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Overview of the work of the Taskforce

The Defence Abuse Response Taskforce (Taskforce) was established on 26 November 2012 as part of the Government’s response to the DLA Piper Review into allegations of sexual or other forms of abuse in Defence (DLA Piper Review).

Under its Terms of Reference the Taskforce is required to assess the findings of the DLA Piper Review and the material gathered by that review, and any additional material available to the Taskforce concerning complaints of sexual and other forms of abuse by Defence personnel alleged to have occurred prior to 11 April 2011.

The Taskforce was established to assess and respond to individual cases of alleged abuse in Defence. The fundamental work of the Taskforce is to determine, in close consultation with complainants, the most appropriate outcome in individual cases.

The Taskforce has received approximately 2400 complaints of abuse in Defence.

Purpose of the Taskforce is to provide outcomes

The Taskforce is only able to provide outcomes to complainants whose allegations fall within the scope of its Terms of Reference and which the Taskforce has assessed to be ‘plausible’.

If the Taskforce is satisfied that an allegation is within the scope of its Terms of Reference and meets the plausibility test, the Taskforce consults with the complainant about appropriate outcomes, which might include:

- a referral for free counselling under the national Defence Abuse Counselling Program;
- a Reparation Payment of up to $50 000 under the Defence Abuse Reparation Scheme, with the amount of payment determined by the independent Reparation Payments Assessor;
- referral of appropriate matters to civilian police for their assessment and possible investigation and prosecution;
- referral to the Chief of the Defence Force (CDF) for administrative and/or disciplinary action; and/or
- participation in the Defence Abuse Restorative Engagement Program, which gives complainants the opportunity to have their personal story of abuse heard, acknowledged and responded to by a senior Defence representative which may include an expression of regret or an apology by the Defence representative.

The Report on abuse in Defence

This reading guide provides an overview of the content of the Taskforce Report on abuse in Defence. The report was tabled in Parliament by the Minister for Defence on 26 November 2014, alongside the Taskforce Report on abuse in the Australian Defence Force Academy. The Taskforce Report on abuse in the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) provides an overview of the nature and extent of abuse in ADFA.

The Report on abuse in Defence (the report) provides a disturbing account of abuse that has occurred in all three primary Defence services – the Royal Australian Navy (Navy), Australian Army (Army), Royal Australian Air Force (Air Force), as well as abuse experienced by Australian Public Service (APS) employees in Defence. The Taskforce has received a significant number of complaints of serious acts of sexual abuse, sexual harassment, physical abuse and harassment and bullying carried out within all services in Defence, dating back to the 1940s and up until the Taskforce’s cut-off date of 11 April 2011.
The abuse has not been limited to one place or service, but has occurred for decades within Defence establishments across Australia. Many complainants experienced abuse during the initial stages of their careers in Defence, particularly during recruit and employment training, and while members were serving overseas on deployment.

This reading guide should be read with the report itself. It is not possible to gain a complete picture of the information contained in that report using this guide alone. This guide is intended to assist you with reading the report. In summary, the report:

- provides background information regarding the work of the Taskforce (Part A);
- provides an overview of the progress made by the Taskforce providing outcomes to complainants (section 9);
- details the nature and extent of abuse in Defence reflected in complaints received by the Taskforce (sections 15 – 20);
- explores the issues arising in Defence’s management of reports of abuse reflected in complaints received by the Taskforce (section 21); and
- outlines the impacts of abuse on complainants (section 22).

This report also contains the Taskforce’s recommendation in relation to whether a Royal Commission into any categories of abuse in Defence is merited (section 13.3).
What kinds of abuse occurred in Defence?

Knowing what I know now, I can see that what went on was not acceptable behaviour. I knew it then too, but being out of Defence completely enables me to see it more clearly and understand how inappropriate it really was. I find it difficult to admit that I was a part of the Defence Force, given the treatment I have received. I no longer support my family members in pursuing a Defence career. (Male Air Force member, late 2000s)

The whole basis of the military are the values of: camaraderie, morale and discipline. It was this betrayal of trust. It is still difficult now to come to grips with. (Male Air Force member, late 1980s)

Statistical overview

As at September 2014, the Taskforce had assessed 2224 cases as raising plausible allegations of abuse (relating to more than 1650 complainants).

Reports of abuse were received across all three services, as well as APS employees in Defence, and ADFA:

- Navy – 861 cases (39 per cent of all cases);
- Army – 879 cases (40 per cent of all cases);
- Air Force – 378 cases (17 per cent of all cases);
- APS – 56 cases (three per cent of all cases); and
- ADFA – 50 cases (two per cent of all cases).

Complaints to the Taskforce include some extremely serious allegations of abuse. Many complainants experienced more than one type of abuse during their careers in Defence. Specific categories of abuse were reported as follows:

- Sexual abuse – 834 cases (38 per cent of all cases);
- Sexual harassment – 389 cases (17 per cent of all cases);
- Physical abuse – 1067 cases (48 per cent of all cases); and
- Harassment and bullying – 1464 cases (66 per cent of all cases).

The abuse reported was experienced by men in a significant majority of cases. However it appears that women are significantly overrepresented as complainants when these figures are compared to the proportion of women serving in Defence:

- Abuse experienced by men – 1647 cases (74 per cent of all cases); and
- Abuse experienced by women – 577 cases (26 per cent of all cases).

In all services, the highest number of complaints of abuse related to abuse that occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. However, high levels of abuse have persisted throughout all three services during the 2000s.

A detailed statistical overview is provided in the report at section 15.5.

Types of abuse in Defence

This section of the reading guide provides an overview of the types of abuse considered by the Taskforce. Detailed definitions of each type of abuse are provided at section 7.1 of the report.
Sexual abuse

As I was showering five or six senior [others] attacked me – they turned off the lights, tied my hands behind my back and proceeded to do things to me. I was held down whilst one of them put his penis in my buttocks, they were all laughing. Then they proceeded to masturbate on me. I was absolutely shocked, at that age I had never even known about things like this. I guess I started to block it out as soon as it happened. (Male Army member, late 1980s)

Sexual abuse was experienced in 38 per cent of all cases of abuse reported to the Taskforce.

Almost all alleged abusers responsible for acts of sexual assault, indecent assault and other forms of sexual abuse were male. Relevant factors in sexual abuse generally included the targeting of people who were in vulnerable positions, such as when isolated or asleep, the use of physical violence, the consumption of alcohol by both the complainant and alleged abusers, and the presence of multiple alleged abusers in a number of cases.

A notable and disturbing feature in complaints of sexual abuse that occurred in earlier decades was degrading and humiliating acts experienced by young boys and carried out by groups of their peers, often in the context of initiation or hazing practices during initial recruit and employment training. This included forced stripping and nakedness, the application of grease or boot polish to the genitals, forced masturbation or being masturbated in front of and ejaculated on, and anal penetration with objects including brooms and mop handles.

Incidents of sexual abuse in more recent decades have typically involved a single alleged abuser, either a peer or a person of higher rank who, in many cases, was in a position of considerable authority over the complainant at the time of the abuse.

Women are overrepresented as the subjects of sexual abuse in more recent decades, particularly during the 1990s and 2000s. Cases of sexual abuse of both male and female complainants during the 2000s include some particularly violent incidents of sexual assault in the form of anal and vaginal penetration, digital penetration and forced oral sex, as well as indecent assault in the form of forced masturbation, and some cases where complainants were filmed or recorded without their consent while in a state of undress.

Sexual harassment

[I] had to move rooms at least three times due to men knocking on my door at night, asking for sex. I didn’t see who they were as I was too afraid to open my door. During one of these incidents, I awoke to find that someone had sprayed tomato sauce on the board outside my door. There were a number of comments written, including “filthy whore” and “slut”. (Female Air Force member, early 1990s)

From his arrival [the Corporal] would have sexually explicit conversations about women on a daily basis. Conversational topics included forced sodomy, intercourse with under-age girls and degrading women sexually. There are some of his specific comments I can recall, which include “if she’s old enough to bleed, she’s old enough to breed” and “hit em before the hair does”, in relation to under-age girls. Once, referring to forced sodomy on women, he said “make em squeal like a pig”. [The Corporal] allowed pornographic material such as magazines and mobile phone videos to be viewed and shared in the workplace. I did object to this several times, but was always laughed at. (Female Army member, late 2000s)

Sexual harassment was experienced in 17 per cent of all cases of abuse reported to the Taskforce.

Sexual harassment was the only type of abuse, which, in total numbers, was experienced by more female complainants than men. Almost half the number of cases where women were the subjects of abuse included sexual harassment, compared to only nine per cent of cases involving male complainants.

