

Release of Defence Force Ombudsman Report – *Defending Fairness: Does Defence handle unacceptable behaviour complaints effectively?*

The Commonwealth Ombudsman, Iain Anderson, in his role as Defence Force Ombudsman, today published his own motion inquiry report, *Defending Fairness: Does Defence handle unacceptable behaviour complaints effectively?*

The Ombudsman found that the Department of Defence's and Australia Defence Force's (together Defence) complaint handling framework does not always work effectively and could work better. In the past decade, Defence has undergone a cultural reckoning with historical abuse and unacceptable behaviour. Given this history and the sheer size of Defence, it is crucial for Defence's complaint processes to work effectively, to encourage people to come forward knowing any complaints will be managed seriously, sensitively and without bias.

In releasing his report, Mr Anderson said, "Failure to manage complaints of unacceptable behaviour can have devastating implications for complainants, respondents, and others in Defence. My Office's findings and recommendations build upon previous and current work making sure that Defence personnel can be confident their complaints will be taken seriously and handled sensitively."

The report makes 9 recommendations to Defence directed at improving the effectiveness of Defence's complaint handling framework and the experiences of both complainants and those who deal with complaints.

Mr Anderson said, "My key recommendation is that Defence establish a specialised, centralised complaint handling unit to operate outside the chain of command across all 3 services. This will be a significant change for Defence, but will help to give Defence

personnel confidence that complaints of unacceptable behaviour will be dealt with appropriately.”

In making these findings, the Ombudsman acknowledges the positive steps Defence has taken to address and reduce unacceptable behaviour, and the commitment of the Defence personnel who participated in the inquiry, who clearly take unacceptable behaviour seriously.

Mr Anderson welcomed the response from the Chief of Defence Force and Secretary of the Department of Defence, which is published in full as an appendix to the report and accepts all the recommendations. The Ombudsman will monitor Defence’s implementation of the recommendations.

[Read the full report \(PDF | 915KB\)](#)

For more information visit ombudsman.gov.au or for media enquiries email media@ombudsman.gov.au