

[16/01/02 Extract CN's Message to RAN Personnel re: media report January 2002 - Navy's Reputation](#)

1. At ref A. I provided you with information about the current media attention concerning the behaviour of navy people, and the actions I am taking regarding these issues. This includes two separate investigations into alleged incidents at Diego Garcia and Christmas Island late last year. When I have all the facts associated with these incidents I will be in a position to decide what further action is necessary.

2. It was disappointing to see an article published in the Canberra Times on 15JAN02 which made repugnant inferences about all of us who serve in the Royal Australian Navy. I do not wish to give the article any credibility by reprinting it all for you. Suffice to say that comparisons with Nazi Germany, Gilbert and Sullivan's Pirates Of Penzance, William Golding's Lord Of The Flies, and accusations of quote 'Defence Chiefs criminal and negligent inability to control sexual violence' unquote, have offended us all.

3. Having inquiries and taking action regarding any form of unacceptable behaviour is something the entire senior leadership of navy is committed to. However, we will not allow our individual or collective reputation, and the professional ability of navy people to be trialled by the media. A/CDF and I have therefore sent the following letter to the Editor of The Canberra Times.

"On 15 January you published an opinion piece about unacceptable behaviour in the Australian Defence Force. The article is repugnant to those who seek balance in critical discussion of matters touching the reputation of the women and men serving and those who have served in the Australian Defence Force.

The article takes the recent alleged unacceptable behaviour of a small number of defence people, and implies that defence and navy senior leadership not only tolerates but tacitly encourages such behaviour.

Any form of unacceptable behaviour is a serious matter. Defence has a policy of zero tolerance to all forms of harassment and other inappropriate behaviour, and no one in Defence has any excuse for not understanding this.

It is the subject of an unrelenting Defence effort to eradicate such behaviour. The defence senior leadership is united in its resolve to ensure it is dealt with effectively.

All Defence people receive ongoing training and education on required standards of behaviour, which are clearly laid out in instructions at all levels, and supported by arrangements such as a defence wide network of equity advisers.

Investigations and legal proceedings have dealt with specific incidents and it is defence policy to reform any elements of its culture that encourage or condone such behaviour. If allegations of unacceptable behaviour are made it is vital that due process is followed. Arbitrary punishment is unjust and we will not condone it. The recent allegations are being investigated and, if the evidence admits, those responsible will be dealt with under law.

The article contains distasteful inferences which we suggest would defy the common-sense of a fair minded reader. They are highly offensive to the highly trained, professional and dedicated men and women people of the navy as well as to the other members of the Australian Defence Force who serve their country.

Navy's people demonstrate daily their personal qualities in operations such as those to counter terrorism, implement government policy on a broad range of maritime issues, and to keep the peace in East Timor, Bougainville and the Solomons. This work is hard, can be dangerous and is performed extraordinarily well under very difficult conditions - in the tradition of over 100 years of Australian Navy service to Australia.

Defence is vigorous in ensuring its people work in an environment that is free from all forms of harassment. This effort continues unabated.

Neither we, nor the other Service Chiefs and Secretary of the department will tolerate unacceptable behaviour and defence personnel know this. Nor will we allow such material as you have published to go unanswered.

The welfare and conduct of Australian service men and women is rightly a matter of public interest. We welcome constructive criticism and debate on these matters. The article has demeaned our people and has added nothing to the debate."

4. The letter above will also be published in Navy News. Make no mistake; unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated. However I thought it important that you understand that your leadership does not intend to let illinformed comment belittle the great work and outstanding professional approach I see demonstrated every day by the men and women who serve their country well in our navy.

Released by D.J Shackleton VADM, RAN CN

© Commonwealth of Australia 2000