

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

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

SUBMISSION

Submission No: 133

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Issues to be addressed.

1. Whether the current recruitment system is meeting, and will continue to meet, the needs of the ADF.
2. The impact of the Defence Reform Program on retention levels and recruiting.
3. The impact of changes to ADF conditions of service, pay and allowances on retention and recruitment of personnel.
4. Current levels and categories of specialist personnel in the ADF compared to the organisations requirements.
5. The impact of current career management practices on retention of personnel.
6. Any other issues, reasonably relevant to the terms of reference but not referred to above, which arise in the course of the inquiry.

Statements addressing the issues.

1. I believe the recruiting system, as it is, is adequate. What is needed to increase the quality and numbers of recruits, is enough of an enticement to get people in. What that enticement should be is open to much interpretation. The offer of a salary to at least match the civilian equivalent (see point 3.), the re-introduction of a DFRDB type scheme (a politician only has to serve 2 terms in government to qualify for their pension – I think), or the provision of FREE (not subsidised or R&Q) housing for defence personnel. These issues would not only improve recruiting, they would also have a dramatic impact on retention. I realise these, and everything else I am proposing, will cost money. But do you want the truth and some answers, or do you want to be told what you want to hear?
2. The impact of the Defence Reform Program on retention levels and recruiting is negative. I have not spoken to anyone in the Submarine Squadron who has changed their mind about the future of their career due to these changes. To a great extent the changes have been invisible or non-existent in the real world.
3. The current conditions of service, pay and allowances within the RAN are far below the standards achieved in civilian and commercial enterprises. In a recent telephone conversation with the MUA, I enquired as to the conditions, pay and allowances given to a civilian bluewater seafarer. The information provided to me was shocking to say the least. A non-technical deck hand will receive a base salary of \$68 975.00 pa (as of 01 Oct 01), an extra allowance of \$45.00 per day when expected to share a cabin of 4 persons, and they have a Leave Factor of 1.153 (every 1 day at sea = 1.153 days leave), and they usually work a roster of at least equivalent time off to time spent at sea (2 weeks on – 2 weeks off). The base salary amount increases significantly with recognised qualifications and experience. These people are not required to spend days/weeks onboard a submarine, they have contact with their families via e-mail, they have recreational facilities, and they are not required to work a 2 watch system, their off watch time is their own, and they are not required to go to war if necessary. Talking to them, they all think we are crazy to do what we do at all and even more so for the pittance paid.

Taking these factors into account, why should I – a qualified electronics technician submariner with 8+ years of service – expect or accept lesser treatment? Contractors working with the Submarine Squadron (ASC, Raytheon, Boeing, TMS, BAE) all offer employment packages equivalent to or superior to the RAN as a starting rate. They have the added bonus of very little - if any - sea time, and when required to go to sea they are paid up to \$200 per day in allowances, and receive 2 days extra leave for every day at sea. These contractors actively try to recruit people they consider competent. Why should I or anyone else approached, stay in the RAN?

I am a submariner because I chose to serve my country in a manner that I would also benefit. But in the current situation I am being forced too seriously to consider my other options.

4. Current levels of specialist personnel in the ADF especially the Submarine Squadron are lower than is required for the operation of the Submarine Squadron as a whole. Although I have been unable to find exact figures, the numbers I have heard talked about is we are at about 60% strength. The major shortfalls are in technical branches, and of experienced personnel. These figures, I believe, include all currently qualified submariners navy wide. It does not take into account those persons in non-productive or non-SMFEG billets. This problem will only be exacerbated in Jan 2002 when the completion bonus is paid and a lot of people are leaving. The completion bonus was probably a mistake, as it didn't keep anyone who wanted to go anyway. Anyone, who did choose to stay for the extra 2 years, is leaving in Jan 2002. The money would have been better spent on improving standards, wages, etc.

This issue also has an impact on the quality of personnel in the Squadron. The experience gap is huge, with many persons in this category being enticed by contractors due to their experience. The number of people being pushed through the system and getting qualified, when they shouldn't be there in the first place or are still not capable of performing the job effectively (or safely), just to build up numbers, or in the case of some of the females, just because it is politically correct.

I believe that with the current lack of experience in the Squadron, it is only a matter of time before we have an incident like Westralia – or Kursk.

