

Restorative Engagement: A New Approach

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Keynote Address

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Introduction

*‘We are at our best when we pause and walk in the shoes of others and reflect on their experiences acknowledging their pain and then commit to right that wrong’.*²

There is much to talk about concerning the Restorative Engagement Program (**‘Program’**) of the Defence Abuse Response Taskforce (**‘Taskforce’** or **‘the DART’**). This article will focus on the evolution of the Program, the principles which underpin it, the conduct of the Restorative Engagement Conferences themselves and the results to date. Other aspects of the Program will also be referred to in terms of material published by the Taskforce.

The establishment of the Taskforce was announced by the then Minister for Defence, the Hon. Stephen Smith MP, on 26 November 2012 in response to a report following a review by the law firm DLA Piper of allegations of abuse in the Australian Defence Force and the Department of Defence (collectively, **‘Defence’**). Details of the circumstances leading up to it, the Taskforce’s Terms of Reference and its progress since then, are contained in quarterly reports to the Minister for Defence and to the Attorney-General tabled in the Federal Parliament.³ They are on the Taskforce website.⁴

The starting point for the Program was the announcement by the Minister for Defence on 26 November 2012 that one of the specific outcomes which would be available to victims of abuse within Defence⁵

1 The Honourable Len Roberts-Smith RFD, QC, is a former Justice of the Supreme Court of Western Australia and Court of Appeal Judge. He also served as Judge Advocate General of the Australian Defence Force between 2002 and 2007, with the rank of Major General.

2 The Hon Stuart Robert MP, Federal Member for Fadden, Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Technology and Personnel, ‘Apology to people subjected to sexual or other forms of abuse in Defence’ (Speech delivered to Parliament, Canberra, 26 November 2012).

3 To date, six Interim Reports have been tabled.

4 Defence Abuse Response Taskforce, *Interim Reports*, (3 May 2014) <<http://www.defenceabusereponse.gov.au/>> .

5 The term ‘Defence’ refers to the Department of Defence.

would be a 'Restorative Justice' process.⁶ However, what that meant was not explained. The promised outcome had its genesis in a recommendation by DLA Piper that the Government's response should include a scheme of restorative justice whereby victims of abuse could meet with the persons who perpetrated the abuse on them. Realistically, it was clear that was never a practicable prospect. It was left to the Taskforce to construct a model that would work in this unique context. Consideration of what that might realistically be, extended over several months. It is important to understand the context. This was not to be another inquiry to make general recommendations. The primary purpose of the Taskforce was to assess specific complaints of sexual and other forms of abuse by Defence personnel made prior to 11 April 2011 and, in close consultation with those complainants, determine appropriate actions in response to those complaints.⁷

By that time, the Taskforce had received many hundreds of complaints of abuse and was anticipating the eventual number would exceed 2000.⁸ The notion of 'restorative justice' did not seem to sit well in the Taskforce environment for a number of reasons, including:

- The Taskforce has no investigative powers and was not to conduct hearings nor make determinations of fact or law.
- In accepting allegations of abuse as sufficiently cogent to qualify for the outcomes the Taskforce could make available, it was to apply a novel standard, that of 'plausibility'.⁹ An allegation would be accepted as true if it was plausible.¹⁰
- The Taskforce had nothing to do with the Justice System – it was not part of any court or tribunal process and had nothing to do with sentencing offenders (it was not even to have any dealings with alleged offenders or abusers).¹¹
- Many of the complaints of abuse made to the Taskforce involved allegations of serious sexual assaults, up to and including gang rape. 'Restorative Justice' programs have usually been confined to property

6 The other outcomes to be provided by the Taskforce were to include:

- a referral to counselling under a nationwide Defence Abuse Counselling Program;
- a Reparation Payment of up to \$50,000 under a Defence Abuse Reparation Scheme;
- a referral of appropriate matters to police or military justice authorities for formal criminal investigation and assessment for prosecution; and
- referral to the Chief of the Defence Force for administrative or disciplinary action.

7 Defence Abuse Response Taskforce, *Terms of Reference* (26 November 2012), (i) and (iii) <<http://www.defenceabusereponse.gov.au/Aboutus>>.

8 The DLA Piper Review received complaints from approximately 770 complainants by 31 May 2013 (the cut-off date for receiving new complaints) the Taskforce had received approximately 2400 complaints, many raising multiple allegations of abuse.