The forms of sexual harassment experienced by complainants were similar during both initial training and regular service, and many forms of sexual harassment were experienced by...
both men and women alike. This included unwelcome touching, exposure to pornographic material, being exposed to another person’s genitals, being groped or licked, subjected to sexual innuendo, malicious rumours spread about their sexual reputation, and repeated unwanted requests to engage in sexual activity. Forms of sexual harassment experienced by women in recent years appear to be more personal and targeted, and in many ways less overt than the types of sexual harassment exhibited during earlier decades when women initially entered the services. This includes the denial or restriction of maternity leave, deliberate attempts by male peers to undermine the authority or managerial decisions of high ranking women in Defence, and negative attitudes towards family or caring responsibilities, including by other women.

Female complainants commonly told the Taskforce of having been subjected to an ongoing, unwelcome attitude towards women serving in Defence, and the existence of a culture in Defence in which women’s participation is denigrated and women are sexually objectified.

Physical abuse

On one occasion I was set up in the back shed and assaulted by [a Leading Aircraftman] from one of [the Sergeant’s] men. I had done nothing to deserve it. He hit me in the face and I fell to the ground. The Sergeant knew about it and was outside when I reported it to him. He ignored it and said to me that “that’s how you work out your problems”. (Male Air Force member, late 1980s)

Almost half the total number of complaints received by the Taskforce involved physical abuse (48 per cent of all cases).

Physical abuse appears to have been considered a way of resolving minor disputes, and complaints received by the Taskforce suggest a high incidence of physical assault by peers, as well as assault with the purpose of reinforcing positions of authority, dominance and control. Complainants experienced many forms of physical abuse, including strangulation, being bashed up and ‘king hit’, having objects thrown at them, being shot at, or threats of violence, including having a loaded rifle pointed at them.

The Taskforce received many complaints describing a culture of violent hazing or initiation practices in initial recruit and employment training across decades and across the services. This included physical abuse in the form of ‘running the gauntlet’, ‘bed tipping’ and ‘blanket bashing’, as well as ‘scrubbing’ with hard-bristled brushes, or forced fighting. Some of these forms of physical abuse were administered as punishment following informal ‘kangaroo courts’ convened by groups of peers undertaking training from more senior intakes. Other forms of physical abuse occurred in the context of harsh training exercises and practices administered by members of staff which went beyond what was reasonable, particularly for young people.

Some complainants also described being coerced into participating in initiation ceremonies and rituals upon entry into regular service, cloaked in the idea of being ‘fun’ and part of a ‘tradition’ within the service – but actually involving particularly violent acts of physical abuse and sometimes sexual abuse. Complainants reported that these practices took place with the involvement and encouragement of members of higher rank.

Many complainants also experienced physical abuse related to illness and injury, including being physically reprimanded or assaulted by superior officers during a period of recovery (sometimes in sick bay), as well as the disregard of medical restrictions and cases involving a denial of medical assistance resulting in further physical injury. This form of physical abuse is especially prevalent in complaints of abuse across all services in recent decades.

Harassment and bullying

He did so many things to me. He wiped shit (literally) on my cabin door handle. He put shit on my car door handle. He spat on me. Would spit on the door handle. He threw a bottle in my bed.
face and cut my eye. I sought medical treatment at the hospital. I told them what had happened but didn’t mention his name. (Male Navy member, late 1990s)

Harassment and bullying was the most commonly reported form of abuse, experienced in 66 per cent of all cases. It was experienced by fairly equal numbers of complainants in all services across the entire time period considered by the Taskforce, suggesting the existence of a culture across Defence that encourages or permits certain negative behaviours.

Harassment and bullying experienced during initial recruit and employment training during earlier decades typically occurred in the context of hazing or initiation practices, where young members of Defence were left largely unsupervised and systematically victimised by those undertaking training from more senior intakes. Abuse often took the form of unreasonable tasking and humiliating demands by peers who were in positions of official and unofficial authority, designed to reinforce the hierarchy and humiliate more junior intakes. It also took the form of the destruction of personal property in an effort to cause reprimand or result in disciplinary action. In these cases, harassment and bullying was experienced mostly indiscriminately by virtue of a complainant’s lower rank and position.

The harassment and bullying carried out during earlier decades appears to have been more overt in nature, such as directly yelling at or otherwise belittling or humiliating the complainant. While these behaviours are still prevalent today, equally common are more covert forms of harassment and bullying. This includes deliberate and malicious attempts to belittle, ostracise, isolate and undermine complainants, as well as attempts to sabotage or prevent a complainant’s career progression and advancement in the service.

Harassment and bullying on the basis of an individual’s race or ethnicity has been and continues to be common in Defence, however the race or ethnicity of individuals targeted for abuse has changed over time, in some cases reflecting broader societal and community attitudes towards particular races and ethnicities.

Abuse in Defence by service

The Taskforce has found that widespread sexual abuse, sexual harassment, physical abuse, and harassment and bullying have occurred across Defence services throughout the decades.

Navy

The Navy is the service relating to which the Taskforce received the highest proportion of complaints given its small number of personnel. Cases relating to abuse in the Navy account for 41 per cent of all cases of abuse that occurred in the Navy, Army or Air Force; however, Navy personnel have historically comprised only approximately 25 per cent of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) Permanent Forces. The Navy is also the service with the highest number of complaints of sexual abuse, with cases involving sexual abuse comprising almost half of all cases of abuse in the Navy. Similarly, most cases of sexual harassment were reported to have occurred in the Navy.

Close to half of all complaints involved abuse that occurred in one of the four main recruit and employment training establishments (HMAS Leeuwin, HMAS Cerberus, HMAS Nirimba, and HMAS Creswell). Young men experienced most of the abuse in Navy recruit and employment training establishments in the period between the 1960s and 1980s. A number of women also experienced abuse in more recent years, including some instances of serious sexual abuse and many instances of significant and ongoing sexual harassment.

The Taskforce is also concerned about the high number of complaints of abuse on ships, as well as the practice of initiation rituals, which in some cases demonstrate how certain hazing rituals have evolved within the service over time.
Further information about the nature and extent of abuse in the Navy is available at section 16 of the report.

Army

The Taskforce received a significant number of complaints involving abuse within the Army. However, the Army also comprises the highest proportion of personnel in Defence. Cases relating to abuse in the Army account for 42 per cent all cases of abuse that occurred in the Navy, Army or Air Force; and Army personnel have historically accounted for approximately 50 per cent of the ADF Permanent Forces.

The highest number of complaints of abuse in the Army related to abuse that occurred in the 1980s, and the number of complaints of abuse fell slightly during the 1990s and 2000s. Complaints received by the Taskforce suggest a high incidence of physical abuse in the Army, with almost half of all complaints of abuse in the Army involving plausible allegations of physical abuse.

Air Force

Of the three services, the lowest number of complaints related to abuse occurring in the Air Force. Cases relating to abuse in the Air Force account for 18 per cent of all cases of abuse that occurred in the Navy, Army or Air Force; however, Air Force personnel have historically accounted for only approximately 25 per cent of the ADF Permanent Forces.

The Taskforce is particularly concerned that rates of abuse within the Air Force have remained high in recent years – 24 per cent of all Air Force cases involved abuse that occurred between 2000 and 2011. From complaints received by the Taskforce, it appears that there are high levels of harassment and bullying in the Air Force carried out by direct supervisors, training instructors or individuals in considerable positions of authority.

The Air Force is also the service with the highest overrepresentation of women who have experienced abuse; of complaints received by the Taskforce, women were the subjects of abuse in 37 per cent of all cases of abuse in the Air Force. This is considerably higher than the 25 per cent of cases where women were the subjects of abuse in the Army, and 18 per cent of cases in the Navy. The Taskforce is concerned about the high number of complaints relating to sexual abuse and sexual harassment experienced by women in the Air Force, especially in recent years.

APS

Complaints involving abuse experienced by APS staff employed in Defence comprised a small proportion of the total number of cases assessed by the Taskforce. However, these complaints are of particular concern given that almost all involve abuse that has taken place between 2000 and 2011, and a number of alleged abusers in these cases are still currently employed in Defence. Most complaints of abuse in the APS involved ongoing and often malicious forms of harassment and bullying carried out by individuals in positions of seniority. This behaviour is typically aimed at undermining or sabotaging complainants in the workplace, with often devastating impacts on their career progression within the service.

ADFA

See the Taskforce Report on abuse at the Australian Defence Force Academy.
What has the Taskforce concluded about abuse in Defence?

