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## THE REAL ISSUE: 25% FEMALE TARGET IN THE ADF

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#### Service Paper

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**THE REAL ISSUES: 25% FEMALE TARGET IN THE ADF**

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## THE REAL ISSUES: 25% FEMALE TARGET IN THE ADF

### AIM

1. The aim of this service paper is to explore why the targeted figure of 25% women in the military is the real issue and impeding the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to achieve gender diversity and recruitment and retention of women. This paper will look at why the figure of 25% creates unconscious messages and impedes, rather than strives for a goal. The intent is to inform the Chief of Joint Capabilities of possible underlying issues impeding the success of the ADF in achieving its goal of gender diversity and recruitment and retention of women. It is noted prior to commencing this paper the significant work already undertaken by the ADF in achieving greater gender diversity and this paper should be used to discuss options moving forward. This aligns with our Defence cultural intent that “our working environment must promote openness, candour and contestability; it holds us all back when we hide from the truth.”<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

2. In 2012 the Australian Defence Organization (ADO) released its leadership plan for cultural change through the Pathway to Change: Evolving Defence Culture, as a result of a number of issues, and follow on reviews regarding gender and culture within the ADO.<sup>2</sup> Over the last six years the ADF has implemented a number of initiatives, measuring success against key performance indicators including: increase in flexible work practices; opportunities and increase in number of women selected for leadership positions; recruitment of women into non-traditional employment roles; implementation and acceptance of the Total Workforce Model making it easier to transfer between service categories; and representation of women on deployments and postings.<sup>3</sup> These initiatives all aim to achieve greater gender diversity and recruitment and retention of women in the military.

3. Measurement against the key performance indicators has shown some improvements,<sup>4</sup> however; further improvements need to be made which is why this paper explores whether there are underlying messaging issues which are impeding diversity change and recruitment and retention of women. Two key encumbrances relating to the creation of unconscious messaging will be discussed. The first being that the notion of the ADF achieving a 25% employment target is that employing 25% females does not achieve the ultimate goal of true gender diversity and recruitment and retention of women. The second key issue relating to the target of 25% is that it is not an accurate reflection of society or the female population within Australia. The current

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Defence, *Pathway to Change: Evolving Defence Culture - A Strategy for Cultural Change and Reinforcement* (Canberra: The Defence Committee, Department of Defence, 2012), 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Defence, *Women in the ADF Report 2016-17* (Canberra: Defence People Group, Department of Defence, 2017), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Defence, *Women in the ADF Report 2016-17...*, 6.

female population in Australia is almost 51%<sup>5</sup> so it is questionable whether 25% is an acceptable target to achieve gender diversity. The figure of 25% is possibly creating an unconscious message that equates to a token figure or even that the ADF is only searching for the best 25% of the female population. This is not encouraging, and does not realistically create a comfortable, inclusive culture for women negatively impacting on recruitment and retention which will also be discussed.

## DISCUSSION

### 25% Target

4. Gender diversity is more than a number and before gender diversity can even be tackled it is important to understand why the military wants more females. Understanding the need for more women in the military is the first step in achieving gender diversity. The simplest explanation of why we need more women in the military is women bring diversity of thought, diversity in action and diversity in decision making. The Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018 Gender Indicators<sup>6</sup> identified that females are well educated and intelligent and they are obtaining more university qualifications than males. In 2017 33% of women aged 18-64 attained a bachelor degree compared to only 26% of males<sup>7</sup>.

5. The target of 25% women was meant to be an arbitrary, achievable figure which could be used as a stepping stone to achieve the real goal of gender diversity and which attracts the best talent; to increase capability; and be a first class and high performing employer.<sup>8</sup> As stated achieving a target of 25% female representation in the military is not the final goal and unfortunately this has not filtered throughout all levels of the military or society. Without significant understanding of why women are required in the ADF and the benefits to capability that women can bring to the ADF, a target of 25% is no more than a number. The real focus of gender diversity and recruitment and retention of women has been lost and the target of 25% has become the focus which has translated to what is known in other organizations as the 'add-women-and-stir approach,' and unfortunately the 'add-women-and-stir approach' has proven to not achieve desired results.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Commission, "Face the Facts: Gender Equality 2018," accessed 11 October 2018, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/education/face-facts/face-facts-gender-equality-2018>

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, "4125.0 - Gender Indicators, Australia, Sep 2018," accessed 11 October 2018, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4125.0~Sep%202018~Main%20Features~Education~5>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Department of Defence, *Review of the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force: Phase 2 Report* (Canberra: Australian Human Rights Commission, 2012), 43.

