SUPPORTING SERVICE FAMILIES

A report on the main problems facing spouses of Australian Defence Force personnel and some recommended solutions

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INTRODUCTION

1. This study was commissioned by the Minister for Defence in November 1985 and conducted between December 1985 and April 1986.

2. The terms of reference for the study were:

"1. To conduct a study into the main problems facing spouses of service personnel, taking cognizance of:

a. the diminution of normal community lifestyle choices resulting from the exigencies of service life, and

b. community attitudes towards service spouses and families.

2. The study should include, but should not necessarily be limited to:

a. identifying employment difficulties facing service spouses and recommending any practical steps that can be taken to improve employment opportunities in public service and private employment;

b. identifying any adverse effects of existing posting and promotion policies on family life and, having regard to service requirements, recommending practical solutions; and

c. identifying deficiencies in living conditions and support facilities for spouses at service bases and recommending practical solutions and priorities for action.

3. On completion the study is to be forwarded to the Minister for Defence."

Method of conducting the study

3. The study was conducted by means of extensive consultations with the spouses of service personnel. Although by far the majority of those I spoke to were civilian women married to servicemen, I also had discussions with civilian men married to servicewomen
and couples where both spouses were serving members of
the defence force. I travelled to all States and
visited all areas with major concentrations of service
personnel, as well as a number of smaller bases in
remote locations. At least one open meeting for
spouses was held in every area I visited and attendance
at these meetings totalled about 4300 people. A
complete list of the areas and bases visited for the
study is at Appendix A.

4. In addition to the open meetings, I received
written submissions from 707 people; took part in
several radio 'phone-ins' around Australia and received
large numbers of telephone calls in my office from
people who wanted to make confidential comments
relevant to the study. In some areas organised wives
groups or the base staff themselves conducted local
surveys as an input to my study. I was very grateful
for the assistance provided in this way.

5. I also had discussions with Commanding
Officers, administrative staff and other serving
personnel in the areas I visited; with chaplains and
welfare staff attached to bases; and with civilian
agencies in areas around bases.

6. The report is based on my impressions from all
these discussions, and discussions with people in
relevant policy areas in the Department of Defence and
the three services. It does not claim to be a
systematic quantitative survey of the attitudes and
opinions of spouses of service personnel. I went and
asked what the problems were; people told me; and I
have drawn conclusions from what they said.
Undoubtedly there is a large group of reasonably
satisfied service spouses who did not have anything
they wished to contribute to my study. Almost
certainly there is another group experiencing very
severe difficulties with service life who, for a
variety of reasons, also did not come forward.
However, I was satisfied that I met or was contacted by
a sufficiently large group of spouses, with sufficient
consistency in the complaints they made, to form an
adequate overview of the problems I was asked to
address.
7. In formulating recommendations for addressing those problems I have obviously had to apply my own judgement about the urgency and extent of some of them. What I have tried to produce as a result of all this is a practical document that accurately reflects the major concerns of the people I was asked to consult with, and recommends some measures to address those concerns.

8. With the Minister's agreement, this report will be circulated to everyone who was involved in organising open meetings for me, with a request that it be disseminated as widely as possible to people who attended the meetings to inform them of the outcome of the study.
SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

9. This section summarises the package of recommendations included in this report, and aims to give an overview of that package. It does not necessarily follow the order in which recommendations occur in the report. For a complete understanding of the detail of individual recommendations reference should be made to the relevant paragraphs in the body of the report, which have been indicated in brackets against each recommendation.

10. The costings given are intended to be indicative of the order of costs involved. In many cases more accurate costings would not have been possible because the necessary demographic information about service families was not readily available. I have suggested in my recommendations that the proposed new Australian Defence Families Information and Liaison Service should address itself to the needs for information in this area, to assist it with its own planning and development activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate commitment to improved family morale

11. There should be an immediate clear directive at Ministerial level that the issue of family morale in the Australian Defence Force is one of high priority and that a careful examination should be made of ways in which adequate resources can be directed to dealing with problems in this area (paragraph 61).

Review of postings and promotion policies

12. A senior person should be appointed to undertake a thorough examination of postings and promotion policies in all three services. The objectives of this review should include, but not be limited to:

- identifying as many cases as possible where geographic stability over at least three years can be achieved in peacetime for those serving members who prefer it;

- recommending ways in which current systems
can be redesigned to ensure that relevant and important family related considerations, such as crucial stages in children's education, the severe illness of extended family members, or the special needs of children with disabilities, can be taken into account at some times in a member's career without jeopardy to long-term career development (paragraph 71).