Significant levels of abuse in Defence have persisted in recent years

They began with [my friend]. Together, they [harassed my friend]. When I told them to stop, they attacked me. [One of the men] grabbed me and gave me a wedgie until my undies broke, then he pushed me onto the bed. He then picked up a vacuum cleaner pipe and bent me over. He pushed it in between my buttock cheeks until it began to push up my anus. (Male Army member, early 2000s)

A significant amount of abuse in Defence reported to the Taskforce occurred between 2000 and 2011. Abuse during this time period was experienced by almost equal numbers of male and female complainants. In most complaints of abuse during recent years, abuse was carried out by persons of higher rank, including an increasing number of female alleged abusers.

There were some differences in the most prevalent types of abuse within each of the services as reported by complainants; including a high incidence of sexual abuse and sexual harassment in the Navy, high rates of physical abuse in the Army, and high rates of harassment and bullying in both the Air Force and the Army.

Women were the principal subjects of sexual abuse that occurred between 2000 and 2011, often in circumstances involving the consumption of alcohol. A number of male complainants also reported being forced to participate in initiation rituals upon their entry into regular service, which often involved elements of physical abuse and sexual abuse. Fourteen cases of abuse of children occurred between 2000 and 2011, of which seven cases involved sexual abuse.

The Taskforce is particularly concerned that abuse during recent years has been more covert, private, and insidious in nature as compared to the forms of abuse commonly exhibited and experienced by complainants in earlier decades. The use of technology is also a particular feature of abuse in recent years, often making the abuse more likely to occur outside of work hours. This includes harassment and bullying via email, Facebook, or other forms of social media.

Further information about abuse in Defence between 2000 and 2011 is available at section 19 of the report.

High levels of abuse of young people in Defence

It started from delivering some ironing that I did for one of the seniors and I was usually paid for doing this. On this occasion however the senior apprentice … pulled my pants down and pushed me onto the bed. He said he would give me a blow job for payment. I felt someone behind me at this stage and I noticed an older man with grey hair standing there. I assume he was a senior officer. The senior apprentice then proceeded to put his finger in my anus and moved it very hard in a “back and forth” motion whilst sucking my penis. The older man said “pretend you are masturbating” and just stood there watching. The senior apprentice then penetrated me and raped me whilst the old man was breathing on me. (Male Navy member, early 1970s)

The Taskforce is particularly concerned about the high number of complaints of abuse of children and young persons during the early stages of their careers in Defence. A total of 62 per cent of complainants were 21 years of age or under at the time of the abuse, including 27 per cent of complainants who were under 18 years of age at the time of the abuse.

A significantly larger proportion of children than adults experienced sexual abuse and physical abuse:
• 51 per cent experienced sexual abuse, compared to 38 per cent of all complainants;
• 64 per cent experienced physical abuse, compared to 48 per cent of all complainants.

Cases of abuse of young boys accounted for 90 per cent of all cases of abuse of children. Specific abusive practices were reported as common within recruit and employment training establishments, particularly between the 1960s and 1980s. Both the victims of such abuse and those responsible for carrying out much of the abuse were generally young boys aged between 15 and 18 years of age at the time of the abuse, and some of whom were as young as 13 and 14 years old.

Young boys typically experienced serious and repeated acts of violence, including indiscriminate physical assaults, being locked inside small spaces for hours at a time, suspended out of windows, having their beds tipped over during the night, and being bashed by groups of people while sleeping. Many complainants reported having sustained serious injuries that required medical assistance or hospitalisation.

Complainants told the Taskforce of being forced to perform humiliating and unreasonable acts and tasks at the behest of senior peers, as well as having to endure particularly degrading forms of abuse. This included being routinely stripped naked, having their genitals scrubbed with hard-bristled brushes or covered in grease or boot polish, having a vacuum cleaner applied to their genitals, being forced to masturbate in public or being forcibly masturbating by others or ejaculated on, and incidents of sexual assault where they were anally penetrated with various implements.

Complaints received by the Taskforce suggest that these hazing or initiation practices upon entry into Defence were implicitly condoned as part of a ‘tradition’ and approved culture in Defence. Complainants told the Taskforce that members of Defence in a supervisory role adopted an attitude which fostered many of these types of abuse, and which discouraged the reporting of abuse. In some cases, the abuse that occurred was directly or explicitly encouraged by members of training staff as a means of character building and developing a stronger, more robust force.

The Taskforce has specifically considered the issue of abuse at recruit and training establishments within each service at sections 16 – 19 of the report. For further information about the way in which the Taskforce shares information with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, see section 13.2.

High levels of abuse of women in Defence

I was dragged by my [colleagues] (one guy on each arm and one guy on each leg) out the back of the Armament Section towards the ablution block. I recall kicking and screaming in a state of disbelief, helplessness and absolute horror, as my clothes were torn from me. I felt betrayed and violated. … Though there were quite a few of my non-commissioned officer superiors present, both during and after this incident, none offered me assistance of any kind.

(Female Air Force member, early 1980s)

Women in Defence have been, and continue to be, particularly susceptible to abuse on account of their gender. Women are overrepresented in complaints of abuse across all services in Defence, and especially in more recent decades.

It appears that as the participation of women in Defence has increased over time, so too has the incidence of abuse experienced by women in Defence. Prior to 1990, 15 per cent of cases assessed by the Taskforce involved female complainants. By contrast, women were the complainants in 43 per cent of cases assessed by the Taskforce that occurred between 1990 and the Taskforce cut off date of 11 April 2011.

The sexual abuse which has occurred in Defence in recent years has been experienced almost entirely by women. Women were the subjects of sexual abuse in 74 per cent of Navy
cases, 88 per cent of Army cases, and 82 per cent of Air Force cases involving abuse that occurred between 2000 and 2011. Female complainants reported serious acts of sexual assault by members of higher rank, as well as violent incidents of sexual assault by peers and co-workers. This included sexual assault by multiple alleged abusers, during which complainants were vaginally and orally penetrated at the same time, as well as incidents where alleged abusers took turns sexually assaulting the complainant.

Women were also the subjects of sexual harassment in 72 per cent of Navy cases, 88 per cent of Army cases, and 88 per cent of Air Force cases involving abuse that occurred between 2000 and 2011. It is particularly noteworthy that the abuse of women in more recent decades appears to be more personal and targeted, and in many ways less overt than the forms of sexual harassment exhibited during the 1970s and 1980s when women initially entered the services. Many complaints of sexual harassment in recent years have involved having superiors make propositions for sexual favours in return for career advancement, and deliberate attempts by male peers to undermine the authority or managerial decisions of high-ranking women in Defence.

Complaints regarding abuse of women in the Navy, Army, and Air Force suggest the existence of a discriminatory culture and the perpetuation of negative attitudes towards the participation of women in Defence.

Inadequate Defence response to abuse

A male peer broke into the locked room I was sleeping in and raped me while three friends of his photographed the assault. … The words that have haunted me [ever since]: “Forget it ever happened… get over it” said by a RAAF policeman. (Female Air Force member, early 1990s)

The Taskforce has found that Defence adequately managed actual reports of abuse in a small number of complaints, where Defence conducted proper investigation and took appropriate administrative or disciplinary action, while supporting complainants during the process.

Defence mismanaged actual reports of abuse in a significant number of cases. This is for a number of reasons, including that Defence took no action in response to many reports of abuse, for example, by not believing complainants or by dismissing the abuse as inconsequential or as an aspect of military life. In other cases, it was clear that Defence action was inappropriate or inadequate in response to the report of abuse, for example, when complainants were required to continue working alongside the people responsible for the abuse, or through a lack of confidentiality when complainants were harassed by their peers after it became known that they made a report of abuse to Defence.

The Taskforce has found that Defence mismanaged a ‘constructive report’ of abuse in a number of situations where complainants did not make a formal report of abuse. This includes where there was a pattern or practice of abuse in certain establishments that Defence knew or ought to have known about, but failed to stop or prevent it. This is particularly the case in initial recruit and employment training establishments. In other cases, abuse was carried out by a person of seniority or higher rank to the complainant to whom they could have otherwise reported the abuse, or the abuse was witnessed by a person in Defence in a position of seniority or higher rank but who took no steps to stop or prevent it. In other cases, the complainant presented to a superior or other person in authority with signs of injury which ought reasonably to have given rise to a concern that the complainant was being, or may have been, abused, however they failed to make any reasonable enquiry.

