

Inquiry: The Defence Amendment (Sexual Assault Prevention, Intervention and Response Commission) Bill 2025.

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Privacy: Public

The issue of sexual assault in the Australian Defence Force rightly attracts scrutiny and public debate. However, the significant and ongoing harm experienced by victim-survivors and those supporting them is rarely given the focus needed.

Sexual violence has no place in our world and should never be an accepted norm in the ADF workplace. Sadly, during my career and more pronounced during my time as Head of the ADF Sexual Misconduct Office, I bore witness to too many instances of the belief that power, privilege and control inherently authorises the commission of sexual violence against workplace colleagues.

It can never be accepted that women should 'expect' sexual violence as part of their service of their nation. This is a gendered issue effecting women more than men. Failing to deal with 'low levels' of harmful sexualised behaviour in effect gives tacit approval to the escalation up to and including sexual assault. This is not speculation. Normalisation of deviance is observable through the examination of sexual assault cases in the ADF frequently pointing to lesser harmful behaviours being ignored prior to the commission of the sexual assault crime.

Victim-survivors have consistently remarked to those supporting them that the management of their complaint of sexual assault was as traumatic as the sexual assault itself if not worse. This needs to change!

The Defence Amendment (Sexual Assault Prevention, Intervention and Response Commission) Bill 2025 is an opportunity to finally address the complex issues of preventing and eliminating sexual violence in the Australian Defence Force and provide the required support to victim-survivors.

The Committee's work to find lasting and effective solutions to aid prevention and response to sexual violence in the ADF is critical to the safety and wellbeing of all who serve. I am willing to work with the Committee to find solutions.