

CSIRO management caned over handling of bullying claims

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THE CSIRO has been accused of misleading Senate estimates in relation to its handling of a bullying claim by an award-winning scientist.

The federal workplace safety watchdog, Comcare, has censured senior CSIRO management for quoting selectively from a confidential draft report into bullying allegations - wrongly suggesting it had exonerated management when in fact it found breaches of its health and safety duties.

The revelations emerged as former CSIRO scientists submitted a dossier of 54 cases of alleged bullying of current and former staff to a parliamentary inquiry into workplace bullying.

The submission said bullying, harassment and victimisation of staff was widespread at the CSIRO but was routinely denied by senior management.

CSIRO spokesman Huw Morgan said the health and safety of its staff was paramount to the CSIRO. He said the CSIRO did not accept that its evidence to Senate estimates was misleading.

Comcare admonished CSIRO deputy chief executive Craig Roy for misleading Senate estimates when he testified that a draft report into bullying claims found no evidence of systemic deficiencies or a culture that promoted bullying.

The bullying claims were made by leading entomologist Sylwester Chyb, who was headhunted from Britain, but later alleged he was harassed, bullied and unlawfully terminated by the CSIRO.

In a letter to the CSIRO obtained by scientists under freedom of information laws, Comcare deputy chief executive Steve Kibble said: "(The) content quoted by CSIRO was not presented in context and failed to highlight to the Committee that (Comcare investigator Nigel) Docker's draft report also contains preliminary findings that the CSIRO breached its occupational health and safety duties with respect to its handling of some of the allegations of bullying made by and against Dr Chyb."

Mr Kibble demanded the CSIRO correct the Hansard record as soon as possible.

Former CSIRO project manager Andrew Hooley, who was made involuntarily redundant last year after nine years at the organisation, told The Australian bullying at the CSIRO was widespread.

Mr Hooley said this was contributing to a brain drain of scientists from the CSIRO.

"It's basically considered an employer of last resort amongst the more gifted researchers," he said. "A lot of them end up avoiding Australia and going overseas."

Mr Hooley said he was effectively sidelined and subjected to public humiliation after raising concerns about possible procurement fraud.

He said as a health and safety representative at the CSIRO he had dealt with employees on suicide watch because of their treatment within in the organisation. Since leaving the CSIRO and helping to set up a website for victims of CSIRO bullying, he said he had become aware of up to 80 cases involving bullying of current and former CSIRO staff. "There's a tendency to cover up the complaints and silence the complainants," he said.

The submission by former scientists to the parliamentary inquiry into workplace bullying called for changes to crack down on the problem, including tougher national laws, an independent body to investigate workplace bullying claims and stronger whistleblower protections.

Ten ex-CSIRO employees have hired lawyers and written to Comcare demanding a formal investigation of CSIRO's workplace practices and management culture.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/health-science/csiro-management-caned-over-handling-of-bullying-claims/story-e6frg8y6-1226433738382>