

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

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

**SUBMISSION**

**Submission No:** 31

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**No. of Pages:** 4

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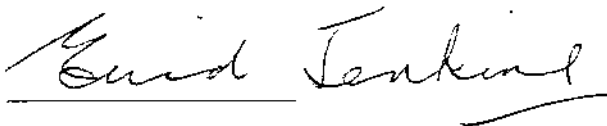
The Secretary  
Senate & Foreign Affairs  
Defence & Trade Reference Committee  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir or Madam,

I enclose my submission to the Inquiry into Recruitment and Retention of Defence Personnel.

I trust that the points I have made will be helpful to your committee members in their deliberations.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Enid Jenkins". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

**ENID JENKINS**

## SUBMISSION:

### INQUIRY INTO RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF DEFENCE PERSONNEL

At a time when the impressive performance of Australian troops in East Timor has masked a number of political and strategic maladroitness, imprudent and populist decisions effecting Australia's engagements in the region, recruitment and retention of Australian Defence personnel has never been in a more parlous state. Separation rates are extremely high both for officers and enlisted personnel. The response of the Defence Department has been a number of inquiries, ensuring, according to some, that any response will be slow. Yet, it can be argued that recruitment and retention of adequate personnel is at least as important and probably more urgent than the purchase of new defence equipment.

In my view, the Defence Reform Program does not sufficiently stress the importance of competent coordinated and creative management of personnel in the ADF, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Defence necessary for maintaining a defence force prepared for the roles and responsibilities required of it now and in the future. The Defence Capability Plan is long and rhetoric, but disconcertingly short on substance. There are generalizations which must be challenged.

According to the Defence White Paper, Australia's healthy economy presents challenges for ADF recruitment. It is alleged that the labour market is competitive and that this increases the difficulty in recruiting. Yet, unemployment in Australia has been high for more than a decade. Failure to recruit required numbers of personnel gives lie to the assertion by Defence Recruiting officers that "it is easy for people to go to the defence force when times are tough, because when times are tough we always have jobs".

Figures show a 20% shortfall of recruits required in 1998 - 99, and a failure of the Australian Defence Force Academy, ranging from 14% for the Army to 40% for the Navy, to meet targets to attract the next generation of officers. Applications to join the ADF are said to have more than halved in the past 10 years. What then is the real reason that the ADF cannot attract Australia's young people?

There has been a number of disastrous incidents and accidents such as the horrific events at Holsworthy, the brutalisation of junior officers by officers of 3RAR Regiment, the alleged mistreatment of prisoners in East Timor by members of the SAS, the Black Hawk and Westralia disasters and unknown numbers of less serious, but never-the-less degrading incidents amounting to harassment. These incidents are indicative of a culture of violence with the defence community, and of serious management shortcomings and inadequacy.

Often the Australian public is given explanations of these events that are barely credible. The information is often delayed and usually incomplete. Frequently, the Australian public first becomes aware of such incidents when details are "leaked" to the media. Thus, the public's perception is of secrecy, lack of accountability, even complexity and cover up.

The extremely high attrition rate for female service women strengthens and confirms the perception of a culture of violence, intimidation and maltreatment that is apparently condoned by the leaders, managers and the ministers charged with responsibility for matters effecting the ADF. Mistakes are hidden.

Young people of intelligence and integrity, and their parents, do not have confidence in the ADF as an acceptable employer. Nor do they consider a career in the ADF a desirable option. The inadequate management of negative incidents, no doubt contributes to their views and to the very high separation of expensively trained young officers, discontent among enlisted personnel and failure to attract young people to the ADF.

Claims that there is a mass of lucrative public sector jobs offering favourable pay and conditions resulting in a drain of defence personnel to private enterprise sounds plausible. But, these claims ignore the effect of lack of job satisfaction and a culture of promotion and advancement based on patronage rather than on performance.

From early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there has been a focus on the factors causing dissatisfaction and research eliciting factors increasing job satisfaction. Prominent among factors shown to decrease satisfaction with the job are a top heavy hierarchical structure and a lack of opportunity to have input into the way the work is carried out. That is, when procedures are determined at a high level but carried out by personnel at the lower levels, without including the people who do the work in formulating the procedures, a great deal of resentment is generated and the workers will usually find ways to do the job their way. Thus, the opportunity for conflict between ranks is increased and the considerable expertise and know how among those who do the job is lost.

It is my understanding that the Executive Director of the Australian Defence Force Association has called for an overhaul of the structure claiming that many of the problems causing discontent would be resolved if the structure was overhauled to eliminate waste and duplication and to eradicate competition and conflict between the ADF and the public service. Such conflict has often been apparent but appears to have reached a new level as events in the lead up to the crisis in East Timor unfolded. Statements attributed to the Minister for Defence announcing that he would be responsible for all public statements relating to defence matters do not auger well for efforts to change or improve the structure of the military arm of the Defence Department. Other factors decrease job satisfaction. A frequently voiced complaint concerns the expectation at enlistment that the recruit will receive certain training. For example, a recruit may be led to believe that he/she will be trained as a helicopter mechanic. But following the initial training course the recruit is told that this category of work is not required and some other course must be taken. There is disappointment and resentment, factors unlikely to contribute to satisfaction or to foster high morale.