9 This was not a standard of proof known to nor which had any application in law.

10 The definition of 'plausible' applied by the Taskforce is 'having the appearance of reasonableness'. In making its assessment whether an allegation of abuse is plausible, the Taskforce does not merely accept the unsubstantiated allegation:

- complaints to the Taskforce are required to be verified by statutory declaration;
- all material (including medical reports or other documentation) provided by the complainant, together with service, medical or disciplinary records obtained from Defence is reviewed;
- approximately 20% of allegations are rejected following assessment.

11 Rob Hulls, 'Adversarial Justice: Pure Gold or Fool's Gold?' (2013), (Paper presented at Broadening Restorative Perspectives: An International Conference, Victoria, 18 June 2013) 8.

or minor offences and sexual or other serious assaults are generally excluded from them. Beyond these considerations, many complainants¹² had never told anyone about the abuse they suffered, before coming to DLA Piper or the Taskforce.

- Most complainants were no longer interested in seeing their abuser brought to account; their concern was with Defence for allowing the abuse to occur and not supporting them when it did. What almost all of them said they wanted was to have their personal account of abuse listened to by Defence, accepted as true and be given acknowledgement that the abuse was wrong and that it should not have happened. They wanted this so that such things would not happen to others.

A final factor here was the response of the Chiefs of the Army, Navy and Air Force to meetings which they had separately with women members of the ADF who had been sexually assaulted at the Australian Defence Force Academy ('ADFA'). The meetings had been arranged by Ms Elizabeth Broderick, the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, in the course of her Review on behalf of the Australian Human Rights Commission into the Treatment of Women in the ADF.¹³ Each of those meetings brought together a woman who had suffered sexual abuse at ADFA, with a Service Chief, who listened to her personal account of what had happened and the consequences of that for her. These were 'one-off' meetings, for the purpose of enlivening the personal awareness of the Service Chiefs.

The meetings had a profound impact on the Service Chiefs, one of them later describing it publicly as probably the most transformative experience of his life.¹⁴ These responses suggested to us that properly facilitated conferences between Taskforce complainants and senior Defence Representatives could serve to meet two of the purposes of the Taskforce – giving some appropriate resolution to individual complainants; and driving cultural change within Defence.

Solution – The Program

The essential features of the Program had been substantially developed by July 2013. The 'Restorative Engagement Program Framework' ('**Framework**') was signed on 23 July 2013.¹⁵ The Framework outlines the background, rationale, principles and processes that informed the development of the Program. It is underpinned by the best practice principles and values of restorative practice, conciliation and mediation. These notably include 'to do no further harm', confidentiality, safety and privacy.

The Program provides an opportunity for those who have made plausible allegations of abuse in Defence to take part in a restorative process that allows their personal account of abuse to be heard, acknowledged

12 The Taskforce uses the term 'complainant' to describe victims of abuse who have complained to it about abuse in Defence because that is consistent with its Terms of Reference; many victims of abuse in Defence have not come forward even now; and many victims do not see themselves as 'victims' but as 'survivors'.

13 Australian Human Rights Commission, *Report on the Review into the Treatment of Women at the Australian Defence Force Academy: Phase 1 of the Review into the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force, Phase 1 Report (2011) and Australian Human Rights Commission, Review into the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force, Phase 2 Report (2012)*.

14 Lieutenant General David Morrison, AO, Chief of Army.

15 Defence Abuse Response Taskforce, *Third Interim Report to the Attorney-General and Minister for Defence*, Report (2013) Appendix F. Amended version in Defence Abuse Response Taskforce, *Fourth Interim Report to the Attorney-General and Minister for Defence*, Report (2013) Appendix F.

and responded to by a senior representative of Defence. It is a means of directly addressing the harm, and the consequences of it to complainants.

The Program was developed in consultation with Defence and has the full support of the Chief of the Australian Defence Force (CDF), the Secretary of the Department of Defence (SECDEF) and the Chiefs of Army, Navy and Air Force. A Restorative Engagement Program Protocol was signed by the Chair of the Taskforce, CDF and SECDEF in late 2013.¹⁶

In October 2013 CDF and SECDEF issued a Joint Directive across the whole of the ADF and Department of Defence, concerning Defence participation in the Program, (the **CFD/SECDEF Joint Directive**).¹⁷

Overview of the Program

This section will provide a broad overview of the components and distinguishing characteristics of the Program. It is necessary first to understand how the Program sits within the work of the Taskforce.