Australian Defence Families Information and Liaison Service

13. An Australian Defence Families Information and Liaison Service should be created, with a small central co-ordinating unit headed by a Senior Executive Service officer or a person of equivalent rank in the Australian Defence Force (paragraph 86).

14. This new Families Information and Liaison Service should absorb elements of the existing Navy Personal Services Organisation, Army Community Services and some RAAF administrative functions into a co-ordinated family support structure for all three services (paragraphs 87, 194-198).

15. It should also have a number of new functions, which would be particularly suitable for the employment of spouses of service personnel. Positions to perform these functions should be created on a job sharing basis, both to meet the high demand for part-time work and to give some continuity in the event of postings where spouses of service personnel are employed. The positions would be for family liaison officers, spouse employment officers and education liaison officers (paragraphs 90(c), 138, 153(c)). In some areas the employment and education components could be two elements of one shared job. Salary and related costs for these new positions would be in the order of $4 million, assuming a generous level of staffing. They could obviously be phased in gradually, with a monitoring of the optimum staffing levels. If necessary, these positions could be obtained by redirecting other positions currently being abolished within the Department of Defence as a result of changes in administrative arrangements.

16. Family liaison officers would be the most numerous of these positions, preferably with at least one at each major service establishment or in an area where there are a group of small establishments. They
would be a first point of contact for families of service people in the area and would act as information and referral points (paragraph 90(c)). They would preferably be accessible to families without the need to come on to a defence base.

17. Their functions would include:

- helping families to settle into new areas and producing attractive and up-to-date local information material (paragraph 90(d));
- encouraging family days at bases (paragraph 90(e));
- developing family support programs to operate at times when serving members are away from home for service reasons (paragraph 90(f));
- mobilising volunteers from service families in the area to take part in self-help and mutual support projects (paragraph 90(g));
- facilitating the access of service spouses to emergency house-keeping services (paragraph 105);
- ensuring that spouses living in married quarters around bases have adequate access to facilities such as banking, shopping, and community health services (paragraphs 110-113);
- developing local consultative arrangements to ensure that spouses have a chance to have their say about decisions that affect them (paragraph 201);
- assisting families with special needs, such as families with disabled children (paragraph 116), single parents with special child care needs (paragraph 103), separated spouses (paragraph 125) and Asian spouses (paragraph 126).

18. They would also administer a local family liaison fund, made up of contributions through the central co-ordinating unit of the Families Information and Liaison Service, the proceeds of local fund raising efforts and contributions from mess funds. This fund would pay for the production of local information materials, cover expenses for volunteers and support
the family liaison officer's community development activities (paragraphs 90(h), 91).

19. Spouse employment officers would have an important role in helping spouses of service personnel obtain work if they wanted it. They would:

- maintain a register of spouses seeking work in the area, and their skills (paragraph 138);
- act as a first point of contact for spouses who were coming into the area and seeking work there (paragraph 138);
- develop a good knowledge of the local employment market, and contacts with employers and the local Chamber of Commerce (paragraph 138);
- take an active role in marketing the skills of service spouses to local employers (paragraph 139);
- promote the employment of spouses of service personnel in suitable civilian positions on bases (paragraph 140);
- counsel spouses coming into the area and those seeking to enter or re-enter the workforce on possible local opportunities, and encourage them to extend their marketable skills by participation in volunteer programs in support of other service families (paragraph 141).

20. Education liaison officers (positions which would provide useful employment opportunities for qualified teachers married to service personnel) would assist families in coping with the stresses of education disruptions. They would:

- liaise with schools about patterns of postings into their area and provide other information useful for the schools' planning purposes (paragraph 153(c));
- encourage schools to conduct detailed individual assessments of pupils moving out of the area (paragraph 153(c));
- be a source of information for parents about local curriculums and their differences from
other States, and assist students in making transitions between different education systems (paragraph 153(c));

draw on a fund administered by the central Families Information and Liaison Service to provide additional tuition for students who need special assistance in making educational transitions (see paragraph 25);

provide additional tuition for students themselves in areas where they are qualified (paragraph 153(c));

assist spouses living in the area who want to pursue further education to make informed choices about the options available to them (paragraph 156).

