

DEATH OF ELLIOTT COULSON

Issue

On 23 April 2013 Seaman (SMN) Elliott Coulson was found deceased. At the time of his death he was a person of interest in the death of Ms Kate Malonyay.

Headline Statement

- Defence is committed to the eradication of violence against women and continues to work towards changing the attitudes and behaviours that allow violence against women to occur, both within the workplace and the wider community.

Key Points

- SMN Coulson was Absent Without Leave (AWOL) at the time of his death and Defence incorrectly provided the Coulson family with funeral support.
- Defence sincerely regrets the distress caused to the family and friends of Ms Malonyay.
- On 2 December 2015, Chief of Navy wrote a letter of apology to Mrs Malonyay. He also met with her at her home on 5 December 2015.
- On 28 January 2016, Mrs Wendy Malonyay addressed the Navy Senior Leadership Group.
- Defence actively promotes anti domestic violence campaigns and cultural change.
- In June 2014, Navy was accredited as a White Ribbon workplace. Navy was the first group within Defence to receive this accreditation.

If asked: about support to Defence families in the event of a member's death

- Defence policy affords limited support to the family of a deceased serving member and in some cases ex-serving members.

Information valid as at: 2 February 2016

- Defence policy normally precludes support to the family of a member who is AWOL. In this case, an error was made during early contact with the Coulson family and support was offered. Subsequently, support to the Coulson family was approved.
- The statements made by the Chief of Navy on 27 and 30 November 2015 make it clear that Defence sincerely regrets the distress caused to the family and friends of Ms Malonyay.

If asked: Why was support provided to a person who committed a domestic violence crime such as Coulson?

- Prior to his death, SMN Coulson had not been charged with an offence and under Australian Law was presumed innocent.
- While I understand there was evidence of Coulson's actions at the time of the funeral, the findings of the Coroner were not made until 29 August 2014, 16 months after the incident and, as such, were not able to be considered at the time.
- The Coroner found that Ms Malonyay died as a result of injuries inflicted by SMN Coulson.

If asked: about the change.org petition and calls for Navy to donate cost of funeral to a domestic abuse charity

- Defence cannot donate funds to a charity due to current policy guidelines. However, Navy has demonstrated a strong track record of achievement in fundraising for causes such as White Ribbon.
- It is estimated that Navy people have donated in excess of \$15,000 to White Ribbon over the last three years; albeit these donations are a secondary factor to Navy's goal of education, transformation and leadership in our commitment to campaign against domestic violence.

If asked: What preventative measures are in place to stem domestic violence in the ADF?

- The ADF has several measures in place including mandatory training at all ranks levels as well as dedicated support mechanisms and assistance systems.

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- Defence is implementing cultural change through the *Pathway to Change* strategy, which provides a clear commitment to shaping Defence's attitudes, systems and behaviours to improve capability and ensure the continued support of the Australian public.
- A key achievement of *Pathway to Change* was the establishment of the Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Office.
- SeMPRO is a victim focussed organisation and offers a 24 hour, seven days a week response and advice service to Defence members, APS personnel, former members and partners who have been impacted by, or are experiencing sexual misconduct.
- They also allow people to receive support without triggering an investigation, or in the case of military, without requiring a notification to Command.

If asked: What psychological screening do members receive?

- In addition to psychological assessment during the recruitment process, Defence conducts mental health screening programs following operational deployment and exposure to potentially traumatic events.
- Current operational mental health screening (Return to Australia Psychological Screen, RtAPS; Post-Operational Psychological Screen, POPS) serves as an early identification and risk referral tool for Australian Defence Force (ADF) members who have been deployed.
- If a member is exposed to a potentially traumatic event, either on deployment or whilst in Australia, they may also be screened by a mental health professional to assess their level of distress and, allow for early intervention and referral before potential symptoms become problematic.
- Mental health assessments are also undertaken on ADF members as required following referral from a medical officer, commanding officer or a self-referral.
- These assessments are conducted through the administration of standard mental health screening tools and an assessment interview with a mental health professional.

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Background (not for public release)

On 1 December 2015, *ABC Lateline* aired an interview with the mother of the murder victim, Kate Malonyay, who stated she had received no apology from the Navy in the two years since the funeral. Navy provided advice to the *ABC* on 1 December that they had written to Wendy Malonyay on 30 November 2015. Navy declined to be interviewed on *Lateline* as its response had already been provided earlier on 27 November 2015. The 30 November 2015 letter to Wendy Malonyay was later revised and sent on 2 December 2015.

On 24 and 25 November 2015, *ABC* screened a two part documentary titled 'Hitting Home', based on domestic violence and which featured a story on the death of Ms Malonyay and subsequent suspected suicide of Seaman (SMN) Elliott Coulson. The Chief of Navy responded to this aspect through his 27 and 30 November 2015 public statements, including a public apology for distress caused to Kate Malonyay's family.

Defence also received a media enquiry from *NewsCorp* on 19 November 2015 requesting information on how Navy deals with personnel accused of, or charged with, domestic violence. The questions directly relate to the death of Ms Kate Malonyay and the subsequent death of SMN Elliott Coulson. Both coincided with White Ribbon Day on 25 November 2015.

With regard to the *change.org* petition and calls for Navy to donate the equivalent cost of SMN Coulson's funeral to a domestic abuse charity, Defence policy does not allow public monies to be donated. However, Navy has demonstrated a strong track record of achievement in fundraising for causes such as White Ribbon.

On 24 April 2013, SMN Elliott Coulson was found deceased adjacent to a Surfers Paradise hotel in Queensland. Police attended the scene of SMN Coulson's death and there did not appear to be any suspicious circumstances. At the time of his death, SMN Coulson was Absent Without Leave (AWOL) and a person of interest in a NSW Police investigation into the death of Ms Malonyay.

On 29 August 2014, the NSW Deputy State Coroner handed down his findings in the inquest into the death of Kate Malonyay. The Coroner found that Ms Malonyay died between 17 and 19 April 2013 in Mosman, as a result of injuries caused by asphyxiation and blunt force trauma to the head, inflicted by Elliott Coulson.

A Service funeral was held for SMN Coulson on 3 May 2013 and attended by a small number of uniformed Navy personnel. Regrettably, this coincided with the funeral for Ms Malonyay, which was not known to Navy at the time.

Following a Freedom of Information request from *ABC Lateline*, the December 2015 Chief of Navy Senate Estimates Brief on SMN Coulson was released in full on 18 January 2016. *ABC Lateline* subsequently aired another story on 1 February 2016.

Point of Contact

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