The primary functional or operational groups within the Taskforce organisation are structured around the outcomes delivered. For example referral of cases to civilian police agencies for possible criminal investigation is done by the Crime Group, which consists of former or still-serving police officers on secondment. Recommendations to the independent Reparation Payments Assessor are made by the Reparations Group, which consists of lawyers and other staff with experience in criminal injuries or other compensation regimes.

The Taskforce made a decision at the outset that complainants would not be 'passed around' the Taskforce, but each would have a single point of contact. That work is done by the Complainant Support Group (CSG) which consists of staff with experience in counselling and victim support. Initial contact with complainants is with the Complainant Liaison Team in CSG; once their complaint is assessed by the Assessment Group as within the Taskforce Terms of Reference and plausible, complainants are allocated a Case Coordinator in the CSG Case Coordination Team. That person will be the complainant's personal contact throughout their time with the Taskforce.

Typically, in the time leading up to a referral to the Program, the Case Coordinator will have canvassed a number of things with the complainant. They will include an explanation of the purpose of Restorative Engagement Conferences; the complainant's capacity to present their story and needs in a conference in a way that is safe for them; clarifying with the complainant what they wish to achieve; managing the complainant's expectations (unrealistic expectations may be counterproductive) and whether participation in a conference might cause the complainant further harm.

The importance of this for the Program, is that by the time a complainant is referred to the Restorative Engagement Group for a Restorative Engagement Conference, he or she will have had the personal support of, and contact with, their Case Coordinator, for weeks if not months. The complainant may even have been referred to an external contracted service provider for counselling.

16 Defence Abuse Response Taskforce, *Fourth Interim Report to the Attorney-General and Minister for Defence* (2013) Appendix E.

17 Ibid Appendix C.

As previously mentioned, decisions on Reparation Payments are made by an independent Reparation Payments Assessor, Ms Robyn Kruk, AM, who was appointed by the Minister for Defence on 30 May 2013.

Restorative Engagement Conferences therefore do not involve any discussion about Reparation Payments – although the payments are made by the Taskforce out of the Defence budget, those decisions are made outside and independently of Defence.

Preliminary Issues

There were some initial issues that had to be worked around. First was the concern that participation in a Restorative Engagement Conference might preclude a complainant taking legal action against Defence (or the Commonwealth) or otherwise talking about the abuse. That concern was dealt with from the outset by a decision that there would be no requirement on a complainant to waive their legal rights nor to sign any confidentiality agreement that would prevent them talking about the abuse they suffered.

Next was a concern by Defence and the Commonwealth that apologies to individual complainants might subsequently be sought to be relied on in legal proceedings, as admissions of liability.

Complainants in the Program undertake that they will not seek to use any apology extended to them by the Defence Representative, as an admission of liability. Participants are not to make or keep notes of what occurs in a conference. The only record is kept by the facilitator. Participants are required to sign an agreement to keep what happens in a conference confidential. Given these assurances, Defence Representatives are able to take part and respond freely to the complainants' accounts.

One other issue was initially seen as problematic. Defence personnel are subject to legally binding directives imposing mandatory reporting requirements especially about alleged sexual offences and unacceptable behaviour. Generally if they become aware of such an allegation they are obliged to report it or take other appropriate action.¹⁸

The concern was that Defence Representatives, to whom a complainant disclosed an account of abuse not previously known to Defence, would be obligated to report it, irrespective of the wishes of the complainant. This concern was obviated by the CDF/SECDEF Joint Directive, Clause 41 of which directs that:

*'...existing requirements in Defence Instructions (DI), Directives, and policies or manuals which would undermine the intent of the Program do not apply to Defence Representatives...'*¹⁹

18 Department of Defence, *Defence Instructions (General)* ADMIN 45-2, 'The Reporting and Managing of notifiable incidents' 26 March 2010; Department of Defence, *Defence Instructions (General)* ADMIN 67-2, 'Quick Assessments' 7 August 2007; Department of Defence, *Defence Instructions (General)* PERS 35-3 'Management and Reporting of Unacceptable Behaviour' 28 June 2009; and Department of Defence, *Defence Instructions (General)* PERS 35-4, 'Reporting and Management of Sexual Misconduct Including Sexual Offences' 11 February 2004.

19 Above n 17, Appendix C.

The Program is predicated on the application of trauma informed care principles. These are safety (physical and emotional); trustworthiness (clarity, consistency and interpersonal boundaries); choice (maximising the complainant's choice and control); collaboration (maximising collaboration and sharing of power) and empowerment (self-determination by the complainant).

It is critical that complainants be consulted about their wishes and offered as much choice as possible.