21. The central co-ordinating unit of the Families Information and Liaison Service would have the initial function of designing and implementing the integration of existing support services into a co-ordinated system, and of establishing the new functions described above (paragraphs 15, 198).

22. It would also:

support and monitor the activities of its various out-posted officers and evaluate their effectiveness (paragraphs 142, 154);

develop national strategies for

- improving family support programs for the families of Australian Defence Force members,

- dealing with the problems of educational turbulence,

- improving the general employment opportunities of spouses of service personnel, based on a monitoring of their particular needs,

- improving the opportunities for spouses to take up civilian employment with defence establishments (paragraphs 136, 142, 154);
monitor the need for and assist in the development of family counselling and information programs (paragraph 106);

develop and monitor national and State consultative arrangements to give spouses an opportunity to influence decisions that directly affect their lives (paragraphs 200).

23. It would act as a central source of up-to-date information for individual spouses and for the out-posted liaison officers on matters of particular relevance to highly mobile families, such as curriculum and other educational differences from State to State, provisions for transferring professional qualifications between States and different States' requirements in relation to adoptions (paragraphs 127, 142, 154,).

24. It would be responsible for apportioning the central contribution to the family liaison fund to be administered by family liaison officers. This contribution would be supplemented by local fund raising activities. I suggest that initially the central contribution be $5 per year for each service family in the area supported by the family liaison officer (ie not more than about $190,000 per year once national coverage is achieved) (paragraph 91).

25. It would administer the fund drawn on by education liaison officers to provide extra tuition at times of educational transition (paragraph 153(c)). This is one area where an accurate costing is particularly difficult because it is hard to establish how many children of relevant ages move in any year, and how many of those would need the extra assistance. Based on some very generalised assumptions about these factors, I would estimate that $300,000 per year might be needed to provide national coverage. Both this fund and the family liaison fund could be phased in gradually as out-posted officers are appointed.

26. The central co-ordinating unit would also develop policy on the desirable balance between service-based support systems and local community-based support facilities. It would administer a small fund I have recommended to provide modest grants to community organisations which have a particularly heavy demand on their services by defence force families (paragraph 209). The cost of this fund would be $150,000 per year.
27. Finally, it would promote the collection of statistical material on the characteristics of service families in Australia, to provide it with a sound base for its own planning and development activities (paragraph 10).

Internal public relations strategy

28. A co-ordinated internal public relations strategy should be implemented as soon as possible. It should be designed to reinforce the self-esteem of service families and to improve their access to information about the Australian Defence Force and about service life and conditions. There should be a focus on simple and understandable information materials (including non-print material) to cover some of the major areas highlighted in this report. I suggest that $1 million be devoted to this activity in its first full year of operation. The development of a network of family liaison officers as information and referral points for families will also assist in this area (paragraph 90).

Child care

29. The Department of Defence should adopt a policy that recognises the special child care needs of service personnel and their spouses and should implement a program to assess the particular needs in this respect of each defence base or location and to devise, within 12 months, strategies for meeting those needs over a phasing in period of five years. I have not attempted to cost the outcome of this process, because I believe a thorough assessment of the various local needs and the appropriate strategies for meeting them is necessary before this can be done (paragraphs 99-101).

30. The relatively minor issue of the use of married quarters by women who wish to provide a service as family day care mothers should be resolved by removing any obstacles to this kind of activity (paragraph 102).

Increase in disturbance allowance

31. There should be an increase in the rate of disturbance allowance payable on removals, based on the outcome of a recent survey of member's expenses in this area. Special attention should also be given to the allowance available in respect of each school-age child and to the allowance for the removal of household pets,
especially guard dogs (paragraphs 177, 178). Cost will depend on what is established by the review as a reasonable recompense for expenses incurred.

**Housing**

32. I have refrained from making specific recommendations about housing because of the level of activity already taking place in this area. However, at paragraphs 157-170 I have made a number of observations which may be of interest to those involved in establishing the new Defence Housing Authority. They cover the maintenance of married quarters, dissatisfaction with houses leased from State housing authorities, the management of service housing, poor security, poor fittings, shortages of 4-bedroom accommodation, problems in relation to cleaning houses and some perceived penalties of home ownership.