Section 21 of the report provides further information about the management of abuse by Defence. The issue of mismanagement is also relevant in the context of Reparation Payments made under the Defence Abuse Reparation Scheme, as discussed in section 9.2).
 Alleged abusers still serving in Defence

The Taskforce takes seriously the risk that individuals who are allegedly responsible for serious acts of abuse are still serving in Defence. The Taskforce believes that still serving alleged abusers may pose risks to individuals within Defence and to Defence as a whole. This includes a dual risk that these individuals may re-offend, and also the risk of undermining the credibility and confidence in the Australian Defence Force if it became known that individuals responsible for abuse who were not held to account now hold middle or senior management positions and have important leadership roles.

As at October 2014, the Taskforce has determined that following numbers of alleged abusers are still serving in Defence:

- 594 individuals in the Permanent Forces and working as APS employees in Defence;
- 204 individuals in the Active Reserve; and
- 341 alleged abusers in the Inactive Reserve.

It is important that steps are taken to ensure that alleged abusers, or those who have been found to have mismanaged reports of abuse, are held to account for their conduct where this has not happened in the past.

One of the outcomes provided by the Taskforce is referral of matters to the CDF for consideration of administrative, disciplinary or other action. This outcome is discussed in more detail at section 9.5 of the report.
What factors contributed to abuse in Defence?

I blame the culture of the military in allowing this to occur despite my protestations to senior officers and [non-commissioned officers] and their failure to intervene and assist me when my lifelong dream was being systematically destroyed. (Male Army member, early 1950s)

A number of key factors have contributed to abuse occurring in Defence. Further analysis and research could be conducted with the Taskforce data available about these and other factors contributing to the occurrence of abuse in Defence, in order to inform the development of strategies aimed at preventing abuse from occurring in the future.

Influence of hierarchy and authority

I could not see any light at the end of the tunnel and my dreams and career had been turned upside down. I felt I was trapped there with no escape. People may wonder why I did not report what was going on. I was a junior airman, he was a Sergeant. I was young and impressionable, and was afraid of further victimisation. (Male Air Force member, late 1980s)

The Taskforce has found that abuse was very often carried out by members of Defence in positions of actual or perceived authority over complainants at the time of the abuse.

Defence is a fundamentally hierarchical institution, within which all members are governed by their rank. Abuse has flourished in an environment where members could be charged with insubordination or subjected to formal disciplinary action for failing to follow orders or participate in certain activities or forms of abuse directed by persons in positions of authority. The ingrained nature of both formal and unofficial hierarchies had the further impact of restricting or removing the ability of complainants to report abuse through their chain of command.

Physical environment of Defence establishments

[The officer] castigated me for the [intoxicated] condition I was in. My mate tried to tell him we were alright and that we did not need any help. He was trying to protect me. [The officer] ordered him to leave and said that he would take care of me. [The officer’s] room was at the top of the stairs which led to our sleeping mess. He ordered me into his room and then locked the door. In his cabin he attempted to have oral sex with me and then brutally raped me. I found out later that [the officer] had a reputation on the ship for sexually molesting junior sailors. (Male Navy member, early 1990s)

The physical aspects of many Defence environments appear to have contributed to abuse in Defence. Individuals who experienced abuse while living and working on bases, ships, or while on deployment, were typically isolated, increasingly reliant on the chain of command, and often unable to remove themselves from the environment of abuse.

The lack of adequate supervision of young people contributed to the high incidence of abuse during initial recruit and employment training where individuals were usually left unsupervised and to their own devices. The incidence of abuse that occurred outside of working hours in accommodation environments on base, private residences off base, or during social and work functions, continued to be high in recent decades in both complaints of abuse during initial training and regular service.

Institutional culture did not support the reporting of abuse

I was set upon by [the Corporal] and other soldiers from [the unit]. I was held down and punched in the stomach and face. My uniform was torn off me and grease was smeared over my body, backside and genitals. … I was tied up with my hands restrained behind me and I was hung from an engine hoist. The Corporal told me “keep your mouth shut”. (Male Army member, late 1980s)
There has been significant under-reporting of abuse in Defence. Many complainants did not make a formal report of the abuse they experienced to Defence.

This can be attributed to a culture that discouraged the reporting of abuse, exemplified by the absence of effective reporting mechanisms, and a lack of positive support for people who reported abuse. The reporting of abuse was seen as a sign of weakness within a culture requiring that members sort out their problems amongst themselves. In many cases of abuse, complainants were also directly threatened against reporting abuse, and abuse went unreported on account of the perceived risk of being subjected to further abuse, or perceived risk to their career in Defence.

Abuse flourished within a context in which individuals knew that acts of abuse could go unpunished, and abuse was implicitly condoned by the institution of Defence itself.

Culture targeting difference

A day or two before I was due to leave for the remedial platoon, I was woken early in the morning at approximately 2am. I was marched up to the platoon office by the Bombardier, non-commissioned officer of my section, and stood in front of the Sergeant and two other Corporals. The Sergeant said, “In this platoon before you go to the slugs, we give recruits a chance to take themselves out”, whereupon I was handed what I thought was a loaded pistol and told to put it to my temple. I was shouted at to stand to attention and told to “pull the fucking trigger”, because all I was, was “a slug”, I was told I was “a disgrace to my fucking family and my fucking country” and I was told to shoot myself, to kill myself. (Male Army member, early 1980s)

Particular factors which marked complainants out as ‘different’ increased their risk of being targeted for abuse by their peers and members more senior in the chain of command. These differences included a complainant’s age and physical development, race or religious beliefs, and sexuality or perceived sexuality.

Across all services, complainants experienced abuse on account of any illness or injury, which was perceived as having a negative impact on their physical capability. This included common use of the term ‘maligner’, and an attitude where one’s susceptibility towards illness or injury was considered a form of weakness.

Alcohol and drug use

I was 17 years old at the time. It began when a friend brought alcohol onto base, into my room. Our accommodation block was a mixed sex facility. I had never lived away from home before, and this was my first experience with alcohol. I became intoxicated. I was walking back from the bathroom when a member from my [class] grabbed me and took me to another room, straight across the corridor from my own. This room belonged to another male, and there was a third in the room also. I was intoxicated and overpowered by the three men. They sexually assaulted me. While they were assaulting me, one of them opened the door and allowed several other naval personnel to watch. When they had finished, they threw me out into the corridor with no clothing on. I was greeted by another member patrolling the building. I was let back into my room and left alone until morning. (Female Navy member, late 1990s)

The consumption of alcohol and other drugs was a factor in much of the abuse in Defence. Alcohol often took a prominent place in the narrative of harassment and bullying during hazing or initiation practices, as well as cases of physical assault, involving being punched, kicked, or king hit while alleged abusers were intoxicated. Alcohol consumption by both complainants and alleged abusers is particularly prominent in cases of sexual abuse, including serious acts of sexual assault and indecent assault. Many complainants reported having been sexually assaulted after social functions, often in circumstances in which they had consumed large amounts of alcohol and were drifting in and out of a state of consciousness. This included some complainants who reported that their drink was spiked prior to the incident of abuse.
Complaints to the Taskforce suggest the existence of an entrenched culture of alcohol abuse, where the consumption of large amounts of alcohol is encouraged as integral and necessary in building camaraderie, shared experiences, and being accepted as a member of the team. This is particularly concerning in the many situations where complainants – many of whom were particularly young and vulnerable in the early stages of their careers – were provided alcohol by their peers or superiors, and felt under considerable pressure to acquiesce out of fear of the potential repercussions of declining an offer by those with whom they would have to work closely, or who held a higher rank.
Impacts of abuse in Defence on complainants

Last year, at age 75, I finally summoned the courage to divulge the sordid truth to my family. Time will not heal but may help us understand the massive impact that these life changing events have had on all of us. (Male Army member, early 1950s)

Abuse in Defence has had very serious and long lasting impacts on the lives and careers of those who experienced it. Many complainants to the Taskforce had never spoken of their abuse before, even to their partners or family members.

The immediate impacts of abuse described by complainants included physical injuries such as bruises, broken limbs and other significant injuries requiring hospitalisation. Complainants experienced immediate psychological impacts, including feelings of fear, shame, betrayal and distrust. At times, the immediate impact was exacerbated by their young age, junior rank, isolation from family, friends and adequate support, not being able to report the abuse, or not having their report of abuse adequately addressed by Defence.

Many people who suffered abuse in Defence have experienced long-term impacts that they continue to struggle with today. This includes the ongoing effects of physical injuries, emotional distress, ruined careers, relationship break-downs, drug and alcohol addictions, serious psychological disorders, suicidal ideation, social isolation and many others.

Detailed discussion of the impacts of abuse in Defence on complainants is provided at section 22.

The Taskforce has also received a great deal of feedback from complainants about the impact of coming forward to the Taskforce. A selection of this feedback is provided in Appendix C.