<sup>9</sup> Roderik M. Kramer and Margaret A. Neale, *Power and Influence in Organizations* (California: Sage Publications Inc., 1998), 312.

6. Pathway to Change understands the importance of cultural change and has invested heavily in programs across the three services to assist in cultural change - New Generation Navy, Adaptive Army and Air Force Adaptive Culture Program.<sup>10</sup> Whilst the Air Force is currently on track to achieve 25% women, it is skeptical whether this will achieve the desired result of gender diversity and recruitment and retention of women. More likely it will be a case of adding women and stirring. The fact the retention of women has decreased<sup>11</sup> shows that the 25% target is not achieving the desired results and it is possible the Air Force and the ADF is impeding its own success by emphasizing the achievement of the 25% target. Whilst it is hoped that 25% female representation is not the end result, it may be the best time to consider a positive change in messaging that will impact retention and gender diversity given recruitment is on the rise. It is to be noted that there is currently no messaging about further targets or achievements once the 25% target is achieved from any of the services or the ADF.

### **51% Females**

7. Women make up almost 51% of the Australian population yet the ADF has decided to strive for 25% female representation. The ADF should be striving for 50%, especially if the organization does accept the tangible benefits of gender diversity, equality and opportunities for women. The ADF has been impeding its own goal of achieving more women in the military by having a target of 25%. It has created an underlying message to both males and females of a token effort, an 'add-women-and stir approach.'<sup>12</sup> One in four, which is classified as a minority as it is less than half, is what the ADF is striving for and is what is seen as acceptable. The ADF cannot achieve gender diversity by achieving 25%, and this paper argues that females cannot truly believe they would have professional equality and opportunities in an organization that strives to achieve a minority. The ADF should be aiming to achieve 50% if they want gender diversity. The ADF may never make 50% but by changing the message both within the military and society the will reduce the unconscious and biased messaging. The ADF needs to change its message if it wants to achieve gender diversity and recruitment and retention of females in the military.

### **Recruitment and Retention**

8. Creating the right culture for women is essential in achieving positive increase in the recruitment and retention of women. The ADF has made great steps with the recruitment of women. This is evident in the increase of recruitment across the Navy, Army and Air Force and in particular for both the Navy and Air Force for recruitment of women of non-traditional roles.<sup>13</sup> Yet since 2013 retention of women has gone down and whilst recruitment has increased if

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<sup>10</sup> Department of Defence, *Pathway to Change: Evolving Defence Culture - A Strategy for Cultural Change and Reinforcement...*, 3

<sup>11</sup> Department of Defence, *Women in the ADF Report 2016-17...*, 6

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 312.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Defence, *Women in the ADF Report 2016-17...*, 9.

women aren't remaining in service long enough to have a career and 'climb the ranks' the ADF will not achieve gender diversity at the higher ranks and star rank leadership roles. This supports the argument that 25% must be more than just a target. Achieving a recruiting target of 25% does not automatically translate to the retention of women at 25% or the end of goal of achieving gender diversity in the ADF.

9. Whilst there are a number of reasons the ADF is not retaining females an underlying culture and unconscious bias are both issues. As stated previously, the target of 25% may be creating an unconscious message of being a token figure. This does not encourage a comfortable and inclusive culture which is important for retention, "women saw the culture of their work group as highly masculine, aggressive, competitive, and self-promoting. The women had invented ways to cope with this work culture, but they felt that they were partly outsiders who did not belong."<sup>14</sup> In addition, it is important to note, many "underlying and subtle interaction practices create inequalities and unwelcomeness"<sup>15</sup> which negatively impact on culture. Examples of this include not asking for women's point of view in meetings or when women give it, they are not listened to by the men who make up the majority in the room, and socializing outside of work hours and not inviting women, whether having drinks or participating in sporting activities. If females are a minority and feel like they don't belong they may stick around for a while, but on average they will not invest in a career in that organization. By changing a message from that of a token figure to a true reflection of society it is possible to influence culture. Creating the right message can subsequently help create the right environment and help eliminate the divide between male and female interaction which impinges on the ADF culture and in turn, on retention.

