frameworks - should consider external investigation process
  - Steps for achieving cultural change include clarity around accountability, external oversight of cultural change
- No evidence having women in combat roles reduces military sexual violence
- Opportunity for victims to come forward is safe, anonymised way is important

## Other

- Families - hypermasculinity is among issues of help-seeking - places pressure on female spouses to provide support
- Dysfunction is baked into military culture

## **2.00 - ADF - Ms Justine Greig (Deputy Secretary Defence People) - Vice Admiral Michael Noonan AO RAN (Chief of Navy) - Warrant Officer Deb Butterworth OAM CSM and Bar**

### Significant identified cultural issues

- Hazing and bastardisation
- Strong teams/tribalism/othing
- Hypermasculinity
- Silence - no jacking
- Mistreatment
- Career limiting following help-seeking
- Sexual assault and misconduct
- Psychological harm from administration processes

### Navy change programs

- Began in 2009 with New Generation Navy program, which continued in 2018 with Next Generation Navy Program - aspire to perfect culture
- Addressed through surveys, external support and Defence People Group to address cultural change
- Human Synergistics introduced Organisational Cultural Index (OCI) and Organisation Effectiveness Index (OEI) - has seen 85% increase in respect of members
- These programs aligned with wider ADF Pathways to Change since 2012
- Combating negative culture through restorative engagement available to personnel, avenues to make sure it doesn't get that far
- Incidents of poor performance leads to action - targeted training, monitoring, admin process - possible removal
- Leaders who fail to take action in response to reported abuse face action - leaders subject to personal OCI assessments upon advancement
- Established accountability framework for leaders in the Navy, with some KPIs around accountability
- Surveys are about understanding problems and addressing them, not punishment
- 'Culture of silence' not prevalent on ships

### Sexual misconduct

- Highest prevalence in Navy and particularly on ships - Navy believes this is due to more open reporting culture in Navy
- Worked with Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) to reduce discrimination in Navy since 2014, including inclusivity programs delivered in training to both soldiers and officers
- Female participation at 23% of workforce and trending up - trending up in NCOs, but underrepresented there

- Sexual misconduct reporting numbers more to do with openness, although of course needs to be addressed
- Have seen improvements in degree of reporting, action and swiftness of action, support provided
- Acknowledges there will be underreporting
- Need victim-centric approach, but also accountability for perpetrators

### Suicide

- Female ex-serving veterans high rates of suicide - hard to draw conclusions from the AIHW data - 23 women died of suicide since AIHW reporting began, 5 in service
- Difficult to know what happens post-service
- Directorate of Navy Post Incident - to understand what might have happened and how to prevent it in future
- Young ex-serving males high rates - again, difficult to determine causal factors from data
- Peer support in place to encourage help-seeking in the Navy - Navy Divisional system
- Ongoing need to normalise talking about mental health and help-seeking

### Other

- DV managed in Navy through working with civil police - mandatory reporting of AVOs by perpetrator - work also with DFSO - suggestion this is insufficient
- Significant spike in DV in 2020/21
- Return of Service Obligation is no longer applied universally, but determined on a case-by-case basis