Implementation

The Program is being delivered in two stages – Phase 1 was conducted in November and December 2013. It involved the most senior Defence Leaders, including CDF, the Vice Chief of the Defence Force and the Chiefs of Army, Navy and Air Force. Between them, they personally took part in 14 conferences. An evaluation was done and that has informed the further development of the Program for Phase 2, which is currently under way.

The Taskforce is contracting experienced facilitators for Phase 2. They undergo an assessment and workshop qualifying them for accreditation to take part in the Program. It is anticipated that the program will involve more than 200 senior Defence representatives ranging from 3 star (Lieutenant General) equivalent to Colonel equivalent, from Army, Navy, Air Force and the Public Service.

Each must be personally approved by their Service Chief or SECDEF, as the case may be.

Defence personnel approved to take part in the Program must attend a one day Defence Representative Preparation Session conducted jointly by the Taskforce and Defence.²⁰ Their names then go into a pool from which Defence can nominate representatives for particular conferences when requested by the Taskforce. Defence nominates three names. The Taskforce (through a Case Coordinator) consults with the complainant on which Defence Representative is to be selected. It is for the complainant to choose whether or not the Defence Representative will wear uniform; the default position is that they will, because they are representing Defence.

The Taskforce designates a facilitator for the conference and makes a recommendation to the Chair (or his delegate) that approval be given for the conference to proceed. Logistical and administrative arrangements for the conference are made by the Taskforce Restorative Engagement Group and the Defence Liaison Unit, in conjunction with Defence. The facilitator is required to (separately) prepare the complainant (and their support person if they choose to have one) and the Taskforce Defence Representative at least a week before the conference.

Many complainants to date have chosen to have a support person with them. They are encouraged to choose a support person who has a personal relationship with them and knows about the abuse and its impact and ongoing implications for them. The Taskforce have found that a support person may often be someone who has only recently been told by the complainant of the abuse they suffered – in some instances after the complainant has come to the Taskforce. The Taskforce are very conscious that in these circumstances the support person him or herself may be experiencing vicarious trauma or high emotion. This of course must be sensitively managed.

20 To date, some 10 Preparation Sessions have been conducted at various locations around Australia. Approximately 160 Defence Representatives have qualified for the pool, thus far.

In the experience of the Taskforce, support persons enhance the process by providing emotional, physical and practical support to complainants before, during and after the conference. They are not there in an advocacy role, but may speak and frequently bring another dimension to the consequences of the abuse.

To summarise, critical features of the conference are that:

- The underlying principle is ‘do no further harm’.
- The complainant’s account of the abuse and the harm experienced is accepted and is not in dispute.
- The Defence Representative is a true representative – he or she is authorised by the CDF or SECDEF to speak on behalf of Defence.
- Defence accepts that the abuse was wrong, and that they have a responsibility to respond (i.e., Defence is accountable).
- The focus is on the complainant’s needs – the primary aim is to provide a beneficial experience for the complainant.
- The conference is the outcome (although the complainant and Defence Representative may agree on further action to be taken by Defence).
- The complainant is not required to waive their right to take any legal or other action.
- There is no discussion about money.
- The complainant is not required to sign any confidentiality agreement which would prevent them talking about the abuse they suffered.
- Confidentiality of the complainant is absolute.
- What occurs in the conference itself is confidential to those present, and the Taskforce.

Participation in a Restorative Engagement Conference can be an emotional experience. The Program requires the facilitators to debrief the complainant immediately after the conference and to contact them again 48 hours later to check on their emotional or psychological health. The Case Coordinator will also contact the complainant after the conference and can arrange counselling if required.

The Program is operating in a very complex environment – and a challenging one, particularly for Defence. For many different reasons, including (but not limited to): complainants not reporting the alleged abuse at the time nor for years afterwards; minimising descriptions of the abuse when it was reported; lack of forensic evidence; lack of witnesses; credibility issues because of psychological illness, alcohol or drug addiction (often the result of the abuse itself) and the absence of documentation, many if not most of the complainants to the Taskforce would have no prospect of having their allegations accepted as true in any formal administrative investigation or judicial process. The application of legal standards of proof (‘the balance of probabilities’ or ‘beyond reasonable doubt’) with the complainant having the onus of proving the truth of their allegation, would be an insurmountable obstacle.