The Taskforce has seen that coming into contact with the Taskforce has affected the lives of complainants in various ways. The Taskforce is gratified to hear that many complainants have experienced personal benefit as a result of coming forward to the Taskforce, as discussed at section 8.5 and demonstrated through quotes provided in the discussion of Taskforce outcomes at section 9.
What has the Taskforce done for people who suffered abuse in Defence?

Thank you for the phone call yesterday and for forwarding the email. I read the email and am very grateful to [the Taskforce] and yourself for all your understanding on what was a very difficult time for myself in the Navy. I have moved on in many ways from what happened as I had to for my family and for my health with the help of my Doctors and Physiologists. Yet I feel with [the Taskforce's] help I finally have the chance to close a chapter that I had deep down inside and the understanding that this should never happened as it did. For this I am so grateful and wish to give thanks to everyone involved in my case and most of all to you for being so helpful and understanding on the phone. I look forward to my meeting in the future in the Restorative Engagement Program. I don’t feel I need to add anymore to my case, as I feel now finally after all these 16 years somebody does care and understand what happened was so wrong outside of my Family, Doctors and Physiologists. Thank you so much [Case Coordinator]. (Complainant 2013/1285)

The Taskforce was established as an innovative means of providing outcomes to people who suffered abuse in Defence in circumstances where there was no prospect of obtaining recourse through existing formal legal or administrative processes. Part B of the report provides an overview of the work of the Taskforce in providing outcomes to people who suffered abuse and to work with Defence to instil a culture which, as far as possible, prevents, stops and appropriately responds to abuse when it occurs.

Soon after its establishment, the Taskforce made a policy decision not to actively approach people to ask whether they would be interested in making a complaint. This decision was based on advice from experts, including rape crisis counsellors and victims’ support groups. However, when the Government announced that people would have until 31 May 2013 to register a complaint of abuse, the Taskforce took active steps to raise awareness of this reporting deadline through advertising, media releases, information posted on the Taskforce website and through Defence’s internal channels (see section 6 of the report for further information).

The Taskforce has received approximately 2400 complaints of abuse in Defence.

Assessment process

The Taskforce is only able to act on allegations or complaints that fall within the scope of its Terms of Reference and are plausible. Under the Terms of Reference, the Taskforce is only able to consider complaints of sexual and other forms of abuse by Defence personnel, alleged to have occurred prior to 11 April 2011.

Further information about the assessment process is provided at section 7 of the report.

Complainant support

The Taskforce acknowledges that for some complainants reporting their experience of abuse to the Taskforce can be distressing. The Taskforce established the Complainant Support Group to provide one-on-one support to complainants as they proceed through the Taskforce assessment and processes. Section 8 of the report provides an overview of the Taskforce’s engagement with complainants and representative organisations. Taskforce staff members have engaged directly with representatives of associations, including the William Kibby VC Veterans Shed and the Defence Abuse Support Association, as well as with legal representatives and other advocates.
Taskforce outcomes

Once the Taskforce is satisfied that an allegation is within the scope of its Terms of Reference and meets the plausibility test (discussed at section 7.2), the Taskforce consults with complainants about appropriate outcomes. Complainants may receive one or any combination of these outcomes, depending on their circumstances. An overview of these outcomes is provided below. For further information, see section 9 of the report.

Defence Abuse Counselling Program

The national Defence Abuse Counselling Program (Counselling Program) is available to complainants to address the abuse suffered or the associated distress of retelling their experiences to the Taskforce. In some situations, a complainant may be referred to counselling prior to the finalisation of their assessment. Significant others affected by the complainant’s experience of abuse may also choose to access counselling under the Counselling Program.

Under the Counselling Program, an initial 10 counselling sessions are approved, with the counsellor to report back after the first five. Ordinarily, a maximum of 20 counselling sessions may be approved, although approval may be given for more than 20 sessions in exceptional circumstances.

As at 27 October 2014, the Chair of the Taskforce (Chair) had approved 2977 counselling sessions for 343 complainants under the Counselling Program, of which 1386 counselling sessions had already taken place.

Defence Abuse Reparation Scheme

The Defence Abuse Reparation Scheme (Scheme) was established as a means of providing financial reparation of up to $50,000 to individuals who suffered abuse in Defence. Payments made under the Scheme are not intended as compensation for physical, psychological, emotional or financial loss or damage suffered as a result of the abuse. Rather, a Reparation Payment is intended to be an acknowledgement that the abuse was wrong and should not have occurred.

There are five categories of Reparation Payment:

- Category 1 (Abuse): $5000;
- Category 2 (Abuse): $15,000;
- Category 3 (Abuse): $30,000;
- Category 4 (Abuse): $45,000; and
- Category 5 (Mismanagement by Defence): $5000.

The first four categories allow for recognition of increasingly serious abuse, relative to other allegations of abuse before the Taskforce. The sum of a Reparation Payment is determined by the independent Reparation Payments Assessor (Assessor), Ms Robyn Kruk AM.

As at 27 October 2014, the Taskforce had made 1159 Reparation Payments, totalling $46.705 million.

Defence Abuse Restorative Engagement Program

The world-first Defence Abuse Restorative Engagement Program (Restorative Engagement Program) provides an opportunity for a complainant to have their personal story of abuse heard, acknowledged and responded to by Defence.
Under the Restorative Engagement Program, a Taskforce-accredited Facilitator prepares the complainant, their support person (should they have one), and the senior Defence representative, before bringing them together in a private meeting to discuss the complainant’s personal story of abuse. The conference also provides the opportunity for the complainant to hear directly from Defence about progress in relation to cultural change within Defence. The Defence representative may provide the complainant with an apology, personally as well as on behalf of Defence.

The most senior Defence leaders have participated in conferences arranged under the Defence Abuse Restorative Engagement Program. Section 9.3 of the report includes a selection of quotes from the CDF, the Chief of Air Force, the Chief of Navy, and the Chief of Army, reflecting upon their experiences in the Restorative Engagement Program. The Taskforce has prepared more than 200 Defence representatives to participate in conferences. These Defence representatives range in rank from the CDF (4 star) down to Colonel (equivalent) across Army, Navy, Air Force and the APS component of Defence.

As at 27 October 2014, the Taskforce had held 76 conferences. The Taskforce anticipates that up to 1000 complainants may wish to participate in the Restorative Engagement Program.

The Taskforce has already seen indications that the Restorative Engagement Program is having a positive impact on cultural change in Defence.

Referral to Commonwealth, State and Territory police agencies

The Taskforce will only refer a matter to a police agency where the complainant provides consent. Many complainants are choosing not to pursue this option for a variety of reasons. However, the number of matter referred to police is not a reflection of the seriousness of the complaints received by the Taskforce. It is important to note that even the most recent allegations of criminal conduct were nearly 18 months old when the Taskforce was announced.

It is important to make clear that the Taskforce does not conduct an investigation or evaluate evidence. Those are matters for the appropriate police agency.

As at 27 October 2014, the Taskforce had referred 80 matters to State and Territory police:

- 28 to New South Wales Police Force;
- 18 to Victoria Police;
- 14 to Queensland Police Service;
- eight to Australian Capital Territory Policing;
- four to Western Australia Police;
- four to Northern Territory Police;
- three to South Australia Police; and
- one to Tasmania Police.

Referral to Defence for disciplinary, administrative or other action

The Taskforce also offers as an outcome the referral of a matter to the CDF for administrative or disciplinary action. Such action can be taken against alleged abusers still serving in Defence.

The Taskforce actively works to identify still serving abusers. Although the complainant’s views on referral will be considered by the Taskforce, the Chair considers that he has an
obligation to inform the CDF where a currently serving alleged abuser potentially poses a risk to other serving Defence personnel.

Where the Taskforce refers matters to Defence, it does so with the expectation that Defence will conduct further inquiries into the matter. As the Taskforce does not have investigative powers or the ability to take direct action in relation to Defence personnel, it has always been the case that Defence would have to look into any matter referred by the Taskforce.

As at 27 October 2014, the Taskforce had referred 40 cases to the CDF for consideration of possible administrative or disciplinary action (including 17 cases referred to the CDF in the ‘ADFA 24’ Case Summary Analyses discussed in more detail at section 10.3). These 40 cases include 64 alleged abusers identified as still serving in Defence at the time of the assessment. The breakdown for where these individuals were serving at the time of assessment was:

- Permanent Forces (including Department of Defence): 38;
- Active Reserves: 11; and
- Standby/Inactive Reserves: 15.