A perennial source of dissatisfaction appears to be the system, or lack of it, by which postings are determined. I have been told that the system defies logic and should a preference for a posting in Queensland be indicated, a posting to Western Australia is most likely. Attention to service personnel's preferences should be possible at least some of the time.

Employees need to feel valued and that their efforts are appreciated. This does not seem to be an attitude displayed by many officers towards their juniors. I note that the Defence White Paper makes some general statements about leadership. Unless the values embodied in the concept of leadership are insisted on by senior officers and supervised at all levels little will change. Further, young officers taught "leadership" in the Academy will undoubtedly experience resistance in the workplace and soon become "socialized" to the values and methods of their more experienced and superior officers.

Recent events reveal entrenched problems between Defence and the Department of Foreign Affairs. Cooperative relationships between these departments are absolutely essential for the efficient and effective function of each. Competition between the intelligence organizations also appears entrenched. While perhaps not directly concerned with loss of ADF personnel from the service such public displays of lack of coordination, overall direction and control, coupled with unclear or uncaring attitudes to managerial responsibility, accountability and the duty of care owed to personnel increase doubts about the suitability of the ADF as an employer.

The health and safety of ADF personnel is of major concern. The fact that compensation costs have "more than doubled over the last five years" indicates serious safety issues. Given that compensation for injury sustained while employed in the ADF is extremely low and totally disproportionate to the risks personnel face, it is time for a major overhaul of this aspect of the conditions of employment in the ADF. The inadequate compensation arrangements were exposed at the time of the Black Hawk disaster by the difficulties experienced by the young serviceman rendered paraplegic in the accident in having his house modified to suit his wheelchair. Failure to provide adequate compensation severely damages the reputation of the ADF as an accountable employer. It also disgusts the Australian public.

The reluctance of the Government to acknowledge the health effects of service particularly in Vietnam and the Gulf highlights an unwillingness to accept accountability and acknowledge the hazards to which young Australians have been exposed.

The Australian public regards the service of young men and women in the ADF as the highest contribution to the national interest. They expect that this contribution will be acknowledged in the conditions of service. They do not expect cheeseparing.

It is of considerable concern that discussion of remuneration indicates that changes to the present system are to be made "within the overall Defence budget constraints". The final paragraph of the Executive Summary in the Defence White Paper indicates, inter alia, that the Government is committed to "pursuing substantial efficiency savings in reduced personnel overheads".

"Efficiency savings" is no doubt a synonym for "productivity increases", a euphemism for "cost cutting". It is difficult to accept that "efficiency savings" can be achieved without constraints on pay and conditions, cutting maintenance of quarters and plant, or providing poor quality gear etc. Such measures will further erode personnel satisfaction and be unacceptable to the Australian public.

Since the major personnel problem for the ADF is recruitment, and immediate focus must be the present recruitment practices. Excuses that "the problems are the same in other countries that have abandoned conscription" are not relevant in the so called "clever country". The admission by the former Defence Minister in December 2000 that the recent recruitment drive costing some 35 million dollars had resulted in each recruit costing \$34,000 is astounding. This is clearly extortionate and cannot be allowed to continue.

According to the Defence Force Reform Program "a pilot (recruitment) scheme is under way in Victoria and Tasmania to establish a commercial service provider." An enquiry to the Minister for Defence asking if the recent recruiting drive was carried out by the ADF or a commercial service provider has not received a response. Failure to provide this information reinforces the perception of prevarication and secrecy. Without this information it is impossible to comment objectively on recruitment policy.

The assertion in the Defence White Paper that if a commercial service provider is used, the number of recruitment offices would increase from 16 to 90 seems to indicate a lack of well planned approach to the recruitment problem. Never the less, it is my contention that such a program is the essential first step in remediation of the urgent problems facing ADF management. Without an effective and efficient recruitment program the impact of the Defence Reform Program on recruitment is likely to be minimal.

How retention levels will be effected by the Defence Reform Program depends largely on the measures taken to improve job satisfaction and to provide thoroughly trained personnel, well prepared to operate new equipment. The requirement for specialist personnel will be determined by the type of equipment purchased, the services required to keep it operational, and to ensure the duty of care for personnel involved in the use of such equipment.

Success of the Defence Reform Program depends entirely on the recruitment and retention of personnel. Without this, none of the goals set out in the paper can be achieved. The plan will gather dust, business will be as usual until the next Defence White Paper. Or, we will be unprepared and embarrassed when Australia is called upon to make a contribution to peace and stability in the region. A stability that is increasingly menaced by unrest in Indonesia and competitive relations between China and the U.S.A. Changes to the New Zealand Defence Force and its role in the region will also impact on Australia.

The public needs to have confidence in the managers in Defence and Foreign Affairs and to feel secure that without disclosing matters legitimately of national security, they are telling the truth, that they are conscious of and do not neglect the duty of care for the well being of the employees, civil and military. What is required is integrity, accountability and transparency without arrogance and insolence; values not often apparent in the statements of the leaders of the ADF, Defence Department, Foreign Affairs or their political masters.

In an address to high ranking officers of the ADF, the Minister for Defence is reported to have declared that accountability is not to Her Majesty the Queen, not to the Governor General, but to the Government. The Minister misses the point; accountability for a properly managed and well prepared defence force is to the Australian people. The people's power is at the ballot box. Already there are ominous signs that the people are not satisfied with the current discharge of this accountability and are prepared to make necessary changes.



Enid Jenkins  
7<sup>th</sup> May 2001