

Assistant Commissioner Ian Stewart
OFFICIAL OPENING
HARASSMENT, DON'T COP IT CONFERENCE

The Oaks, North Quay
Thursday, 18 October 2007 (9:00am)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Ms Neroli Holmes – Acting Anti-Discrimination Commissioner for Queensland
- Ms Anne Milner
- Members of the Conference Steering Committee
- Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning and thank you for attending the Queensland Police Service, *Harassment, Don't Cop It!* Conference. This is a special occasion for our organisation, as it is the first time such a conference focusing on these human resource management issues has been hosted by the Queensland Police Service.

I know there are many representatives from a wide section of police jurisdictions, government and non-government organisations and agencies here today, and I thank you for your attendance and participation.

It is through collaboration and forming partnerships with other organisations that the Queensland Police Service is able to improve our services and professionalism to our employees. The knowledge gained by the Queensland Police Service also benefits the community of Queensland as a whole.

This conference presents a unique opportunity for the QPS, as part of the broader business community, to engage in an open information sharing forum with other professionals. It is a step in the right direction to collectively and mutually explore best practice strategies and initiatives within our organisations and agencies in an effort to prevent and effectively manage harassment in the workplace.

I trust that the knowledge gained through our guest and keynote speakers, your participation at the conference, and the combined experiences shared with other delegates, will translate into tangible benefits for yourself and your organisation.

Workplace harassment has been an organisational dilemma for a number of years now, becoming increasingly problematic not only for organisations but also within our community.

We see harassment manifest as various bullying behaviours in the community. These bullying behaviours are often broadcast in the media, and usually labelled as 'road rage', 'car-park rage', or 'checkout rage'. It appears individuals have become less tolerant of others. We say that our lives are becoming too fast and people are more impatient of others. We demand more from work, life and others.

Additionally, we live in an age of change where our labour market is highly competitive and our workforce is dynamic and upwardly mobile. Where once people would often stay in one workplace for the whole of their working lives, employees seek positive change in their career and gravitate towards employment opportunities that offer a work-life balance.

Technology also seems to change and advance on a daily basis challenging the status quo. This change is providing organisations with opportunities for innovative advancement but also challenging change-management processes for employers.

Employees are better educated and well-informed now, more than ever. They have a greater understanding not only of their rights within their workplace but also their employer's responsibilities. They are increasingly expecting their work environments to reflect legislative and social changes and for their employers to respond quickly and efficiently to these expectations.

As professional pro-active organisations, we are required, and expected, to offer a diverse range of incentives and opportunities to our potential employees. We always need to be alert to attracting, recruiting and retaining qualified and motivated staff. People are our most critical asset.

Quality of a work-life balance is for many employees a prime motivator in their career choices. Part of that quality of life, is providing a supportive work environment - free from the stresses of bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

Failure to provide our employees with safe work environments can prove to be extremely costly for all involved. Complaints of harassment, discrimination and bullying cost the government and private enterprises millions of dollars annually in litigation, sick leave, stress claims, lost productivity, money, time and resources spent on training, and premature resignations.

Behaviours that were once, rightly or wrongly, taken as a cultural and social norm within the workplace are now no longer tolerated nor acceptable to the organisation. Sometimes, our understanding of what exactly constitutes harassment and bullying is a little unclear or becomes confused over time. The human factor is partly the cause.

While the QPS has a number of policies and procedures established to manage and minimise incidents of harassment and bullying from occurring within the work environment, we can all easily become victims of complacency.

It is easy to believe, as a large state organisation with the best intentions, that our policies and processes are working adequately and will not let us down, especially when we have put enormous effort into the development and implementation of strategies. So, sometimes we can fail to identify when things first start to go wrong.

When harassment or bullying occurs in our work environments, it significantly impacts on the work life of the person being harassed. Harassment can have devastating effects on an employee's private life, and their subsequent relationships with colleagues, family and friends.

It also considerably damages the reputation and calibre of the organisation not only through litigation and complaints that get processed through various courts and tribunals, but also the damage that is done to its reputation through negative word of mouth.

