

## DEFENCE

### Defence investigates army personnel over 'explicit email' scandal



"I'm appalled." Army Chief Lieutenant General David Morrison reveals a scandal involving officers producing explicit detail demeaning to women. Picture: Ray Strange

- Joe Kelly
- TheAustralian
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OVER 100 defence force personnel have been embroiled in a damning new scandal over the distribution of thousands of derogatory and explicit emails using defence computer systems since 2010.

Army chief, Lieutenant-General David Morrison, today said there were at least several female victims who were the target of "demeaning, explicit and profane" emails sent by male army personnel based all over the country, some with over ten years experience.

"The imagery, as is the text, is explicit, derogatory, demeaning and is repugnant to me," he said.

General Morrison warned the actions of the men involved undermined the "heart of the army's ethos" and its "contract with the nation".

Three army personnel have already been suspended from duty as a result of an ongoing investigation between the Australian Defence Force Investigative Service and NSW police into the email network.

General Morrison said civil charges could be laid against the three men by NSW police and warned a further 14 army personnel intimately linked to the scandal were also at risk of suspension.

General Morrison said the suspensions related to the misuse of defence computer systems, the distribution of visual and textual material that was denigrating to women as well as illicit drug use.

The outcomes of the investigation by ADFIS could lead to the discharge of the individuals from the army.

General Morrison also warned that over 90 defence personnel, the majority from army, may have been on the "periphery" of the group's e-mail exchanges and could also be investigated.

"There is no place for this type of behaviour in our army," General Morrison said. "It brings the Australian Army into disrepute."

General Morrison said such behaviour was evidence of a systemic problem that would not be tolerated by the ADF leadership and that it was worse than the "Skype sex" scandal of two years ago.

"The Skype sex scandal is under investigation," he said. "It is alleged of course to have taken place on the grounds of ADFA and to involve, in most cases, cadets who had been in the military for ten weeks.

"In the matters we are looking at now, these are actions by men who have been in the defence force for in excess of ten years.

"This goes to the heart of what I've said about systemic problems with culture inside the army."

He said the female victims were members of the defence force, public servants and members of the public.

The 17 men currently under investigation are made up of at least one lieutenant-colonel, with the remainder being majors, captains, warrant officers, sergeants and corporals.

General Morrison said the men were based at different locations across Australia and were from a number of different areas in the army.

After speaking to four female victims earlier this morning, General Morrison said they were "angry" and apologised on behalf of the Australian army.

He warned the investigation by ADFIS and NSW police could go on for some time, declaring the matter to be very complex.

General Morrison said he took responsibility for the scandal.

"It's on me," he said. "I'm responsible for this, I'm the chief of the Australian army. The culture of the army is in my hands during my tenure and I'm doing as much as I humanly can to improve it.

"This is a setback but I'm going to pick myself up."

Defence Minister Stephen Smith said he strongly supported General Morrison and that the government and ADF leadership were committed to ensuring there was a “zero tolerance” approach towards inappropriate conduct.

“Lieutenant-General Morrison has unambiguously reinforced his expectations of appropriate behaviour to the Army and demonstrated his resolve to act decisively in response to these types of incidents,” Mr Smith said.

“Lieutenant-General Morrison briefed me when he became aware of the matter. I welcome the strong response that demonstrates in the post-ADFA Skype environment a zero tolerance for this type of behaviour.”

Opposition defence spokesman Senator David Johnston said the allegations made today by General Morrison were of "great concern to the Coalition" and encouraged ADFIS to continue its investigation thoroughly and properly.

"The Chief of Army obviously considers these matters to be very serious and we have great faith and confidence in his capacity to respond appropriately to them," Senator Johnston said.

"I know that the senior leadership of the ADF are committed to changing cultural issues in the organisation that have been a source of discouragement to women joining the ADF."

Senator Johnston said there was no place for such conduct within the ADF.

"Lieutenant-General Morrison is entirely correct when he says that he wants the mums and dads of Australia to be comfortable with their daughters joining the defence force," he said.

Senator Johnston said he would seek an urgent briefing with the Chief of Army to be kept updated with the progress of the investigations.

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