**Superannuation provisions**

33. Any future review of benefits for survivors under the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme should take careful account of their perceived impact on spouses (paragraph 75).

**Reunion travel for families**

34. With a view to facilitating reunion travel to a family's home base at least once they have served for the average posting period in a location away from that base, there should be an investigation of whether, within the constraints of service requirements, a more reliable system of using empty space on RAAF flights for this purpose could be developed. If this is not possible, other methods of facilitating reunion travel will need to be explored (paragraphs 108, 109).

**Entitlements related to unaccompanied postings**

35. Where serving members who are entitled to an interstate removal for their family elect to take an unaccompanied posting instead, whatever the reason for that choice, members should be entitled to six domestic economy return airfares between the place to which they are posted and their family's location for every twelve months of the posting. The fares should be transferable to the spouse or dependent children at the member's discretion (paragraph 120). While it is difficult for costing purposes to establish how many members would take up this option, costs should be
significantly offset by savings on removals and temporary accommodation allowance, and by savings on use of a married quarter or temporary rental allowance where families remain in their own homes.

36. As a general principle, families who opt to remain in the old location while the member takes an unaccompanied posting should be able to retain a married quarter or temporary rental allowance to avoid disrupting their living arrangements. However, there may need to be exceptions to this principle in some special circumstances (paragraph 121).

Health services

37. Qualified medical personnel attached to isolated bases should generally be encouraged to seek local registration and offer a service to dependants in the area, as now occurs in some places (paragraph 114).

38. Special attention should be given to the adequacy of obstetric services in the Katherine area to meet the needs of families posted to the new RAAF base at Tindal, as lack of such services causes particular problems of family support in remote or isolated areas (paragraph 115).

Separated spouses

39. The spouse of a serving member who reports the breakdown of the marriage and ceases to claim service benefits in respect of that spouse should be entitled to a removal within Australia (paragraph 124). Where spouses prefer to settle in the area where the breakdown occurs they should be able to seek the advice and assistance of the local family liaison officer, particularly where they are occupying a married quarter (paragraph 125).

Education

40. Apart from the assistance with educational transitions which has been recommended as a function of the Families Information and Liaison Service (paragraphs 15, 20, 25), mid-year moves for families with school-age children should be avoided wherever possible. Where a member accepts a mid-year posting but the spouse and children remain at the old location to the end of a school year, family reunion assistance on the basis described in paragraph 35 should be available pro rata (paragraph 153(a)).
41. A small group of qualified teachers who are married to service personnel should be commissioned to redesign, in consultation with relevant service personnel, the individual pupil assessment form currently supplied by the Department of Defence (paragraph 153(b)). The maximum cost of this in fees and travel should be $20,000.

Removals

42. Where a serving member cannot be available, for service reasons, to assist his or her spouse during a removal, a special allowance should be made to cover the costs of child care or other domestic assistance for one day at the old location and one day at the new. This allowance would currently need to be set at about $35 a day. Hopefully the existence of this allowance would act as a disincentive to arrangements that prevent serving spouses from assisting at their own removals, and it would in practice be restricted to the very limited number of families who move while the serving spouse is at sea or on a course or exercise (paragraph 182).

43. To ensure that families do not suffer undue stress at the time of the removal, there should be a firm entitlement to at least two nights motel accommodation for a family leaving an area, rather than the variable local arrangements that currently exist (paragraph 182).

44. All areas should carefully examine their management of movements into and out of their location by service families, particularly in relation to the use of motel accommodation, as there seems to be significant scope for greater efficiency, and hence reduced stress on families, in this area (paragraph 183).

45. The current review of removals to tropical areas, which is examining whether families should be permitted to have their own furniture removed to those areas, should make every effort to accommodate the element of choice that most families are seeking in this respect (paragraphs 185, 186).

46. A high priority should continue to be given to securing satisfactory arrangements for service families in respect of the interstate transfer of drivers licences and car registrations, which are a source both of considerable expense and of personal
inconvenience. Meanwhile, local information kits should include clear advice on local obligations (paragraph 179).

47. The Spouses Working Party on Removals, which liaises with the Department of Local Government and Administrative Services on all matters relating to service removals, should note that while recent improvements in removals were reported, there are still extensive complaints about the standards of service provided by removalists and the service provided by the Department of Local Government and Administrative Services in relation to claims for repairs and compensation (paragraph 188).

