

Eight sailors from HMAS Ballarat to be disciplined for bizarre sexual hazing rituals

EIGHT crew members from HMAS Ballarat, the navy's latest "ship of shame", will be disciplined over bizarre sexual "hazing" rituals on the warship.

By Ian McPhedran national defence writer

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Ship of shame ... eight crew members on the frigate HMAS Ballarat will be disciplined. *Source: News Limited*

EIGHT sailors from the navy's newest 'ship of shame', the frigate HMAS Ballarat, will escape criminal charges but will be disciplined internally over bizarre sexual 'hazing' rituals.

Punishments will range from the sack to a formal warning for the eight who were at the centre of serious allegations that their shipmates were sexually assaulted with water bottles, carrots, bananas, pens and pencils.

An internal investigation failed to turn up adequate evidence to pursue criminal charges so Navy chief Vice-Admiral Ray Griggs will take so-called "administrative action" against the sailors.

Each of the eight, including a senior Petty Officer, has been asked to 'show cause' why they should not be punished for the strange behaviour that marked birthday celebrations on board the warship.

When the allegations were raised last year a former sailor known as 'Bridget' told Network Ten that birthdays boys and girls were set upon by a gang of sailors who sexually assaulted them with pens, pencils and water bottles, causing injuries to at least one.

"A whiteboard lid came off in his bum and that was the one who ran out screaming . . . because his bum was bleeding," she said.

An investigation failed to find enough evidence to prosecute the sailors either under the [Defence Force](#) Discipline Act or the Criminal code.

At the time of the Ballarat incident Vice Admiral Griggs asked sailors to come forward with any other allegations of bad behaviour and as a result another investigation into a serious matter is underway.

Chief of Navy, Vice-Admiral Ray Griggs said the decision to commence administrative action demonstrated Navy's commitment to address unacceptable behaviour.

"We have worked to clearly articulate what behaviour is appropriate in our workplace. Accountability is a feature of our cultural change program. All personnel are aware that Navy will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour," he said

"While I am pleased the report has found no clear evidence of a pattern of systemic unacceptable behaviour, Navy takes all allegations of this nature very seriously."

The zero tolerance message still has not been heard by all sailors and officers, and according to defence sources some justified the behaviour because they had been subjected to similar treatment at footy clubs and saw nothing wrong with it.

Outgoing Defence Force Chief David Hurley vowed to achieve deep cultural reform across the organisation and defended the right of all members of the armed forces to serve in an environment free from abuse.

Australian Army chief Lieutenant-General David Morrison admitted there were “systemic problems with culture inside the army”.

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