

## QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

### BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING : 26 May 2015

#### IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

#### **(BE15/078) - Staffing - Post Traumatic Stress - Internal Product (DIBP)**

Senator Reynolds asked:

1. Senator REYNOLDS: I would also like to attach my similar sentiments to Senator O'Sullivan's. Just on the issue of demonising your departmental staff and other border protection agency staff, have you got any figures on the number of staff who suffer post-traumatic stress or any other sort of related mental illnesses? You have people who have served on your vessels and have literally had to fish bodies out of the water, people who deal with highly traumatised people and people who often have been assaulted themselves at some of these facilities. Have you got any indication of how your staff have been faring through all of this?

Mr Pezzullo: I will ask the Chief Operating Officer and her staff to attend the table. The department and service have employee support and that includes psychological support services. We are in the process of amalgamating those activities so I am not sure that we have aggregated data. Mrs Grant, Ms Goodwin or others can respond as best they can, otherwise we will take it on notice.

Mrs Grant: I am sorry, Senator. We will need to take it on notice to provide you the precise numbers. I can say, though, that across the department there is really no variation in the sorts of claims we are seeing for compensation for psychological injury from any one particular work area over another. We can certainly extract for you the details that we have.

2. Senator REYNOLDS: That would be good. Also could you take on notice, since 2007, how many incidents of assault you have had against your staff or those working under contract in management of the detention centres, physical assault but any other cases of post-traumatic stress. Also, taking what Mr Quaedvlieg just said—I guess this is for both of you—how you monitor it, particularly for those who have been in very high stress circumstances and what programs you have to make sure that people can self-report or you have another way of monitoring. Obviously, I have referred you to Defence. They have had a long journey with this and things do come up many years afterwards sometimes.

Mrs Grant: We can certainly answer on behalf of the portfolios, both the immigration side and Customs and Border Protection. We can probably provide you with some details about our employee assistance scheme and our mental health strategy, that sort of detail.

*Answer:*

1. The Portfolio ensures that all staff are made aware of the importance of reporting or disclosing workplace incidents, including those related to trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder.

For the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 for the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service (ACBPS), there were 14 compensation claims for mental illness of various types and of these, liability was accepted by Comcare in 8 cases. For Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP), for the same period, there

were 41 compensation claims for mental illness of various types and of these, liability was accepted by Comcare in 13 cases.

The Portfolio has mechanisms in place to protect the mental health of its employees and to ensure that the due diligence obligations under the Work Health and Safety Act (2011) are met. These mechanisms include post incident debriefs by professional counsellors when necessary; post incident reviews to identify and address possible gaps/risks; an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that provides free and confidential support and advice to employees; incident reporting procedures and enhanced health and safety support through a Professional Support Framework, which includes on-site counselling support as a risk management initiative. Staff who have compensable mental health claims are allocated a case manager for ongoing support.

Staff can access EAP services and/or seek the advice of an injury prevention officer at any time.

The Maritime WHS team discusses psychological injury in training sessions and encourages officers to come forward if they experience difficulties. ACPBS has two staff counsellors available to all staff. The ACPBS EAP provider is also available for individual officers to seek assistance, ensure counsellors are available when a vessel docks following an incident at sea and provide follow up counseling as needed.

Maritime supervisors are trained to monitor for stress in their crew. Debriefs are mandatory after any incident aboard the vessel and crew provide peer support amongst themselves.

2. Number of assault related incidents from 2007/08 to date, for DIBP staff working in Detention Network and Customs staff working in the Maritime/Airports units.

<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>DIBP – Detention Network</b>	<b>Customs –Maritime/Airports</b>
2007/08	4	8
2008/09	5	8
2009/10	3	18
2010/11	8	7
2011/12	16	4
2012/13	2	9
2013/14	23	2
2014 to date	8	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>57*</b>

The Portfolio has incident reporting systems in place to record all non-notifiable and notifiable incidents that occur in the workplace. The mechanism monitors the number of incidents and assists to identify risk trends for the Portfolio to address. Staff can self-report as required on this system or they can report/disclose to their supervisors, Health Safety Representatives, First Aid Officers, Harassment Contact Officers, Human Resources or WHS sections who will then report the matter and ensure appropriate follow-up action occurs.