Taskforce engagement with Defence and other agencies

Section 10 of the report also provides information about the way in which the Taskforce engages with Defence, for a variety of purposes, including to arrange for the Taskforce to access Defence material and to prepare Defence representatives to participate in the Restorative Engagement Program. This section also provides specific information about the actions taken by the Taskforce in relation to a cluster of allegations of sexual abuse at ADFA in the 1990s. This section should be read alongside the Report on abuse at the Australian Defence Force Academy.

Under its Terms of Reference, the Taskforce is required to liaise with Defence on any implications of its work for Defence’s Pathway to Change: Evolving Defence culture strategy. The Taskforce has met its obligation under the Terms of Reference by:

- consulting with the senior leadership of Defence, including in relation to the 35 systemic issues identified by the DLA Piper Review;
- publishing detailed parliamentary reports;
- identifying alleged abusers who are still serving in Defence; and
- arranging for senior Defence representatives to participate in conferences arranged under the Restorative Engagement Program.

Section 11 of the report also provides an overview of the way in which the Taskforce engages with other agencies both within and separate to Defence. These agencies include the Australian Defence Force Investigative Service, the Department of Veterans’ Affairs and the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee.
What is the Taskforce’s position on whether a Royal Commission into any categories of abuse in Defence is merited?

The question of whether a Royal Commission into abuse in Defence should be established has attracted substantial public discussion. Section 13.3 of the report contains recommendations in relation to the question of a general Royal Commission into abuse in Defence, as well as a Royal Commission into ADFA.

While a brief summary of the Taskforce’s views on this question is provided below, it should be read alongside the complete discussion provided at section 13.3 of the report.

Royal Commission into abuse in Defence generally

The Taskforce does not recommend a general Royal Commission into abuse in Defence. Public discussion about this issue includes frequent references to what could be achieved through a Royal Commission. The Taskforce has considered each of these commonly articulated views and has concluded that a Royal Commission would be likely to send a strong message to those who experienced abuse that they are not alone and would also generate significant publicity, most likely leading to more individuals coming forward with complaints of abuse.

The Taskforce has also concluded that a Royal Commission might well elicit information that would cast a light on the cultural and systemic issues relating to the occurrence of abuse in Defence, as well as issues relating to Defence management of reports of abuse. However, given the various inquiries and reviews that have been conducted into Defence’s culture, a Royal Commission would be unlikely to add any significant new information or insight into these issues. Nonetheless, the Taskforce considers that a Royal Commission might be able to gather more detailed information about actual actions taken in response to abuse by particular individuals, including witnesses and those in positions of responsibility. A Royal Commission would also be able to ascertain from those in the chain of command or management, what they actually knew about abuse and what actions they took in response to reports of abuse.

One common argument in favour of a Royal Commission is that it would hold people to account. However, a Royal Commission’s role is not to make legally binding determinations of fact or law, but rather to consider systemic issues, and to report and make recommendations in relation to them. The Taskforce also notes that it would not necessarily be the case that allegations against those claimed to be abusers in Defence would be made public in the course of public hearings held by a Royal Commission or in any resulting administrative or disciplinary hearings within Defence.

A general Royal Commission into abuse in Defence, with no limitation as to time, place or person, would be an enormous, resource-intensive and extremely expensive exercise, likely to take some years.

Defence has been the subject of numerous inquiries and reviews about this – including the DLA Piper Review and the work of the Taskforce itself. This report provides a comprehensive review of the incidence of abuse in Defence across services establishments and locations, and identifies cultural and systemic factors which encouraged, allowed or facilitated it. This information supplements that already available and should inform cultural change in Defence. The Taskforce considers it unlikely that a general Royal Commission
would add significantly new information about systemic or cultural issues relating to abuse in Defence or the response of Defence to it.

The Taskforce accepts that in recent years, Defence has undoubtedly been making genuine and significant efforts to achieve cultural change and deal with the problem of abuse, especially sexual and serious physical assault. The Taskforce considers that Defence should be given the opportunity to continue the measures it has been taking to effect cultural change in this area. The Taskforce also proposes that further recommendations in relation to whether a general Royal Commission should be established be made prior to the conclusion of the Taskforce.

**Royal Commission into abuse at ADFA**

The Taskforce does recommend a Royal Commission into abuse at ADFA.

The question of whether a Royal Commission should be established into ADFA specifically is also considered at section 13.3(f) of the report. This section should be read alongside the Report on abuse at the Australian Defence Force Academy.

As the Report on abuse at the Australian Defence Force Academy makes clear:

- there was a disturbingly high incidence of sexual abuse of female cadets at ADFA during the 1990s;
- in a number of these cases, Defence did not take appropriate disciplinary, administrative or management action;
- in some cases, reports of sexual abuse were seriously mismanagement by Defence; and
- the Taskforce is aware of at least 13 individuals allegedly responsible for perpetrating sexual abuse at ADFA in the 1990s still serving in the Permanent Forces or Active Reserves, and an additional three individuals who have transferred to the Inactive/Standby Reserves.

The Taskforce considers that there is a very real risk that the ranks of officers in the ADF include a number of individuals who sexually assaulted or otherwise seriously abused other members of the ADF and include officers who acquiesced to that conduct.

Defence has known the identity of some of the people who experienced sexual assault at ADFA and some of the alleged abusers for many years. However, there are very likely a significant number of cases of which Defence is not aware.

The Taskforce appreciates that there are real difficulties for Defence in responding to allegations of sexual abuse at ADFA, as outlined both in section 13.3(f) of the report and also in the Report on abuse at the Australian Defence Force Academy. However, the fact remains that many of these allegations were not appropriately managed at the time they were made and there are constraints on Defence’s capacity to respond to them now. This means that a significant cluster of very serious allegations within Defence have never been thoroughly investigated and abusers have never been called to account.

The Taskforce considers that the only way of ensuring confidence that the allegations of very serious abuse at ADFA can be thoroughly and completely investigated, and appropriately dealt with, is by way of Royal Commission.

The Taskforce accordingly recommends that the Government establish a Royal Commission to inquire into, report and make recommendations in respect of allegations of abuse, and the management of reports of allegations of abuse, at ADFA from its inception to the present day.
What will happen to the Taskforce after 30 November 2014?

The release of this report coincides with the conclusion of the Hon Len Roberts-Smith RFD, QC’s term as Chair. The Chair was originally appointed for a 12-month term on 26 November 2012 and has since accepted two extensions.

It is clear that the Taskforce’s operations and programs will continue beyond 30 November 2014 in order to provide outcomes to complainants. The current Taskforce forecasting I that these ongoing operations and programs, including counselling and Restorative Engagement Conferences, will conclude on 30 June 2016.

At the time of drafting the report, the Government had not yet announced the arrangements to be made for the Taskforce beyond 30 November 2014. The Taskforce’s recommendation in relation to these and other ‘legacy issues’ is provided in the report at section 14.

In summary, the Taskforce proposes that responsibility for the Taskforce be transferred to the Defence Force Ombudsman (DFO). The Taskforce considers that the ongoing operations of the Taskforce until 30 June 2016 would most comfortably and appropriately sit within the DFO’s responsibilities, with little disruption or dislocation to existing administrative and staffing arrangements. Further, this proposal would ensure that the Taskforce is able to maintain its independence from Defence.

It is the Taskforce’s strong view that people who suffered abuse in Defence must be able to come forward with their complaints and have those complaints appropriately responded to. Although the work of the Taskforce is not yet complete, this report concludes with some preliminary observations in relation to whether Taskforce programs or other measures should continue beyond 30 June 2016.

The experience of the Taskforce indicates that those who have experienced abuse may take many years to reach a point where they can talk about the abuse they suffered. The Taskforce considers that the Government and Defence should develop and implement processes to enable people who suffered abuse in Defence and did not make a complaint to the Taskforce before the 31 May 2013 cut-off date to have their complaints appropriately responded to.

The Taskforce has put in place administrative arrangements to ensure that there are no delays to the delivery of outcomes as a result of these legacy issues.
Case studies

Male Junior Recruit, HMAS Leeuwin, early 1970s

I joined the Royal Australian Navy at the age of 16 at the Junior Recruit training school HMAS Leeuwin. It was the first time I had ever been away from my family home.

The first incident of sexual abuse occurred [in] the early 1970s. I had only been on HMAS Leeuwin for number of weeks. That morning, I was showering and when I was about to leave the shower room I was approached by a senior recruit who was on duty. This senior recruit questioned me as to why I did not shave. I was not as physically developed as others and had no facial hair. I said to the senior recruit that there was nothing to shave and I had never used a razor. The senior recruit started yelling at me “you will shave every morning, everyone has to shave every morning”.

