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Navy mired in betting-on-sex scandal

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SEVERAL male sailors have been counselled and sent home after a ledger surfaced recording bets on how many of their fellow crew members they could sleep with.

A Defence spokesperson confirmed last night that an unnamed number of sailors on HMAS Success were returned to Australia from Singapore in May. A formal investigation is under way.

Concerns about the betting book, known as "The Ledger", were raised by female crew members. Dollar values were placed on the female crew, with higher amounts to be won if sailors had sex with a female officer or a lesbian.

Channel Seven news reported last night that the men also challenged each other to have sex in different locations, including on top of a pool table.

The sailors allegedly detailed their bets and the various dollar values on the female targets in The Ledger, which was discovered while HMAS Success was visiting Singapore in May.

Sailors were formally interviewed by their captain, Commander Simon Brown, and a number were immediately returned to Australia.

HMAS Success, an auxiliary oiler replenishment vessel, is on exercises in South-East Asia. It has a company of 220.

Defence said it would be inappropriate to discuss details of the complaints or investigation while the inquiry was under way. But in a statement, the department said the navy warned all its personnel to "treat others fairly" and that "unacceptable" behaviour would be dealt with.

The navy has a strict "equity and diversity" policy that demands workplaces be free of denigrating and harassing behaviour.

The policy is regularly monitored and so-called "health checks" are conducted in workplaces at sea and on land to ensure it is being enforced.

Sailors at the centre of the new allegations were removed from the ship after such a "health check".

The navy has intermittently been involved in headline-grabbing sexual harassment and intimidation complaints, leading to stringent policies to try to force a change in attitude towards female crew.

The latest statistics available reveal that between 2005 and 2007, there were more than 100 official investigations into sexual offences and harassment in the navy.

One of the most sensational cases was a decade ago when the high-profile captain of the frontline frigate HMAS Sydney, Tony Gale, was dismissed for sexual harassment.

The furore surrounding the case led to a wide-reaching investigation by Federal Parliament's powerful foreign affairs and defence standing committee.

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