

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

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

**SUBMISSION**

**Submission No:** 32

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Dear Senator Hogg,

I have been an officer of the RAN for the past 17 years and in that time, I have seen the RAN (and indeed, the ADF) undergo many sweeping changes. There can be no doubt that some of these changes have had a significant effect on our ability to retain our personnel. In this submission I have at times, become somewhat emotive, however it is important to realise that many of the reasons affecting recruiting/retention are, indeed, emotive ones.

### **Our Changing Lifestyle**

One of the many things slowing our recruiting effort is, I believe, a change in the attitudes and values of the youth of today. Modern youth seem to place more priority on lifestyle rather than the job - they want a life with a job, not a job with a life. Unfortunately, one of the many drawbacks that comes with life in the ADF is a very restrictive lifestyle.

### **Recognition of the special circumstance of our families**

This is one of the big retention issues. Many politicians and Defence civilians in Canberra (particularly, it seems, those with MBAs) seem to be unaware of the highly nomadic lifestyle and extreme sacrifices put up with by Defence members and their families. Until we recently decided to buy our own home in WA:

My wife didn't know her neighbours. My kids never made long term friendships. My eldest daughter attended 8 different primary schools. I changed the registration of my car four times since 1993. We have endured sub-standard accommodation. We rarely get together with our relatives (most of them live on the Eastern seaboard) Despite my wage, we only barely make ends meet.

### **Our Families want Location Stability.**

My wife and 3 daughters live in Perth, WA. I am working in Victoria. I visit them once every 3 months. We own a home in WA and my eldest daughter is 19 and no longer wants to move. She is not ready to leave home. Yet, I have very few job opportunities in WA, due largely to civilianising of jobs in WA. The re-union travel provided for me offers a generous 6 travel warrants a year - with only 25 days leave to expend them. Do the mathematics, and that leaves very short stays home! I use up a full day's travel just getting between Melbourne and Perth. The conditions for those who are married and separated due to the job are appalling by civilian standards. We need longer leave entitlements, and more opportunities to get home. Remuneration and Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT)

Such is the life of a typical defence family. Yet, any extra "perk" we are seen to receive through the Defence system is often reportable under Fringe Benefits Tax! I believe FBT has been one of the biggest killers for retention in recent years. Despite the likely loss of revenue to the Government, we really need to exempt the ADF from FBT.

Even the food I am given at work, while living away from my family, is FBT reportable.

The remainder of our pay system is cumbersome and not adequately indexed with the rest of Australian society. To make the matter worse, every time we receive a pay rise, we receive a rise in Married Quarter rental, Interest rates (until recently) or Health Insurance. Defence members are inadequately paid for their working hours and the stresses of the job. How is it that the Commanding Officer of a warship, with all its inherent pressures, earns less money than the ship's doctor or the ship's helicopter pilot?

## Overworked, understaffed

The above issue concerning remuneration is also linked to our workload. With only 12,361 people in the RAN, everybody is often doing the job of more than one person. Those who are not are still subjected to high work and stress levels.

As an example, in my previous job as a Warfare Officer in HMAS [REDACTED], I was regularly working a 20-hour day.

In my current job, my school is 37% understaffed, yet we are still trying to maintain the same output. I work a 12 hour day.

There are, in many cases, insufficient opportunities for staff to take Long Service Leave. In most cases, LSL is kept until discharge.

Our lords and masters seem to have no qualms in personnel cutbacks - after all, > personnel are our most expensive asset - but in doing so, it heightens the stress levels of those who remain, and they eventually get to the point where they can no longer stand the lifestyle.

## Civilianisation of Jobs

For a long time, the ADF has undergone the Commercialisation Support Program (CSP). This has caused irreparable damage to the ADF. Many of these civilians have taken over jobs which were used as respite postings for those from seagoing jobs - those jobs now no longer exist, so it is now very difficult to find a job ashore to rest.

Civilianisation has also had an effect on the level of service provided in messes, the transport provided at bases, and even some of the old "perks" of being a serviceman. For example, the golf course at HMAS CERBERUS used to be FREE for ADF members. Since commercialisation, we now pay \$18 for a round. I might as well play on a better-kept external golf course.

## The hierarchy

The ADF hierarchy is over-loaded with so-called "experts" with a Masters in Business Administration (MBA). These courses poison a person's mind with business practices which may work well for a large multi-national company with shareholders to satisfy and profits to make, but they do not stand up well in a Defence Force whose job, if it is to fight and win, is to spend money. Yet, many at the top can only see the need to keep cutting, cutting, cutting.

Defence is NOT a business. Our job is to fight and win. We cannot do this by cutting costs and constantly changing our structure.

Many of us at the "Coal Face" wish that the never-ending changes which hit this organisation would simply stop for about 10 years.

The ADF needs stability.

The following would be my recommendations for improving retention of ADF personnel:

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- Eliminate Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) completely from all aspects of Service in the ADF
- Provide adequate remuneration based on the time, effort and sacrifice made by ADF members.