5. The impact of current career management practices on retention of personnel is probably a significant reason for the retention problem. Career Management in the Navy is a joke. People are constantly misled, promised things that are not delivered, and blatantly lied too. It is unacceptable to have your career constantly pushed around. It may not be seen as important in the large-scale view of things by the Navy, but its important to the individual. When the Navy finally starts practising what they preach in terms of “our people being our most important resource”, and treating people like human beings instead of billet numbers or “just a junior sailor”, then retention will increase significantly.

People also need to be placed in positions where they are performing a useful purpose. They need to feel at least some degree of job satisfaction. An ET or MT doing a Writers job, a CSO being a transport driver, DSS/DSO duties – answering a telephone at 0200. These are hardly the things we joined the Navy for, or a good use of resources by the Navy. If there is no enjoyment in your job, you will not stay there. I accept that all employment has a down side and unsavoury tasks, but when most if not all of it is a down side!

6. All the above issues need to be addressed in a manner that will produce a win-win situation. I realise that there is not a bottomless bucket of money, but if people are not paid what they are worth – they leave.

- The Navy, as a whole, needs to be run less like a corporation or another government department, and more like a defence force should be. The contracting out of virtually everything is causing a significant loss of skills, and a great deal of dissatisfaction. It may look good on the short-term budget, but it does not produce a capable fighting force. You can't send TENIX or RAYTHEON to East Timor.
- If cost cutting needs to be achieved, get rid of some of the dead wood. The people inboard who have never been to sea, the bureaucratic and paperwork nightmares that exist, the useless branches – Stewards especially (I'm reasonably sure that an Officer is just as capable of making their own coffee, cleaning their own toilet, and washing their own plate – although some may need extra training).

Change the left over social attitudes from the 17th century as they cause a great deal of resentment. The perceived class structure is just a hangover from the Royal Navy 200 years ago. An officer is no more or no less important to the effective operation of a team than is Seaman CSO Bloggs. Why is a CMDR deserved of better accommodation than an AB. They are both human beings with a wife and children. Is the CMDR's wife a better person and therefore deserves to have a better house. Have the AB's children done something wrong in their lives that they should live in a lesser environment than the CMDR's children whom they go to school with. Although I recognise the need for a command structure in the military, as opposed to just management, it doesn't change the basic worth of the individual.

The separate messing and even toilet facilities, in shore establishments and onboard ships and submarines causes a huge amount of cost overheads. What more useful purpose could this space be put to? How much money would have been saved by not building them in the first place?

- The lack of identity and individualism within the Squadron is also an issue with a large number of people. Since the closure of HMAS Platypus, the Submarine Squadron has essentially been integrated into the Fleet. This has produced some benefits, but has also produced some serious drawbacks. There has been, throughout the history of submarines, a deliberately cultivated air of elite-ism for those that serve on submarines. This was to cater for the difficulties and hardships associated with life onboard a submarine, and the extra levels of knowledge and skills required. Although there is no basis in reality for this, the feeling of being elite, special, and different, fostered a camaraderie within the Squadron that has all but disappeared. This culture is stifled at HMAS Stirling, with little chance of it ever being resurrected. I have no answer to this issue, as it is obviously a policy that is enforced from above. I do agree with the integration of the Squadron with the Fleet on logistic and cost grounds, however I feel that a valuable tool for the retention and job satisfaction of submariners has been lost.

- The military has been taking away all of the benefits that used to be in place and has not compensated for them in any other way. The manning issues will never be addressed until the Navy is seen as an attractive, lucrative and long term career again. Major changes need to be implemented for this to happen. We are otherwise headed toward the position New Zealand finds itself in. No money for defence, no public or political support for defence and no people interested in a career in defence. Will our Submarine Squadron be the first branch of the military disbanded in 20 yrs when Collins Class is not replaced due to lack of interest?

I realise that some of the above statements may be seen as sour grapes, or just having a whinge, however this is not my intention. I have spoken to a great many people in the Squadron, and those already discharged to come to these conclusions.

*I am happy to have any part or all of my submission made public.
I DO-NOT wish my name and address to be published, as I believe that there may be repercussions to some ideas, that may be detrimental to my career.*

Thankyou for your time in considering my statements.