

INDIVIDUAL SUBMISSION TO SENATE COMMITTEE
QUALITY ASSURANCE TECHNICAL SKILLS DIMINISHING IN DEFENCE

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INTRODUCTION

I am a Technical Officer Level 4 in the Land Engineering Agency and will outline the changes I've seen during my career working in Supplier Quality Assurance and give evidence of the consequences from those changes. I speak from having been employed as one of many Trainee Technical Officers (TTOs) recruited by the Army Quality Assurance Service more than 35 years ago after age profiling showed they needed to implement succession planning before losing corporate knowledge.

PAST STATUS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) TECHNICAL OFFICERS'

During 1979 and early 80's TTOs were recruited for our technical qualifications and industry experience with quality auditing skills being provided via in-house training and through working with experienced QA technical officers. This was at a time when a long history of each of the Services inspecting military supplies was changing to quality auditing, the difficulty of which can be gauged by the fact that it wasn't until the mid 80's that auditing actually began to occur. Throughout these organisations there was a strong complement of appropriately skilled QA technical officers to audit all Defence materiel. In 1989 the Service Quality Assurance Organisations were amalgamated to form the Defence Quality Assurance Organisation (DQAO) of approximately 1000 staff around Australia.

My technical skills are in clothing manufacture and I worked in the Clothing Textile and Footwear (CTF) sections within the 3rd Army Quality Assurance Unit followed by the DQAO. We had QA technical officers with skills to cover all clothing and equipment for the ADF. There were QA technical officers with skills in clothing, textiles, knitwear, headwear, footwear and heavy textiles. QA technical officers were stationed at the Australian Government Clothing Factory with support from other itinerant QA technical officers who also audited at other ADF CTF manufacturers. These staff had a good understanding of the production of the items they were auditing and were responsible for Acceptance of Supplies on behalf of Defence giving confidence in the Supplies being delivered. Ten years pass and another review in 1999 saw the DQAO disbanded with higher level staff packaged out and QA technical officers dispersed into Support Command Australia (SC(A)) and Joint Materiel Agency (JMA)

CURRENT STATUS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE TECHNICAL OFFICERS'

The origin of the decline in QA technical officers can be traced back to the devolvement of technical officer's into SC(A) and JMA. Technical officer's were quickly moved from quality auditing to specification writing due to their understanding and experience of the Supplies. QA staff in major projects found they had to find themselves a new position when their projects closed and many moved into other areas as projects were not prioritising pre-contract and in-contract QA support.

On disbandment of the DQAO I moved into pre-contract support in the Directorate of Procurement - Army (DProc-A) as well as providing in-contract support for new clothing items such as the Nuclear Chemical Biological protection suits and introduction of curved ballistic body armour carriage systems. DProc-A management was one of the few areas that really understood they were no longer going to have an

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office full of skilled QA staff who could be identified in their contracts, sent a copy of the contract and were competent to implement appropriate quality audits to ensure Supplies met contract requirements. Through several name changes and organisational moves I continued to provide pre-contract and in-contract support in contracting agencies or a dedicated QA section with Additional Responsibility Payments on numerous occasions within and outside the QA area.

The current figures for QA staff in positions with Defence is:

Canberra Supplier Quality Assurance	6 (EL2-APS4)
Navy Supplier Quality Assurance	15 (EL2-APS5)
Land Systems Division	5 (EL1- APS6)*
RAAF	0**

*Reduced due to recruitment constraints not allowing advertising to fill 3 recent retirements..

**RAAF has moved all remaining QA staff into the Directorate General Technical Airworthiness – ADF and none are identified as QA staff.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE DIMINISHING QA TECHNICAL SKILLS IN DEFENCE

Defence is in a worse state than when I was recruited as a TTO more than 35 years ago with many QA staff eligible to retire and recruitment constraints preventing filling of vacant positions.

QA no longer offers career paths to attract skilled staff and with less in-contract quality audits being undertaken it limits opportunities to bid for TTOs when pre-contract QA support work is more desk based.

We can see Navy maintains the most robust numbers and this can be directly linked to the Westralia incident during 1998 that identified trialling of flexible fuel hoses without appropriate technical approvals brought about such tragic results. They have also focused on WHS assurance.

The First Principles Review has recommended the contracting out of more work. It is essential that QA staff who ensure Defence materiel is delivered in compliance with our contracts be excluded from the effects of this recommendation. Defence cannot delegate its responsibility to ensure the safety of our ADF men and women at a time of increasing international involvement where the rules of engagement are not practised by our enemies.

HOW TO TURNAROUND THE DECLINE IN QA TECHNICAL SKILLS

Defence needs to reinvigorate an appropriate complement of QA technical skills across the range of Defence materiel; create a career path into and out of QA practitioner roles; and ensure QA audits have a strong focus on Defence contractors management of what is an ever increasing use of overseas suppliers.