

**INQUIRY INTO ALLEGATIONS OF BULLYING IN  
WorkCover NSW**

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Partially Confidential

## BACKGROUND

I have recently retired from SWRD WorkCover NSW after fifteen years at TestSafe Australia at Londonderry NSW 2153. TestSafe is part of the Work Health and Safety Division with its General Manager John Watson. (Note I joined NSW Public Service in February 1981).

TestSafe has undergone at least five reorganisations during the time I have been at TestSafe and has had five Directors.

TestSafe has been a separate entity with its own ABN and accounting (Still under WorkCover NSW and previous to this other NSW Government Departments) then back under the Work Health and Safety Division.

The history is important as each change brought different staff reorganisations, which resulted in much stress between various groups within TestSafe. Directors also were appointed for different political reasons some with particular skills in bullying staff and appointed to a much higher grade before retirement resulting in a better superannuation payout.

I will describe particular incidents in the next section. It is difficult to encapsulate all that has happened at TestSafe but I will try and give a brief over view.

During my fifteen years at TestSafe I have been one of the Public Service Association of NSW Delegates and also the Metro/TestSafe Delegate on the WorkCover Departmental Committee. The WorkCover Departmental Committee has representatives from all parts of WorkCover (now includes SWRD).

The Implementation of the Gibbons Report (the first report into TestSafe) resulted in reorganisation by an external consultant and a Mini Board, which met at Londonderry. The emphasis was to improve efficiency.

The very opposite happened and staff felt bullied and belittled and devalued by the external consultant. Changes to flexitime and removal of the "shackles of the Public Service" with the often-repeated statement that the staff could be easily replaced by people from the local "CES" (now staff recruitment agencies. Morale fell rapidly.

Various reviews changes and reorganisations have taken place since, together with the changes to the Directors and have led to low staff morale. Loss of the store and the calibration laboratory removed during cost recovery measures has resulted in much increased work for staff.

Major emphasis on cost recovery has led to production staff having to submit time sheets. Other Units not having to submit time sheets has resulted in much hardship for the Customer Service Unit and the individual members being subjected to abuse and bullying by Senior staff right down to all levels of staff. CSU became the enemy.

## DESCRIPTION OF PARTICULAR INCIDENT/S

The effect on \_\_\_\_\_ was significant one of the staff members being constantly reduced to tears, advised not to apply for other positions at TestSafe not supported by Senior staff.

Constant degrading of their work with discussion in the meal rooms about the \_\_\_\_\_ staff and their inadequacies. Rumours were part of an everyday culture.

The staff involved were asked to report the incidents by their PSA Delegate and Industrial Offer but said it would be worse if this bullying were reported.

Other examples of Bullying were many but just a few more incidents show things at TestSafe were no different to other parts of WorkCover. Reference to the two staff surveys shows a distrust of management and recognition of a culture of Bullying.

Another instance of bullying was by a previous \_\_\_\_\_ and involved an incident \_\_\_\_\_ . The matter could have been handed easily at TestSafe but was escalated to involve \_\_\_\_\_

the Director who looked after internal audits and fraud. Two members were directed to a meeting with out due notice and contrary to the Public Service Management Act. This incident had profound and lasting effects on the two staff involved. It was simply a case of bullying. One of the staff said "I feel like walking under a bus on the way home." He was advised to seek medical help on the way home. His supervisor provided no help whatsoever it was his work colleagues and PSA delegate who checked in on him until the matter was concluded. I have never seen anyone the colour of one of the staff before he went into him interview. All for no avail simply a witch-hunt.

This staff member was caught up in the ITSB culture of bullying well documented and resulted in the change of Director and other staff changes. Sadly still not eliminating bullying.

All these instances result in staff not functioning to their full potential, extra days off and physical affect and mental effects that would be easy to document and assess with adequate supervision. Generally and this is through WorkCover the PSA does more to help and counsel staff than the staff who should be covering these matters.

The effect also on PSA Delegates at times also needs to be recognised as they are often in the front line in assisting their members. They take home problems and do work in their own time thus having an effect on them as well.

#### **REPORTING COMPLAINTS OF BULLYING**

To my knowledge reports of bullying being reported are rare. The staff I deal with would not report bullying, gossip or harassment as it would only increase the problems not solve them. I have spoken to supervisors sent emails to the CFO but to no avail. Bullying is embedded and will take much work to eliminate.

In the cases we see at the Departmental Committee the staff complaining about bullying are the ones who are treated poorly and find the only recourse is to leave. If WorkCover did as much to eliminate bullying as they do fighting cases then we would have an exemplary organisation indeed.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

There are many reasons for bullying not being eliminated or the changes made to behaviours not being done. It starts at the top and flows down. I don't think there is a full appreciation of bullying and the need to realise that the perpetrators need help. Too often the person complaining is the one at fault. In some instances the bully has mates above and below that assist in a culture of cover up.

Training sessions were carried out had little effect. No real appreciation or acceptance for the problems that were shown in the staff surveys.

The Departmental Committee were instrumental in a committee being formed with WorkCover Management with procedures being drafted and much work done but fell in to the too hard basket with Management disinterest. Reinstatement or reforming this committee with the previous DC Members would be a great start.

There is a lot more to be said but I think this is long enough. I am happy to be contacted if more information is required.

#### **ATTACHMENTS**

None