It was against this background that the Taskforce is required to accept an allegation of abuse as true, if satisfied on all the material available, that it is plausible. To put that another way, what it requires is that the person making the assessment and applying the standard of ‘plausibility’, is brought to an actual belief that the allegation is true. A complainant is not eligible for any outcome from the Taskforce (including Restorative Engagement) unless their allegation of abuse has been assessed as within scope of its Terms of Reference and plausible. The Defence Representative goes into a Restorative Engagement

Conference accepting the truth of the allegation because it has been assessed by the Taskforce as plausible.

That assessment, of course, is not in any way a legal finding or determination. The Taskforce is not a statutory body, certainly not a judicial or administrative tribunal and nor does it have any investigative powers. It is a Ministerial instrument under the Executive power of the Commonwealth.²¹

This circumstance immediately raises the potential for apparently conflicting outcomes from different processes within Defence. For example, Defence (through the Defence Representative) accepts an allegation of abuse as true for the purposes of the Taskforce and the Restorative Engagement Program. It may be that the same allegation becomes the subject of criminal investigation²² – which may not even result in a prosecution, because the evidence cannot satisfy the standard of proof beyond reasonable doubt; or a prosecution may result in an acquittal, for the same reason. Likewise, the allegation may be the subject of an administrative inquiry²³ but fail to be accepted because the evidence available does not satisfy the inquiry that on the balance of probabilities it is true.

In short, whilst Defence accepts for the purposes of the Taskforce and the Restorative Engagement Program that an allegation of abuse is true, that may not be the case under different administrative or legal processes within Defence which must be conducted in accordance with the legal principles and rules which apply to them.

Whilst the reasons for these potentially different outcomes are well-established and rational, complainants who have success in one context do not necessarily readily understand why the same allegation is not then accepted in another context in which different standards and legal rules apply. Of course, that situation is not novel to Defence and the Taskforce – it is not uncommon for findings to be made in a civil or administrative law ('balance of probabilities') forum which are rejected in a criminal law ('proof beyond reasonable doubt') forum.²⁴

Insights

As the Taskforce moved through the experience of Phase 1 and the early part of Phase 2 conferences, some interesting insights began to emerge. The following are not exhaustive, but are indicative:

- **The conference is the outcome.** This was always the intent of the Program, but the examples set out below gave us a greater appreciation of how that was so for complainants.
- **Failed by their Service.** The fundamental driver for many, if not most complainants, is that their Service (Army, Navy or Air Force) had an obligation to look after them, and failed in that obligation by allowing the abuse to happen and treating them badly afterwards. They see the ADF (or more particularly their Service) as their 'family' and as having betrayed them. An example of this is provided by Private Veronica Wadley, quoted in the *Weekend Australian Magazine*:

21 *Australian Constitution* s 61.

22 By Defence, under the *Defence Force Discipline Act 1982* (Cth) or by a civilian police agency.

23 Under the *Defence (Inquiry) Regulations 1985* (Cth).

24 Findings by Royal Commissions are a classic example of this.

'It's not the rape' she says... 'it hurts, yes, but I can let that go. It's how the Army treated me that killed me the most. They were my family. We were supposed to look out for each other, to watch each other's backs. But when push came to shove, they showed me the door. They just broke my heart'.²⁵

- **Fractured Relationship.** Complainants invariably say that they joined the ADF because they aspired to become part of an organisation they admired and respected and wanted to serve their country. The abuse they suffered not only ruined their lives, but took those things away from them. Their separation from, or rejection by the ADF is a cause of lifelong emotional pain and distress. Complainants often want the relationship to be restored and for them to be able to see themselves (and others see them) as part of the ADF. The Defence Representative is able to give them that, simply by being there, listening to them, accepting their account and its consequences and acknowledging that it was wrong and that Defence had failed them.
- **Harm is always individual.** Everyone is different. The question is not 'How would I have responded to that' but 'What impact did that in fact have on this person?' It is the harm done to the particular individual with which we are concerned. To the extent the conferences enable Defence Representatives to develop a personal appreciation of this, they contribute to changing culture within Defence.
- **Traumatic harm not dependant on nature of trauma.** The harm spoken of by complainants tends to be similar in nature and degree, irrespective of the nature of the abuse. Severe workplace bullying may cause similar traumatic symptoms in a complainant as, for example, a particularly serious sexual assault.
- **Complainant's perception frozen in time.** A complainant commonly sees things for years afterwards as they were at the time of the trauma (abuse). In Restorative Engagement Conferences this can present as a fixed belief that 'nothing has changed' combined with a determination to propose specific measures to contribute to a change in Defence culture. The way in which the Defence Representative responds to this can be critical. It requires careful preparation, sensitivity and empathy.
- **Telling their story of abuse.** Most complainants have never told anyone, even their families, about the abuse they suffered. Recounting it for the first time to the Taskforce was invariably difficult and often traumatic in itself. In many instances, complainants were able to tell their story only piece by piece, over many telephone conversations with a Case Co-ordinator. The fact that they had told their story to the Taskforce did not mean they would be able to go into a Restorative Engagement Conference and tell the whole story to the Defence Representative. The Taskforce understands this and so emphasises the importance of the Defence Representative being given – and being familiar with – the story of the complainant's abuse, before the conference. The conferences to date have reinforced this understanding. Complainants do not necessarily want (or are able) to recount the story of their abuse, and many may not even talk about the consequences of it on their lives – they may just want to talk about how to stop it happening to others.