This yelling drew the attention of a senior sailor, not a recruit, who took over the abuse. He said to me “seeing that there is nothing to shave on your face, I will have to shave you somewhere else”. He ordered me to strip and go to the drying room. He followed me in with either four or five other senior recruits. The senior recruits were from a division nine months older than my intake. I am not sure where they had come from as I had not seen them before.

He handed them a razor and some boot polish and ordered them to shave my pubic area using the boot polish as shaving cream. As he stood there he said with a laugh “there is not much to shave here either is there?”. The senior recruits held me down and one of them shaved me. I remember being very scared but I did not struggle too much as I kind of knew if I did, I would be worse off. When it was done, he told the others [to] leave and as they did, he pulled my testicles very hard and wiped the back of his hands which were covered in boot polish on my face. He then told me to go shower and clean up. I was then told that I had to report back to him after lights out that night.

I remember that after this incident, I recalled going over to the toilets and sitting there crying after speaking with my mother by phone as it was her birthday. This was the first time I had spoken to or had any contact with my parents since leaving home.

That night, I reported to the senior sailor as ordered that morning. He was there again with a number of the more senior junior recruits. He again ordered me to strip and go to the drying room. I left my clothes on the basin in the shower room.

I was held down by some of the senior recruits and then felt pain like I had never felt before. I was held face down on the ground and then either a broom handle or mop handle was inserted into my anus. The pain was unbearable and I remember screaming. Someone put their hand over my mouth to stifle my screams. I remember there was a fair bit of laughter going on from them.

I am not sure how long this incident lasted but I do not think it was a long time. The senior sailor then ordered the recruits out. As I was lying on the tiled floor, I remember him coming up close to me and whispering into my ear “you will learn to like it”. He pulled me up by my hair and then he … put his tongue in my ear and licked the side of my mouth and then left the room.

I recall going back to my bed and putting a towel in my mouth to stop the noise of me crying being heard by others.

The next day or the day after, I was approached by one of the senior recruits who had been involved in the night incident. He said he was sorry for his actions being involved. He said
that he had to do what he was told to do or he would have copped it as well. He told me to keep my nose clean and keep away from the senior sailor. He said “he is trouble and will make your life hell if you don’t watch out”. I think he really meant it and was truly sorry. Whilst you could not have a friendship with anyone from a more senior intake he did approach me a few times to ask if I was doing okay. It is strange but that meant a lot to me.

Similar incidents like this occurred three or more times over a period that I am not sure of. The same senior sailor was again the perpetrator on these occasions. I knew that whenever the senior sailor was on night duty, our block was in for it.

I was so frightened a couple of nights he was on duty that I hid and slept in the top of my wardrobe hiding from him until one night he found me in there. That was the worst night of all. Instead of using something like Vaseline, they used boot polish on the end of a mop handle as a form of lubricant which burnt and caused even more pain than the other times. I think there were only three senior recruits plus the senior sailor that night.

When it was over, I recalled the absolute agony I was in trying to clean the boot polish from my back side. I remember not sleeping that night so I could get up early to be first in the shower block so I could clean myself the best I could so that none of the other recruits would see the boot polish all over me. I was in a real bad way that morning.

There was also a lot of bleeding and I had to stuff toilet paper in my underpants to try and stop the bleeding. I had to do this for a number of days. The sores in my anus became infected and the pain would not go away. The bloodied sores continued to weep. I recall them being so bad that one day the pain got so unbearable that I had to dry them with a form of disinfectant I obtained from the cleaning room. I think that may have done more harm than good but I did not know what else to do as I was not confident to talk to anyone about it. The pain when I put the disinfectant on them was mind blowing and I recall I almost passed out.

There was nothing else I could do without anyone finding out. I was fearful that if anyone found out what I had been subjected to, things would get worse for me including getting bashed. There was no way you could “dob” someone in without being punished for it.

A few days later we were on the parade ground in our white shorts and white singlets for physical or sport instruction. It was a serious offence to have any marks on our white clothes, and would result in punishment. On this morning, I was unaware some of the blood from the sores and scabs on the inside and around my anus had seeped through my white shorts even though I still had toilet paper stuffed inside … my underpants. It was noticed by the instructor, he yelled abuse and called me to the side of the parade ground. He asked me what the blood stain was. I said that I had an infection and was bleeding. He told me to immediately report to the sick bay which I did.

When I went there, I was sent to a room and a nurse saw me. She told me to drop my pants and after examination, she said “I am not going to ask you what caused this”. She said I had two options, I could fill out a sick bay form and see the doctor or I could leave the sick bay which she said for my own sake would be the better thing to do. She said to me I should take care in the future. I also remember her saying “you have beautiful teeth and you would not want to have anything happen to them by speaking out”. She said to me it was a dischargeable offence if I was involved in any homosexual act and I would be sent home with a dishonourable discharge that would affect me for the rest of my life. She said that those types of things did not happen at Leeuwin or in the Navy. She gave me a tube of cream, I returned to my group and carried on the rest of the day as normal.

For long a period of time, I was not only scared of what was happening to me but also that I could be discharged dishonourably and have to tell my parents as to the reasons why. Things got so bad for me that I worked up the courage to go to confession with the Navy Chaplain and told him what had been happening to me. He told me I had done nothing wrong and I was not to blame myself. He was caring and in fact some time later he found a sponsor family for me. If you had a sponsor family you could spend a Saturday night when
you had shore leave with them rather than returning to the base. To have sponsors was one of the best things you could have during your time at Leeuwin.

I am not sure if it was the next weekend or weekend later, I had a day of shore leave. I do not remember how I came up with the idea but when I went ashore, I found a public hospital in Fremantle and went there as I was still in pain with sores and infection. I do not remember much but I remember being questioned as to why I had gone to that hospital and not to the Navy Hospital. I was still in uniform because as a recruit at Leeuwin, you did not have civilian clothes to wear. I think I gave a false name at the hospital and they prescribed me some form of antibiotic. I could have given my correct name but am not sure. The antibiotics I received from the hospital in Fremantle worked and after a time, the sores healed.

After the day of being sent to the sick bay from the parade ground, that form of abuse by the senior sailor never happened again. I look back and think that somehow [this was because] he found out that I was sent to the sick bay and because I did not “dob” him in. It was the standard unwritten rule that you do not “dob” on anyone for any reason at Leeuwin, he somehow saw me in a different light.

Some months later, for some reason I had a meeting with a welfare/social worker. It must have been part of the routine where every junior recruit had a meeting with her. During the meeting she said something like, “there is something disturbing you, do you want to tell me what it is?”. I told her what happened to me without fully going into the details of the mop handle during those early weeks at Leeuwin. She said to me not to take it personally it was just part of the toughening up training that will serve you well later in your Navy life.

Male Recruit, ARTC Kapooka, late 1980s

[In the late 1980s] I enlisted in the Australian Regular Army as a recruit. I was 17 years of age. …

I was subjected to assault, bastardisation, sexual harassment, harassment, bullying and other forms of unacceptable behaviour whilst posted to Kapooka. The abuse was carried out by one Corporal, a Platoon Sergeant, an Anglican Vicar and also by my fellow recruits.

Within the first few days of arriving at Kapooka, I was made to strip naked, while standing on a table in front of several others (including a female). I was then asked to perform sexually explicit actions, including bending over to show my anus and playing with my genitals, while they laughed and made degrading and humiliating comments about my body and genitals, the length of my penis and by body hair. …

During my time at Kapooka, I was constantly threatened with violence, and even with death. The worst death threat made to me was when [the Corporal] told me that he could kill me and make it look like an accident. He used examples, such as drowning me in a large pond while on exercise, or having me “accidentally” shot.

I was frequently bullied by [the Corporal], about my lack of strength and ability. He reminded me often that I was the worst recruit in the platoon. He seemed to enjoy punishing my section, and telling the other recruits that it was my fault.

I was threatened with violence for minor indiscretions, such as tying my bootlaces the wrong way. I would then be punished by being made to perform tasks. These included being made to do push ups while [the Corporal] read adult magazines, or being made to make a bed dozens of times for [the Corporal] to then tear apart. … I was also told that I would be beaten if I went to the toilet at night. …

I was threatened with violence by all the Corporals with the platoon, as well as by the Sergeant and several recruits. After [the Corporal] had commenced his bullying of me, the other recruits began to join in with him, making fun at my expense. I was constantly called a cunt, moron and lazy prick. … When I dared to approach another Corporal and tell him that
[the Corporal] was being unfair, he promptly passed this on to [the Corporal], who told me that he would kill me if I went behind his back again.