10. Another factor which may be affecting retention is the very structure of the military as "research shows that flat team structures provide professional women more equality and opportunity than hierarchical bureaucracies, but only if the women function like men."<sup>16</sup> This research raises two interesting issues that the ADF needs to consider. The fact that the current ADF structure is a hierarchical military structure so therefore already it is less likely to achieve equality and opportunity for women, and the issue that women need to function like men in order to achieve equality and opportunity. It is unrealistic for the ADF to even consider a flat line structure due to the nature of the business. The ADF must work harder than flat team structures to achieve equality and opportunity for women and this needs to be through cultural change and a clear definition by all members at all ranks of why it is beneficial to the ADF to have more women in the military. The issue that women need to function like men in order to achieve equality and opportunity will change as a result of many contributing factors, including through

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<sup>14</sup> Joan Acker, "Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations," *Gender & Society*, 20, no. 4 (August 2006): 446,

[http://intergender.net/OLD\\_IG/IG\\_ARCHIVE/www.sagepub.com/oswcondensed/study/articles/05/Acker.pdf](http://intergender.net/OLD_IG/IG_ARCHIVE/www.sagepub.com/oswcondensed/study/articles/05/Acker.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 445.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 446.

specific programs targeted at women like flexible work options but also through cultural change and an increase in representation of women in the workplace and leadership roles. Again this relies on accurate and reaffirming messaging.

11. Whilst the recruitment figures of women have been increasing, changing the message within the community can positively impact on recruitment. Pathway to Change emphasizes “our relationship with the Australian Community requires acknowledgement and attention. We cannot take the community’s support for granted,”<sup>17</sup> and noting that 51% of the community is female the ADF should be providing an unbiased message. Similar militaries around the world are trying to achieve similar goals of 25% but are struggling, yet guerrilla militia, the FARC in Columbia, achieved 40% women representation by not setting a limit but by truly understanding that without suitable female representation they would not have political or community support. Whilst some of their methods are completely not acceptable regarding the way they treat women, one thing was sure - they knew they needed the female representation to gain the community’s support.<sup>18</sup>

## CONCLUSION

12. The ADF has made significant progress on recruitment of women in the military. The efforts from senior leaders with change in policy and culture has directly influenced this, however more needs to be done in changing the culture and this can be achieved directly by changing the messaging. To achieve equality and diversity messaging from the onset should have been truly reflective of achieving equality and diversity. Messaging change to achieving 50%, a true representation of society within the military will help to achieve the desired cultural change results which will positively influence retention of females. Further, improved messaging and a true reflection of the society will improve support to the ADF and assist with recruitment of females.

## RECOMMENDATION

13. It is well understood achieving gender diversity within the military requires the recruitment and retention of more women and messaging is key in achieving this. This paper has explored reasons why the message of achieving 25% has impeded the military on achieving recruitment and retention of women and ultimately gender diversity. It is recommended that the ADF dismisses the message of achieving 25% and if it truly wants gender diversity it must change the message to achieve a true reflection of society that is 50%. It is almost guaranteed 50% will not be achieved within the next five years but this new focus will go a long way in

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<sup>17</sup> Department of Defence, Pathway to Change: Evolving Defence Culture - A Strategy for Cultural Change and Reinforcement. . . , 3.

<sup>18</sup> Francisco G. Sanin, and Francy C. Franco, “Organizing women for Combat: The Experience of the FARC in the Colombian war,” *Journal of Agrarian Change*, (August 2017): 771.

assisting in cultural change, achieving gender diversity and recruitment and retention of women which is the real reason the military needs more females and not just to achieve a 25% target.



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