25 Cameron Stewart, 'Closing Ranks', *Weekend Australian Magazine* (Sydney) 1-2 June, 2013, 1.

Notwithstanding the often extremely serious nature of the abuse suffered and the devastating impact of it on the lives of complainants, it is noteworthy that what we have not seen is anger or hostility directed towards the individual Defence Representative.

Complainants

It is important to allow some of the participants in the Program to speak for themselves. Below is a list of de-identified quotes provided by complainants reflecting on their experiences of participating in a Restorative Engagement Conference:

- *'...The experience was huge...a massive part of the healing process. Thank you so much for the opportunity to tell my story. It is something I have kept buried for many years, talking about it released a lot of emotional baggage I have had for a long time. [the Defence Representative] was incredibleThank you so much for being a part of this process and guiding me along the way...you have made a huge difference in my life and I'm sure in many others....'*
- *'...This has given me an opportunity that I would have never got to finally confront this issue with someone that counts, and that counts more than you could imagine. Once again I thank you...for this very rare and privileged opportunity to make some peace with myself and help implement new changes for all the [complainant's name] of today that suffer quietly'.*
- *'...Thanks so much for your help with the meeting and [the Defence Representative]...He is certainly a man who knows what Honour is, and the damage that can be done when a person's honour is taken in the way that mine was. Today, he gave me a little of that back, and to hear his apology on behalf of the [service] was excellent, and I believe, delivered with the utmost sincerity...and I will add that if I can be of any help as a former ...who has suffered abuse...I would be honoured to help in any way. I know firsthand, just how important this program is to those who have suffered at the hands of others'.*
- *'...The emotional response that I have had to the meeting has caught me by surprise...I did not think it would affect me on the level that it has. I do not have the words to adequately describe what I have felt and am still feeling. The process has been positive and one I genuinely feel that the meeting went well...I have a new level of peace that I did not have beforehand. In the second half of the meeting, I felt a connection with [the Defence Representative] that I did not expect to have'.*

Facilitators

Below is a list of de-identified quotes provided by Restorative Engagement Conference facilitators:

- *'...The [Defence Representative] delivered a masterful apology...it was personal, sincere, acknowledging and validating...The complainant...had incredible insight using fantastic metaphors for his experience and the impact of this...and the complainant was "beaming" at the conclusion of the conference'.*
- *'To date and without exception, the post-Conference feedback from all participants has been singularly positive with Complainants reporting immediate therapeutic benefits and a high level of satisfaction that their concerns have been thoroughly acknowledged and addressed. Complainants leave the process confident that broader cultural change within the Defence Forces (sic) is a real possibility as a result of this enlightened approach'.*

A Service Chief

Finally, below is a quote from Vice Admiral Ray Griggs, AO, Vice-Chief of the Defence Force:

'I believe the Restorative Engagement Program is immensely powerful.

It provides complainants an opportunity to be heard by today's and tomorrow's senior leaders of the ADF. Having their story listened to and the wrongs acknowledged is clearly cathartic and an important turning point. For senior Defence leaders it is a program that brings the darker side of Defence culture into sharp and stark relief. It reinforces and bolsters resolve to make a difference in ongoing cultural challenge programs. By picking the right leaders to participate in this program we are ensuring senior leaders over the next decade or so will carry this experience with them – it is an experience no participant can forget'.

Conclusion

The feedback received by the Taskforce indicates that the Restorative Engagement Program provides an exceptional opportunity for Defence to acknowledge and respond directly to people who have suffered abuse. The participation of senior Defence representatives from across the three Services and the Australian Public Service, at various rank levels and in various locations around Australia will assist in enabling a broad insight into the impact of abuse on complainants, their families, the ADF and the Department of Defence.