Implementation

48. Deputy Secretary A in the Department of Defence, jointly with the Assistant Chief of the Defence Force (Policy), should be responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of these recommendations by relevant areas of the Department and the Australian Defence Force. They should be supported in this by a small, full-time secretariat whose responsibility it should be to co-ordinate within six months the implementation of those recommendations that can be given immediate effect, and to prepare within the same period a detailed strategy of implementation for those with longer-term implications. A progress report should be submitted to the Minister for Defence at that stage and the brief and composition of the secretariat reviewed and adjusted as necessary (paragraphs 210, 211).

49. A National Consultative Group of Service Spouses should be established to act as a source of advice on the implementation of these recommendations. The group should be appropriately balanced in representation by service, State or Territory, and rank of serving spouse (paragraph 212). The maximum cost of this in fares and sitting fees should be $15,000.
WHY ARE THESE PROBLEMS IMPORTANT?

50. The overwhelming impression I gained from the service spouses I talked to in the course of the study was their feeling that they and the contribution they make in support of the Australian Defence Force are not valued either within the service community or in the community generally. They perceive the service hierarchy as generally unsympathetic to the special problems that service life creates for a family and inflexible in responding to those problems. They see the civilian community generally as placing little value on defence activities and having little or no esteem for those who choose defence as a career or for their families.

51. In spite of these perceptions, most of the people I spoke to were very proud of their spouse's service career; but they saw that career being pursued at a cost to family life that many Australians would not be prepared to tolerate; and they sought some recognition of that fact.

52. It is hard to quantify the impact on service morale of this feeling of low self-esteem, but it was quite clear from my observations that dissatisfaction on the part of families was having a significant impact on the morale of serving members; and in many cases was an important cause of resignation from the services.

53. There has been extensive comment recently on the increases in numbers of people leaving all three services. Levels are currently very high, and seem to be increasing, particularly from among the junior officer ranks. While the Defence Force traditionally tolerates, and even encourages, a higher rate of wastage than many other sectors of employment, such increases must be a source of concern from the point of view of long-term management of the Australian Defence Force. They must also be of concern in a purely economic sense when the cost of training and developing some of those members who are now choosing to leave is taken into account.

54. While comprehensive and reliable statistics on reasons for leaving the services are not available, I can only report that I spoke to many service people in
the course of my study who told me that issues related to family stability and family morale were influencing them to quit. Obviously this is not the only factor pushing up the wastage rate, but I believe from my observations that it is a significant one.

55. In both the United Kingdom and the United States the importance of the link between family morale and decisions to leave the services has been recognised. In response to this recognition, in 1983 the Chief of Staff of the United States Army produced a White Paper 'The Army Family' which states:

"...the unique nature of military service lends an urgency to the need to develop a coherent philosophy for the Army family. Servicemembers and their families should be able to enjoy the benefits of the society they are pledged to defend. Furthermore the nature of the commitment of the servicemember dictates to the Army a moral obligation to support their families."

56. This statement is being underpinned by the development of programs of family support and there are indications that the retention of trained and experienced personnel in the United States Army has improved as a result of those programs.

57. Certainly it will require some fundamental changes in service attitudes and priorities to address these problems properly in Australia. Currently there is a widespread acceptance that a defence career makes special demands on, and requires a special commitment from, those who choose it. However there is no clear acceptance of the consequence that flows clearly from this proposition - the responsibility to assist serving people to cope with the problems that this special commitment can create for their families. Acceptance of this commitment is not merely part of the obligations of the Australian Defence Force as a responsible employer; it makes clear management sense if the result is likely to be a more contented and committed service workforce.

58. Of course some of the current attitudes I have observed and which have been reported to me are based on a particular view of the role of the family and the
relationships of individuals within it - one which assumes that the needs and interests of all other members should be subordinated at all times to those of one breadwinner. This model of the family has been a convenient one for the services in the past, but, while it remains a legitimate choice for some families, it is by no means the preferred model for many Australian families today and, unless some means can be found to respond more adequately to the varying needs of families, it seems likely that a defence career will become increasingly incompatible with a satisfactory family life for growing numbers of people.

