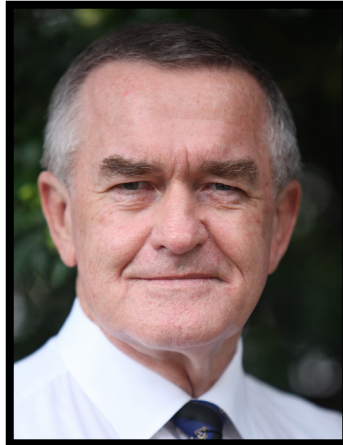


media release #13



GREG McMAHON

**INDEPENDENT SENATE CANDIDATE for QUEENSLAND
FEDERAL ELECTION - 2 JULY 2016**

Discrimination, bullying and abuse in the Defence Force...the need for urgent reform

Queensland Independent Senate candidate Greg McMahon said today if he was elected on July 2 he would press for the establishment of a Royal Commission into the Institutional response by the Defence Force to disclosures about discrimination, bullying, rough justice and abuse.

"I have experience of 40 years fighting discrimination against and mistreatment of soldiers, trainees, and reservists, and of dealing with the response from superiors and watchdog authorities," Mr McMahon said.

"I have a special insight into the causes of the phenomenon, as well as into the mechanisms that allow such treatment of service personnel to persist. I would like to turn that expertise into a pathway for assisting the Defence Chiefs to a process of reform," he said.

"The focus of others trying to address the problem on the 'culture' of the Defence Force might reduce the focus that should be placed on the leadership of the Force.

"We know from research into change management that leadership is 70 per cent of culture, so a focus on the actions of Defence leadership will provide the benefit sought from any reform program.

"A Royal Commission is the best vehicle to bring self-awareness to the leadership of the Defence Force," Mr McMahon said.

"The results may have surprises for all," he said.

"When I was an instructor at principal tactics schools, I was given the role of giving leadership and ethics lectures, and of facilitating discussions among young captains and majors about these topics.

"Very often, the discussion would turn to adverse comments about actions by generals.

"These comments had to be allowed for a while, to show that no topic was excluded from an open discussion, but then the discussion had to be turned back toward what could be learned from these actions about leadership.

"I used to do this by asking the officers the question, 'What do you think these generals were like when they were captains and majors like you?'

"Invariably, the answer would be, 'Probably like us.'

"And the next question I asked was, 'So what will happen to you between now and your highest rank that will cause you to change into what you have just been criticising?'

"Valuable positive discussion would quickly follow," Mr McMahon said.

"Further, there were people who assisted me in addressing serious matters when they were middle-ranked officers, but who withdrew their assistance as they achieved promotions to higher ranks.

"It causes one to think what might happen to anyone who achieved such promotions," Mr McMahon said.

"The reforms that I was able to achieve, with others, within the Defence Service and through outside organisations, mainly unions and the ACTU, and the initiatives that I saw taken by warrant officers, might be perceived as criticisms of leadership in the Defence Force for not matching these efforts.

"But I came to the opposite view. The factors which might change many officers as they moved to higher ranks may also be acting to disarm them from a capacity to attempt what warrant officers and majors were enabled to achieve.

"The indications for the future of the leadership of the Defence Force are not all negative.

"Studies sponsored by senior officers into discrimination against reservists are one encouragement," Mr McMahon said.

"There are several examples of senior officers who, after they retired, clearly displayed their feeling of obligation to assist soldiers adversely affected by the soldier's service in the Defence Force.

"The negatives, however, dominate," Mr McMahon said.

"The saying recently publicised by Defence Force public relations, 'the standard you walk by is the standard you set' is fair, but misses totally the issue with the 'Institutional response'.

"The saying more applicable to the problem, in my experience, would be 'the standard you set is what you do when others are not looking'," Mr McMahon said.

"In the modern Defence Force, military justice appears to come mainly to those who can get national media coverage," he said.

"An investigation officer of star rank once told me, 'Greg, if what you say is true, they (senior officers) will never tell you', and they have not told me," he said.

"In this sense, the fact that the Defence Force did tell the people of Oakey about the poisoned water supply (albeit after a decade of keeping the information to themselves) is an indication of a reform.

"The people of Oakey, however, may not see it that way.

"But the years of silence over the Oakey water supply is consistent with the years of silence towards those service personnel subjected to toxic harm, and radioactive harm in their service for Australia.

"I served at the Army Base at Oakey from 2009 to 2015, and I have just found out, from the media, that I need to take blood tests.

"The Defence Force has had 21 inquiries into military abuse in 21 years, and little has changed when no one is looking.

"The leadership in the Defence Force needs to look at itself. A strong mirror is required.

"The only mirror with sufficient strength is a Royal Commission," Mr McMahon said.

"A Royal Commission, with appropriate terms of reference, headed by a person or persons likely to be unaffected by a dining-in night and a helicopter ride, will have the best chance of initiating the reforms that are urgently needed.

"By being elected to the Senate as an Independent with my first-hand experience of these serious matters, I could be the catalyst for necessary and long overdue reform in the Defence Force," Mr McMahon said.

24 June 2016

Home/Business: 22 Kersley Road, Kenmore, QLD, 4069

Mobile: 0411 757 231

Email: mcmahonqueensland@gmail.com

Webpage: <http://www.gregmcmahon.com.au/>