



16 August 2013

The Secretary of Standing Committee Health, Ageing, and Social Services

GPO BOX 1020

Canberra 2601

By email: committees@parliament.act.gov.au.

Dear Secretary

Attached is the CPSU submission to the Inquiry into ACT Public Service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment.

The PSU Group of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) is an active and progressive union with approximately 60,000 members. The CPSU represents employees in Commonwealth government employment including the Australian Public Service (APS), the ACT and the NT Public Service.

The CPSU has a long and proud reputation of representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait members across our areas of coverage. We have a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Caucus (NATSIC) with more than 1000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members. This network advocates for improved employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members.

Should you wish to discuss this submission further I can be contacted on 02 6220 9625.

Yours sincerely

Vince McDevitt
CPSU Regional Secretary

CPSU Submission to the Inquiry into ACT Public Service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment

Introduction

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) is an active and progressive union committed to the promotion of a modern efficient and responsive public sector that delivers quality services and quality jobs. We represent around 60,000 members in the ACT Public Service, Australian Public Service, NT Public Service, telecommunication and broadcasting.

The CPSU has a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Caucus (NATSIC) with more than 1000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members. This network works to advocate for improved employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members.

The CPSU supports the commitment by the ACT Government to increase the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in the ACT Public Service (ACTPS).

In preparing this submission the CPSU conducted a survey of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members in the ACTPS. The survey asked members about their experience in the ACTPS and with the Employment Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (the Strategy) in particular. We have also relied upon other recent research in this area to inform our submission, including the 2007 report 'Achieving the Target of 2% Aboriginal Employment in the South Australian Public Sector' by the Australian Institute for Social Research and the issues paper 'Increasing Indigenous employment rates' produced for the Closing the Gap Clearing House in March 2012.

Summary

Although the objectives of the Strategy are largely sound, feedback from CPSU members is that the implementation of the strategy is not effective in achieving these objectives. Key areas where improvement needs to be made are:

- Creation of ongoing secure jobs by reducing the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees engaged on a non-permanent basis;
- A stronger focus and greater commitment to career development outside of entry level training programs;
- Extension of mentoring and support arrangements; and
- Greater cultural awareness training, ensuring that the training is provided in all ACTPS agencies.

The Strategy is failing to meet its goals in relation to attraction and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. As at June 2012, the increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in the ACTPS was less than half of the goal set by the Strategy for that point in time. More can and should be done to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to work in the ACTPS including ensuring that all Agencies develop and implement attraction and retention strategies.

The Strategy could also be enhanced by adding additional key performance measures including reducing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees engaged on a non-permanent basis and increasing the average classification level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. There are several areas where more data should be collected and made publicly available in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment, especially data

that assists in tracking career development and creation of quality jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

Implementation of the ACT Public Service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy.

The Strategy has commendable objectives and contains an action plan with a number of specific measures designed to achieve those objectives. The objectives of the Strategy include:

- To make the ACTPS an attractive workplace for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People;
- To attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to work in the ACTPS;
- To retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- To improve the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and
- To ensure that the ACTPS assesses and reports on the progress of implementing the strategy.

However, feedback from CPSU members is that although they were positive about the objectives of the Strategy, they do not think the implementation of the Strategy is effective in achieving the objectives. Some members commented that the strategy involved a lot of rhetoric but not enough genuine commitment from Agencies in its implementation.

Sufficient ongoing employment opportunities

The availability of ongoing employment opportunities is an important factor in attracting and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. A review of Aboriginal employment in the South Australian public sector found that secure ongoing employment was the greatest factor influencing retention of Aboriginal employees. This was the factor nominated by most Aboriginal SA public sector employees surveyed as the most likely to encourage them to remain in the SA public sector¹

ACTPS members surveyed by the CPSU also stated that job cuts in their agency were restricting employment and progression opportunities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Others mentioned that the merger of training programs in the ACTPS meant that fewer opportunities were provided.

This is exacerbated by the high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees engaged on a non-permanent basis. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees are less likely to be employed on a permanent basis than other employees. At June 2012, 29.6% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees were engaged on a non permanent basis either as temporary employees or casuals. This is compared to a non permanent employment rate of 22.1% for the ACTPS as a whole. The ACTPS should aim to reduce the number of employees engaged on a non permanent basis.

Career Development

Participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in the ACTPS involves more than just attracting and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. It also involves making sure there are more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in senior positions and improving career development options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. This is recognised in the objectives of the Strategy.

¹ Australian Institute for Social Research, *Achieving the Target of 2% Aboriginal Employment in the South Australian Public Sector, 2007* p 15

However, CPSU members have said that less attention seems to be given to the career development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees than the efforts to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

Some survey respondents had observed that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees do not find sufficient continued support after finishing their initial training programs. Members reported trainees reaching a career bottleneck after their traineeship and stated that more attention needs to be given to providing promotion and development opportunities to employees on completion of entry level programs.

Also, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees who have been in the Agency for a longer period have reported that the Strategy is not being directed to further help them with their career development. The Strategy talks about ensuring that a proportion of positions on management development programs are available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. Clearly not all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees feel that such opportunities are sufficiently open to them.

While one third of survey respondents said that the Strategy has had a positive impact on their career opportunities and access to learning and development, the remainder said it has had no impact.

In addition, not all survey respondents said that they have an individual career plan that has been developed with their employer although this was a mandatory part of the Strategy for all Directorates.

