

**SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE
REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO RECRUITMENT & RETENTION
OF DEFENCE PERSONNEL**

SUBMISSION

Submission No: 113

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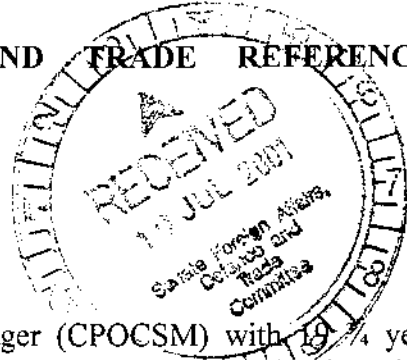


ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY
HMAS WATSON
WATSONS BAY, SYDNEY 2030

SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Attention: Mr Paul Barsdell

Dear Sir



DEFENCE RETENTION ISSUES SUBMISSION

1. I am a Chief Petty Officer Combat System Manager (CPOCSM) with 14 years service to the nation which includes 11 years of sea service. I am currently serving in a shore posting in HMAS WATSON Watsons Bay Sydney.
2. Is there a retention problem in the NAVY? Apart from the fact that a Senate Committee is cruising the country looking for opinions on this matter, and despite efforts from Canberra to look through rose coloured glasses my own observations tell me we definitely have a problem. The issue of retention, let alone recruitment is such a wide and diverse subject I find it difficult to put my finger on a single issue and what I perceive as a problem may be viewed differently by others.
3. On my base we have no Executive Officer (2nd in command), a reservist senior non-commissioned officer currently fills the 1st lieutenant position (senior lieutenant of the base). In an area responsible for what we call Command Team Training (ships warfare teams are trained and assessed in the simulator for 2 weeks), and Surface Warfare integrated Procedural Exercises (Principal Warfare Officer simulator training and assessment- 9 weeks per course). Has no Australian Principal Warfare Officer posted to the position. There are not enough staff to man this simulator, even with external assistance there is still a shortfall in manning. Vacant Chief Petty Officer and Petty officers position with in the Combat System Faculty, which is on the brink of impacting on face to face training of new entry Combat System Operators. This is by no means a finite list of problems at this base.
4. At sea we have operational warships deploying with less than the full complement of Principal Warfare Officers. Able Seaman filling the positions of Leading Seaman. Less than the full complement of qualified Officer of the Watch's (ship drivers). Officer positions being offered to Warrant Officers on landing craft, because there are no officers to fill these positions. Officer positions being offered to Chief Petty Officers on Patrol Boats, because there are no officers to fill these positions. This also is by no means a finite list of problems at sea.
5. People are leaving because they are frustrated, disillusioned and especially after trying to hold this organisation together with limited numbers are burnt out and tired. We can recruit as many people as we like and have a high turn over at the initial entry level which what the government appears to want. If you don't retain your experienced people, there will be no one left to train the new entries and the organisation will implode.

6. The first area that has impacted on the disillusionment is to do with firstly capital asset purchases and upgrades. Along time ago we removed the Navy's ability to give 24hr a day 7 days a week air cover for any task group at sea. We now have to rely upon the Air Force to give this cover. Which I believe is unachievable out side of 200 miles of the coast or with in hostile territory. We have allowed our tier one surface combatants to retire with no replacement, leaving the job to our ageing Guided Missile Frigates utilising area defence weapons that are no longer in normal production. With an upgrade to these ships slowly disintegrating and the improvements to the Anzacs being all but cancelled has left us with the most well informed target in the world. The Collins class project needs no further comment except they are widely known as the "Citrus Class". The waste of public money to bring Kanimbla and Manoora to a seaworthy state, the project should have been culled immediately. This has left us with inferior ships with inferior weapons, which we struggle to man and fuel to go to sea and try our absolute best to win the battle (we hope).

7. The second area is the systematic dismantling of a professional force. In the early 90's we embarked on a series on amalgamations of different branches (jobs) and restructuring. Although this occurred across the entire non-executive area of the navy I can only speak on the changes that happened to me. My job prior to amalgamation was as a Radar Plotter, which incorporated detection and tracking of all surface and air contacts utilising radar. Gather information from other agencies and ships to analyse and identify these contacts and share this information internally and externally via radio and data networks. The jobs of Radar Plotter, Underwater Controller (Sonar) and Electronic Warfare were then amalgamated. Each area was then required to learn via cross training or on the job, each other's jobs. This has resulted in superb sailors trying to spread their skills across a broad area, who struggle to cope with this unrealistic expectation. This dismantling has lead to many people leaving in large numbers.

8. Those who have remained are now using inferior equipment, applying their skills across a broad unrealistic area of expertise. On top of this they are also doing their best to cover the gaps left by the people who have already discharged from the Navy. This has lead to the current stock of experienced people, who have remained and are unrewarded are reaching burn out.

9. The solutions to many of these problems will take a long time to achieve and will be very expensive. In the short term all of these loyal people who have stuck by the Defence Force must be compensated by financial and non-financial means.

Yours faithfully

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