59. To some extent the sorts of changes in attitudes necessary in this area may be assisted by the increasing employment of women in the Australian Defence Force - particularly as women advance to more senior positions. Indeed, the relatively small numbers of women in the services in the past may have contributed to the tendency for the service hierarchy to lag behind general community attitudes in its approach to spouses. Working with women as colleagues and equals is a good way to develop an appreciation of the growing diversity in the roles women now play in Australian family life.

60. Changes in priorities will inevitably need to be reflected by some increase in expenditure in relevant areas. I have estimated the cost of the main family support proposals in this report - the creation of an Australian Defence Force Families Information and Liaison Service and the implementation of a co-ordinated public relations strategy - at a little under $6 million (see paragraphs 15, 24-26, 28). With the child care developments I have recommended the cost would be somewhat higher. However, $6 million represents less than 0.1% of total estimated Defence outlay in 1985-86, and I suggest that funds to support these initiatives could be made available, if necessary, by a reordering of priorities within the defence budget.

61. Naturally, changes in attitudes, and even changes in expenditure priorities, can be slow to take effect in organisations the size of Defence and it would be surprising if so fundamental a shift could be achieved immediately. However, I recommend that an immediate start be made and a strong impetus given to the changes by a clear
directive at Ministerial level that the issue of family morale is one of high priority and that a careful examination should be made of ways in which adequate resources can be directed to dealing with problems in this area.
MAJOR PROBLEM AREAS AND SOLUTIONS

62. In the course of my consultations with spouses of service personnel a number of clear themes emerged, and I have grouped my observations and recommendations around them. I have already discussed the low self-esteem among service families that I see as one cumulative impact of these problems. Another observation I must record is the widespread perception of unsympathetic treatment of family difficulties by the service hierarchy. I see the correction of this perception as a major management challenge for all three services.

63. The main problem areas discussed with me are listed here, but each is dealt with separately and in greater detail below.

- **Family support:** Because current operational and training requirements mean that service personnel move frequently from base to base, many service families spend long periods living away from their own extended families and often have to settle in a completely new community every couple of years. This constant removal from previously established networks of support was the cause of many of the problems I heard about, and I regard the establishment of adequate measures to compensate for this disadvantage as a high priority among my recommendations.

- **Information and liaison needs:** Most of the people I spoke to felt they would be helped by more information on a number of issues, ranging from local information to help them settle into new postings, to general information on service conditions and entitlements. They also felt the lack of any clear point from which such information could be obtained, and more particularly any clear point of contact for families with the service system, to which any problems, or simply inquiries, could be referred. Meeting these needs is an important element in providing an adequate system of family support for service families, and in addressing some of the problems related to the self-esteem of service spouses that I have discussed in paragraphs 50-52 of this report.
Employment: Employment presents a problem both for the spouses of service personnel and for their other dependants. There are two main contributing factors. First, many service establishments are located in areas where civilian employment opportunities are limited; and second, the frequency and uncertainty of postings makes it difficult for civilian members of service families to secure regular employment or to have any great degree of career development within their chosen employment.

Education: This was the most worrying problem for most of the groups I spoke to. Frequent changes of schools cause great concern to families, particularly when these involve interstate moves into unfamiliar school systems and when the children are in secondary school. Further education is also a problem for the spouses themselves, as they often have difficulty in meeting enrolment requirements for courses or in completing them before they are interrupted by a posting.

Housing: Housing was another major area of concern. In the course of my visits to bases I visited a number of married quarters and discussed their living conditions with the tenants. In many cases I found it profoundly embarrassing that people were being asked to live under the conditions I was shown. The main area of concern to most people was the standard of maintenance in service housing.

Moving and related allowances: This was also a major area of dissatisfaction, both in relation to the circumstances surrounding many service removals and in relation to the costs that fall on families as a result of frequent removals, and which are seen to be inadequately compensated.

Overlaying these major themes, and to some extent drawing them together, was a general feeling of dissatisfaction with the lack of control over their own lives that is clearly felt by many service families.
They said they often feel unable to plan ahead for more than a few months at a time, or to make fully informed long-term decisions about education for their children or themselves, employment opportunities, housing, health related matters, child care and a whole range of other issues that are fundamental to a satisfactory family life. It is hardly surprising that, in these circumstances, I saw many people who were suffering frustration and stress because of the uncertainty in their lives.