Mentoring and support

Mentoring and workplace initiatives such as buddy systems were identified by the strategy as important elements in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment.

CPSU members who had undertaken a role as a mentor said that they found it to be a rewarding and beneficial experience. However, they believed that the mentoring arrangements in the ACTPS could go a lot further to support junior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

There is one particular area of support that was identified by the South Australian review of Aboriginal employment in the public service as being often overlooked. That is specific support that recognises the unique pressures faces by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in representing their communities in the public sector workplace and representing the public sector (and by association, government) in Aboriginal communities. The report states that:

“They can be expected to represent all Aboriginal peoples even though it is possible only to represent themselves. There are often high expectations placed on them in terms of providing role models and mentors to other Aboriginal employees, and in providing time to be official representatives on a range of committees and other structures. These create significant time and personal pressures that are rarely acknowledged in public sector support strategies, despite being continuously identified by Aboriginal people”

The ACTPS should look at extending the roles of mentors and the level of support that can be provided.

Cultural Awareness

Cross-cultural training has been highlighted as a key strategy in increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and retention by the Closing the Gap clearing house.² The ACT Employment Strategy also provides for cultural awareness training to be a mandatory part of Agency specific strategies. However, cultural awareness training is only provided in 9 out of 16 Agencies in the ACTPS.³

Two thirds of respondents to the CPSU survey did not think that their workplace was culturally sensitive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. More attention must be given to cultural awareness training in the ACTPS. As a start the ACTPS should undertake its commitment to provide this training in all Agencies.

Effectiveness of attraction and retention programs

The ACTPS has made some significant progress in the last 10 years with the proportion of employees who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander tripling in that time.⁴ However, in recent times, and particularly in relation to the goals set by the Strategy, the ACTPS is failing in its efforts to attract and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

The Strategy aimed to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in the ACTPS from 176 (0.9%) in June 2010 to 407 (2%) by 2015. The anticipated increase in recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees is projected to grow each year of the strategy so that three quarters of the recruitment occurs in the last three years of the Strategy.

The Strategy aimed to have 233 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees by June 2012, 57 employees more than in June 2010. However, according to the State of the Service report, there were only 202 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in June 2012.⁵ This means that the increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in the ACTPS is less than half of the goal set by the Strategy.

The proportion of people living in the ACT who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander is 1.4% which is lower than the national average. However, the low representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in the ACTPS cannot be solely attributed to this factor. The proportion of Commonwealth Public Service employees living in the ACT who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander has been consistently higher than in the ACTPS.⁶

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
ACTPS	0.57%	0.60%	0.76%	0.87%	0.86%	1.02%	1.02%
APS	1.67%	1.63%	1.61%	1.62%	1.67%	1.59%	1.59%

² Gray, Hunter and Lohar, *Issues paper no. 3 produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse: Increasing Indigenous employment rates*, March 2012, p 1

³ ACT Public Service State of the Service Report 2012, p 50

⁴ Ibid p 62

⁵ Ibid, p 62

⁶ APSED, https://apsc.gov.au/APSEDii/APSEDIIFirstPage_index.shtml

Part of the issue seems to be with retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in the ACTPS. In the 2011-12 financial year, the separation rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in the ACTPS was 11.9%, compared to 8.5% for all staff. 77.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees have been working in the ACTPS for less than 5 years, compared to 48.7% of all employees.

Despite the fact that the Strategy requires Agencies to develop specific strategies to attract and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, only 10 out of 15 agencies have had developed such plans at June 2012.⁷ Clearly more can and should be done to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to work in the ACTPS.

Data collection, monitoring and reporting mechanisms

Availability of data

To be open and transparent, and assist in a collaborative approach to facilitating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment, the ACTPS should collect and make public Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment data. Currently not all data collected is published, the only publicly available data is that contained in the ACTPS State of the Service Report. This makes it hard to assess the progress that progress that is being made in this area.

The reported data only relates to the most recent financial year and there is a lack of historical data available to track changes over time.

As a comparison the Australian Public Service APSED database allows people to search APS employment statistics broken down by any combination of diversity, classification, length of service, age, educational background and gender. It is also possible to get time series data on these attributes for the last 10 years.⁸

Monitoring and reporting

There are currently three quantifiable Key Performance Measures set by the Strategy. These are:

- Increase the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to 2% by 2015
- Decrease the separation rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees
- Decrease the gap in average remuneration between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and other employees.

There are a number of other Key Performance Measures that could be added to these that would help encourage a focus on career development and the creation of quality jobs, as well as ensure more comprehensive monitoring and reporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in the ACTPS. These could include targets to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in non permanent positions and increasing the average classification level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

In addition, there is no publicly available data to monitor the career progression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. Such data could include current and historical data about how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees are engaged at each classification level or pay bracket as well as the length of time employees have spent at their current classification level. While the State of The Service Report, reports on average and median salary for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, it does not break it down in a manner in which it is possible to

⁷ Ibid, p 31

⁸ https://apsc.gov.au/APSEDii/APSEDIIFirstPage_index.shtml

track the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees at each level over time. Nor does it state how many years employees have spent in their current classification.

Other factors that could be reported on include the type of engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees (i.e. traineeship, cadetship, general recruitment processes, identified positions, etc.), reasons for leaving, and access to formal training and education including tertiary qualifications.