

Explicit emails a reminder some in army still don't get reform

- **Elizabeth Broderick**

I was appalled and saddened to learn that a number of members of the Australian Army - of varying ranks and who had been there for many years - had allegedly produced and distributed explicit emails and photos that demean and denigrate women.

I was appalled because no woman should ever have to endure behaviour that is degrading. The behaviour is alleged to have been perpetrated by men who are trained to lead, represent and honour their country. It is behaviour that is inexcusable and intolerable.

'Appalling' scandal hits army

Chief of Army Lieutenant General David Morrison announces an investigation into 17 Defence personnel over an alleged email scandal.

But I was saddened, too, because I know that the army has, over the past 12 months, made significant efforts to make its service a more inclusive and respectful workplace. Obviously there are some men in the army that still don't get it.

They still don't get that there is no place for behaviours that are offensive and are disrespectful to women. They still don't get that a modern military needs both men and women to achieve its goals and maintain capability. They still don't get that sexist and offensive behaviour will not be tolerated by their own senior leaders and by the broader Australian community.

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Over the past 18 months I have been immersed in defence culture as part of the review I lead into the treatment of women in the Australian Defence Force. I have heard the voices of thousands of serving men and women, many of whom spoke of positive experiences. Others told of experiences that were deeply distressing.

Women I spoke to disclosed stories of extreme exclusion, sexual harassment, victimisation and sexual assault. For these women, service had come at an unacceptable personal sacrifice.

Courageously, some of these women came with me to tell their stories to their service chiefs. From that time on, the chiefs - moved and angered by what they heard - committed to stamping out abuse and harassment in their service. The evidence of this was in the way the chiefs, as well as the Chief of the Defence Force, swiftly and unequivocally accepted the recommendations from my review.

These recommendations are about creating a culture that allows both men and women to thrive, a culture where sexual and offensive misconduct has no place, and a culture worthy of a first-class military organisation.

The latest allegations in the army are a significant setback to reform.

A history of harassment

1992 Female doctor on HMAS Swan alleges sexual assault. A Senate inquiry reveals more assaults on women and a culture of harassment on the ship.

1995 Naked submariners on the deck of HMAS Onslow were smeared with food and beaten by shipmates.

1997 Defence Force chief John Baker admitted sexual harassment was unacceptably high after a survey found 41 per cent of women and 12 per cent of men claimed they had been harassed.

They still don't get that a modern military needs both men and women to achieve its goals and maintain capability.

2001 Crewmen from HMAS Arunta engage in naked romps, sexual assaults and theft during a deployment to Christmas Island. Senior officers charged with covering up the scandal.

2003 Allegations that sailors from HMAS Adelaide and HMAS Kanimbla had sex on the beach, streaked through military bases and ran around naked on the US outpost Diego Garcia.

2009 Sailors on HMAS Success accused of running competition to have sex with nominated female sailors. Inquiry finds “predatory sexual conduct”, bullying and drunken behaviour. Up to 50 face disciplinary action.

2010 Four soldiers investigated for allegedly assaulting a female colleague at Lavarack Barracks in Queensland.

April 2011 Air force cadet “Kate” learns that consensual sex with a fellow cadet, Daniel McDonald, has been broadcast via Skype to other cadets. Defence Minister Stephen Smith announces six reviews.

December 2011 Former lieutenant-commander John Alan Jones sentenced to 18 months’ jail for seven “acts of indecency without consent” towards a junior officer on HMAS Sirius.

July 2012 A report from law firm DLA Piper into 755 plausible allegations of abuse over 60 years finds that rapists who were never prosecuted are probably still occupying senior positions.

August 2012 A review by Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick finds one in four women in the force have been sexually harassed in the past five years. The fear of reprisal prevents many incidents being reported.

November 2012 Defence Minister Stephen Smith announces a new military abuse taskforce to investigate past allegations of abuse including about 10 currently serving defence force members suspected of involvement in rapes of ADFA cadets.

Elizabeth Broderick is the Sex Discrimination Commissioner

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