65. Of course, this uncertainty is directly related to the operation of the postings and promotion systems, and my terms of reference ask me specifically to identify any adverse effects of those systems on family life. While I do not pretend to have made a comprehensive examination of those policies in the time available to complete this report, there are several observations I wish to make in this area, because most of the problems reported to me can ultimately be traced to the high degree of mobility required of service families.

66. The first is that to many service families postings seem random and capricious. I accept that currently postings are guided by defined operational and training requirements, and while I do not necessarily accept that those requirements are immutable, this is not the place to challenge them. However, the logic underlying the present system is certainly not always obvious to those whose lives are disrupted by it, and since postings are to some extent 'driven' by resignations and retirements, the impact is obviously exaggerated at times when resignations are high. Since I would argue that at least some resignations are caused by unsatisfactory postings at crucial family times, there is a therefore danger of a spiralling effect setting in, if, in fact, it has not already done so.

67. The second observation is that while many service families welcome the opportunity to move around Australia (even if they would prefer those moves to be better planned) most families want some element of stability at some times - and the reasons for, and timing of this requirement, vary from family to family. Currently there appears to be insufficient flexibility in the system to accommodate these requirements and there seems to be limited opportunity for the sort of negotiation with the system that might avert an unnecessary and reluctant resignation because
of family needs which are immediately pressing, but perhaps also short-term.

68. Third, many of the spouses I have spoken to and many members of civilian communities around service bases have suggested to me that some of the stressful effects of continually severing community links and re-establishing families in new communities could be alleviated by working towards a goal of at least three years in a particular geographic location (which could, of course, represent two or more shorter postings within that area). Certainly I think there is room to move towards greater geographic stability in postings in this way; nor am I deterred from this view by those pessimists who claim it would 'condemn' certain service members to extended periods of duty in remote or unpopular locations. Optional shorter tours of duty in such areas could be meshed, in a flexible system, with longer periods in more desirable locations.

69. However, I do not believe that any comprehensive revision of postings policies can proceed simply from the point of view of the stresses they place on family life. There are too many other factors to take into account, at least some of which are currently the subject of separate reviews. And while I have not always been fully convinced by some of the arguments put to me in this area about particular service and training requirements, I have not been able, given the perspective of this study, to make an authoritative judgement about them.

70. I am certainly aware that there have been some recent moves towards greater stability - based not least on economic considerations. However, many moves are still regarded as essential on the basis of assumptions that I have not been in a position to test.

71. I therefore recommend that a senior person be appointed to undertake a thorough examination of the postings and promotion policies of all three services, whose specific objectives should include but by no means be limited to:

- identifying as many cases as possible where geographic stability over at least three years can be achieved in peacetime for those serving members who prefer it;
recommending ways in which current systems can be redesigned to ensure that relevant and important family related considerations, such as crucial stages in children's education, the severe illness of extended family members, or the special needs of children with disabilities, can be taken into account at specific times in a member's career without jeopardy to long-term career development.

72. I believe that if such an examination of policies and practices could achieve a significantly greater degree of geographic stability in the defence force in peacetime, the impact of many of the problems discussed in this report would be greatly reduced. The level of activity and expenditure directed to family support that I have recommended is aimed at dealing with the current situation, and is to some extent an explicit recognition of the disadvantages that service families suffer by reason of their mobility. With greater stability, adjustments in scope and emphasis could occur.

73. Finally, there were two other areas frequently raised with me, which were not strictly within my terms of reference, but which I record here because of the extent of the dissatisfaction expressed to me.

74. The first concerned the levels of pay within the defence force, and particularly the pay levels for the lower ranks. There was a widespread perception that Service Allowance (a flat rate payment of about $3,000 a year, which includes a component in recognition of extra hours worked, does not operate as a fair compensation for the hours worked, and this perception was obviously an important influence on family morale. It was also my impression from discussions with individual families that the financial position of junior members with dependants is often precarious, particularly where the spouse has difficulty in obtaining paid work.

75. The second concerned the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme. There were a number of criticisms made of this scheme, but one in particular which should be registered relates to the treatment of widowed spouses by the scheme. There was a high level of resentment at the difference in the proportion of husband's pension received by service widows (5/8) as distinct from widows covered by the Commonwealth Superannuation Scheme (2/3). There was also a
perception that service widows whose spouses had died before retirement are disadvantaged by loss of the commutation option on which the family's long-term financial planning may have been based. I recommend that any future review of benefits to survivors under the Defence Force Scheme take careful account of their perceived impact on spouses, as this is another important influence on family morale. Such a review might also take account of the fact that many defence spouses have had limited opportunities to develop their own attachment to the workforce so as to acquire either marketable skills to assist them in widowhood or their own independent superannuation entitlement.
Family support

76. One of the fundamental facts of service life is that families move around Australia. They are not only away from their own extended families for long periods, but every couple of years they may be uprooted from any networks of community contacts they have developed and asked to settle in new areas.