Most of us may have a view of ourselves as good managers with good interpersonal communication skills, and conflict resolution skills. We like to think we know what occurs within our areas of responsibility and that, if necessary, we have the managerial skills and expertise to take appropriate action should a negative behaviours issue arise.

But there is always new knowledge to gain, and this information only comes from sharing with others and learning from experience.

We must have the tools to quickly discern the situation, the personalities and expectations of the individuals concerns, and what outcomes are achievable within the boundaries of the organisations.

That is why conferences such as this here today, are a vital strategy in assisting us to effectively address, manage, and prevent such issues. Shared knowledge that has been implemented effectively in your workplace

gives us, as large state-wide organisations greater insight into what possible steps we can take to better manage our own environments.

Ultimately, preventing harassment before harassment occurs is any organisations goal.

As individuals, life can get pretty complicated when we do things in isolation, but working together gives us a stronger sense of belonging, involvement and mutual support. As employees of large organisations, these same principles often apply. Discussions with others helps foster a sense that we are not the only ones who are faced with harassment issues and that this knowledge and support enables us as professionals to provide a healthy work environment for our employees.

I hope that you all gain valuable insights into some of the issues surrounding harassment and are able to take with you, strategies which will assist in making yours a more supportive and productive work environment.

As Chair of the *'Implementing best practice strategies for managing harassment and promoting positive workplaces project'* I would like to thank everyone involved in steering this project to this two day event especially members of the conference Steering Committee.

We are very fortunate to have guest speakers and presenters attending this conference that I am sure will inspire you to greater heights in your own career and personal life, and will provide a spark to ignite your participation in the workshops which will be conducted during day two of this year's conference.

Our guest speaker is Ms Ronalds S.C. Ms Ronalds is a leading Sydney Counsel, highly specialised in discrimination law, employment and equal opportunity law, and administration law. Just last year, in 2006, Ms Ronalds S.C., was commissioned by the then Commissioner of NSW Police, Mr Ken Moroney, New South Wales Police Force, to undertake an independent investigation into a number of matters relating to sex-based harassment and discrimination.

During this inquiry police officers and staff members from one of the largest policing organisations in the English speaking world, were invited to voluntarily participate in a series of confidential interviews to determine how to best provide a safe and healthy workplace for all employees.

The *Report of the Inquiry into Sexual Harassment and Sex Discrimination in the NSW Police*, was released by Ms Ronalds S.C., to Commissioner Moroney, on the 22 December 2006. This approach taken by NSW Police was proactive and strategic to meet the needs of an ever increasingly diverse state policing organisation.

The Recommendations presented to this policing jurisdiction, by Ms Ronald's inquiry created a butterfly effect for other policing jurisdictions, including the Queensland Police Service.

The Ronalds Inquiry contributed to the QPS taking a closer look at our workplace behaviour issues, and to examine our processes that provide support and advice to the victims of harassment and discrimination, and enable us to identify, and educate, the perpetrators involved in these incidents.

Our guest presenters will include Ms Neroli Holmes, the Acting Anti Discrimination Commissioner for Queensland, Ms Trish Kendall, an organisational psychologist who conducts her own consulting business – Changecorp and Ms Leanne Clare SC., the Director of Public Prosecutions Queensland who will be facilitating our panel discussion.

Guest presenters for tomorrow include Mr Shane Stockill and Ms Dianne Schultz from the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations. The facilitators for our workshop are Mr Ross McSwan and Mr Tom Stodulka, both experienced negotiators and conciliators in workplace matters.

To commence proceedings however, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Ms Anne Milner, Partner in Milner Lawyers, and also the president of the Industrial Law Committee of the Queensland Law Society.

Ms Milner has more than 15 years experience in workplace law, including anti-discrimination and sexual harassment, workplace health and safety, and industrial disputes and strategies. Ms Milner is also the Chair of the Industrial Law Committee of the Queensland Law Society, the peak professional body for legal practitioners in Queensland. Ms Milner will be discussing the topic: *Work Cover Litigation - Harassment and Reasonable Management Action and Duty of Care - What are the Lessons'.*

So, please join me in welcoming Ms Milner to the Harassment – Don't Cop It! Conference. Enjoy this wonderful two day event. Thank you.