[The Corporal] physically assaulted me on three occasions. On the first, he tipped me out of bed. This was because I had apparently not made it properly. There were no witnesses to this. On the second, he forced my hand into boiling water. This was because I had dropped a knife into the washing tub. [Another recruit] was a witness to this. On the third occasion, he forced me to lie on the ground and shout derogatory things about myself, while he stood over me with his foot on my neck.

A fellow recruit advised me to allow other recruits to assault me by way of gang bashing. This was so they would then have got all their ill feelings out of their systems and would supposedly treat me better afterwards. A date for the bashing was arranged, but I got myself put in hospital to avoid it. …

[The Corporal] seemed to enjoy watching me fail and then making fun of me. On one occasion, when I could not climb a length of rope, he pushed me off the rope, into the sand and told the other recruits that I was a waste of space. The other recruits laughed. [The Corporal] also ordered me to run the rest of the platoon off their feet. This caused several injuries, which I then suffered the blame for.

[The Corporal] often made fun of me in a sexual way, such as calling me a “compulsive wanker”. I was exposed to pornographic material by other recruits, and when I told [the Corporal], he told me to grow up. Sexual talk within the barracks was almost constant. …

It seemed that no-one in the platoon ever spoke, everyone screamed, yelled and shouted. Rarely was my actual name used; I was called cunt, faggot, fuckhead or slug.

On one occasion, I had hurt my back. The doctor … gave me a handful of pills and told me to swallow them. When I asked what they were, he ordered me to take them. After swallowing them I passed out and woke up in bed completely naked. I was frightened that perhaps I was going to be poisoned or assaulted or operated on without my consent.

[The Corporal] constantly berated me for going to [the doctor], making me feel as if I was doing the wrong thing by being ill.

I tried seeking help from [the Chaplain]. When I told him how much I was suffering, he rubbed my leg and said that he would “help me if I helped him”. I took this to mean that he would help me if I performed some sort of sexual favour for him.

I escaped the Army in the only way I could think of, by going AWOL. In total I served for less than two months. …

Since my time in the Army, I have suffered regular bouts of depression, anxiety, alcoholism and feelings of worthlessness. I have considered suicide. I believe the fear I was in during that time crippled my ability to live a normal life. I believed during that period that I would be murdered, and the feelings of anxiety, mistrust and anger have stayed with me always. It has affected my ability to have normal relationships, due to a deep seated fear. …

I can only think of the outrage society and media would bring forth if a 17 year old, working somewhere like McDonalds or Coles, was forced to go through what I did, but it seems that because I was a 17 year old in the Army it doesn’t count. …

As a result of the abuse I suffered, I have developed psychiatric conditions, including Depression, Anxiety, a Social Disorder and Alcoholism. I have required medical treatment and medication for my conditions. … I feel that one of the reasons the abuse had such a significant impact on me was my age at the time (17).

I feel that the way the Army treated me has had a permanent and lasting effect on my mind and emotions, and that this has ruined my life.
Female Air Force member, [Locations redacted], 1990s

My service in the Royal Australian Air Force was throughout the 1990s. …

While on [a course], I met [another girl in training]. We instantly became friends. One night she came into my room crying. She told me that she had been raped by a fellow colleague [an Aircraftman]. She told me this straight after it had happened. [The Aircraftman] was on a different course to us. [The Aircraftman’s] father was the Warrant Officer Disciplinary at the base.

[The other girl on training] and I reported the incident the following morning. We approached our course Sergeant and advised her of what had happened. The Sergeant told the Commanding Officer who informed the Officer Commanding. We were then taken to the Officer Commanding of the base to report the incident. The RAAF police were also present.

I was informed by the Officer Commanding and the RAAF Police that [the other girl on training] was lying about her assault. She was subsequently discharged from RAAF. I advised the Officer Commanding that I believed [she] was telling the truth. I was informed that if I continued to believe [the other girl on training’s] assault and that if I mentioned it to anyone I would be discharged also. I therefore didn’t speak of the incident and continued with my training.

Two weeks later I was sleeping in my quarters on base when there was a knock on the door. [The same Aircraftman] was shouting out that he needed to talk to me urgently. It was approximately 1.00am. When I opened the door, [the Aircraftman] and another male had pushed their way through the door and pushed me onto my bed. I was struggling as they put their hands over my mouth so I couldn’t scream. I couldn’t get away. [The Aircraftman] penetrated his penis into my vagina and the other male put his penis into my mouth. I struggled as much as I could to get away but I couldn’t. I couldn’t even scream. It felt like hours had passed but it was only a matter of minutes that this incident went on for. I remember crying and looking around the room and praying for it to stop. I was so scared and so worried that they would hurt me. I was wishing I was dead.

A short time had passed when [a friend] walked past my room. The door was still open at this point. She came through the door to see what was happening and [the Aircraftman] and the other male ran out of the room. At this time I still had no pants on. …

I was so worried I would get kicked out of the Air Force if I spoke about what had happened as [the other girl on training] had been discharged for reporting her assault involving [the Aircraftman]. I feared that I too would get kicked out of the Air Force if I reported the incident against [the Aircraftman]. …

[Later that year] I was posted to [another base] to complete my service in stewarding. My first job was at the Officer’s Mess. …

There was a [Squadron Leader] who on many occasions would threaten me if I didn’t dance with him or let him kiss me. He said he would have me charged if I didn’t do as he asked. As much as I disliked dancing with him and doing as he asked, I was really worried he would pull through with his threats and have me charged with something. …

Shortly after, I was sent on a bush exercise. … The exercise lasted a week. On the last night of the exercise we were allowed to have two alcoholic drinks. As I had a headache and was not feeling well, I went to my tent early while everyone else was in the main tent drinking. I awoke to someone groping me and dragging me out the back of my tent. I struggled and screamed and the person who was dragging me ran off into the bushes somewhere. My Sergeant and a few other people came running to me. My Sergeant tried to calm me down and sent a few guys to try and find the guy in the bushes. The guys had found the person who attacked me and brought him back. The person who attacked me was one of the members on exercise with us. The Sergeant then called a “Kangaroo Court”. The Sergeant
acted as a judge and decided that the person was guilty. The punishment was a bashing from one of the members on our exercise. He was beaten up. I was told to “shut my mouth” and that if I did open my mouth that nobody would believe me anyway. So again, I did not speak out about what had happened to me. …

A year later, I was posted to [another base]. … Prior to the commencement of my shift, I was changing into my bar uniform. After I got changed I sat in the change room, looked up and saw a video camera. I followed the leads and found that the leads attached to a video recorder above the keg room. It was set on record. I felt sick. …

Within days there were rumours around the mess about the camera. Members of the Sergeant’s Mess approached me making comments about me being on video camera changing. I could not take all of the accusations going around so I sought legal advice from the base legal officer. I was told to be quiet and drop the subject. …

No one apologised or said that it was wrong that the camera was in the room. No one accepted responsibility. Instead what started to happen was that excuses were made as to why the camera had been there. … I cannot describe how dreadful and alone I felt as a result of the behaviour by Command. All they needed to say was sorry and to provide me with support. I believe that would have made a lot of difference to me.

I felt humiliated and victimised. People began to talk about the video camera and I became known as the girl on the video. As I stayed on the job after the incident I was also subjected to comments such as “I’ll have a Scotch and Coke and a copy of that tape”. I would constantly feel disgusted, embarrassed and victimised. I felt like I was being held responsible for being seen on camera. … From this point forward, people within the RAAF treated me differently and I felt like they were blaming me for speaking out and their response was to get rid of me. …

My life was made hell for speaking out. For instance, I was removed from my position in the Mess and I was placed on cleaning duties where I had to make 50 beds per day, clean numerous toilets and do dishes during meal times. … This job was normally done on rotation but I was made to do it for approximately one year. I was also required to work nights as a Porter in the Officer’s Mess. This was after I told my Flight Sergeant that I was scared of working on my own around drunken men due to previous assaults. I believe to this day I was being punished for speaking out about the camera in the change room.

After approximately a year and a half of being punished I couldn’t take it anymore. I applied for a discharge. My discharge was approved and I left the service. …

Since this day I have not been able to block the assault at all. … I was diagnosed with depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and anxiety. I am on anti-depressants and sedatives so I can sleep and not wake up with nightmares. … Even though I am medicated, I still feel anxious whenever I have to be out shopping or doing other things alone. I get horrible panic attacks when I go out in public places alone. …

I still look back to my time at the RAAF and ask myself if it was all my fault and that maybe I did something to deserve it. I feel sick in the stomach whenever I think about it.