77. This is, from my observation, the single most important source of stress for service families and one where, because that stress is caused by the very exigencies of life in the services, there is the clearest responsibility on the Department of Defence and the Australian Defence Force to provide support measures that compensate for this fragmented lifestyle.

78. Service life does demand a very special commitment from those who choose it, and special sacrifices from their families. I have heard this said with pride by many military people; but I have seen little evidence that this pride is translated by the defence bureaucracy into practical assistance that recognises and underpins the commitment that members of the defence force make.

79. One woman at an open meeting put it starkly when she said "You simply have to be desperate to get help".

80. There are many practical ways in which service families can and should be given the kind of support they need to prevent their position from becoming desperate.

81. The stresses of constant moves obviously manifest themselves at different times and around different issues from family to family, but there are two points at which families seem to suffer particularly from a lack of support mechanisms. The first is when young and recently married people are posted away for the first time from the extended family of the civilian wife. A young woman may then find herself alone in a strange community, perhaps with one or two young children to care for, who by their very demands on her time can be an obstacle to her finding new friendships and contacts within her new environment. If she is the wife of someone in the Navy, her husband may at this stage be posted to sea,
so that she often assumes sole, 24-hour care of her children. The same situation may arise in the other services because of exercises or courses involving lengthy absences. The difficulty of making new social contacts is then exacerbated, because such contacts are often based on the couple as a unit. Her family and other established friends to whom she would normally turn for support and advice may be on the other side of Australia and her only access to them may be by long distance telephone calls which, given the rates of pay for the younger and more junior service members, the family can ill afford.

82. The other difficult point seems to be for people who have coped quite well for five or six moves, perhaps over a period of five to ten years. Then they begin to feel that the effort of being the newcomer in a new community again is simply not worth it. They do not wish to form new friendships simply to lose them again. They stop trying to make new friends and contacts and withdraw from community life — in effect simply living out the time until the next posting comes round.

83. In both these cases serving spouses may be buffered from the impact of isolation and loneliness by the fact that there is a ready made community based on their work for them to fall back on. It is the civilian spouse who carries the burden.

84. Of course not all spouses of service people suffer such difficulties — nor on the other hand are the difficulties limited to the above examples, and it is very hard to say exactly how widespread and damaging the impact of them is. Certainly whenever I spoke to civilian health workers who have regular dealings with service families, they described frequent instances of agoraphobia and other stress related symptoms. I observed for myself that an unexpectedly high proportion of the people who spoke at meetings prefaced their comments with the words "My child is asthmatic..." or "my child suffers from eczema"; although, of course, I had no way of assessing to what extent these symptoms might themselves be stress related.

85. Because I believe this constant pattern of moving is one of the most severe disadvantages faced by service families and is at the root of many of the problems they identify, many of the recommendations in
this report are aimed at establishing mechanisms to compensate in different ways for the separation of serving families from their extended families and other established community support networks, and at assisting them in making the transition from posting to posting.

86. The mechanisms I propose are described in detail as I deal with each of the areas they are designed to address: information and liaison needs, employment, education, removals and so on. In some areas these mechanisms will require some central co-ordinating point for which there is currently no obvious candidate within the Department of Defence or the Australian Defence Force, and to provide for that function I recommend the creation of a small central co-ordinating unit, headed by a person with Senior Executive Service or equivalent Australian Defence Force status. This unit, together with the outposted positions I recommend in the information, education and employment areas, would be known as the Australian Defence Families Information and Liaison Service.

87. The exact structure and function of this service will become clear as each element is described in the course of the report, and it is also set out in the summary of recommendations (paragraphs 13-27). I envisage that it would absorb significant elements of the current Navy Personal Services Organisation and Army Community Services into a co-ordinated family support structure for all three Services. This is discussed in greater detail in the Section, 'Getting It Done'.

**Information and liaison needs**

88. One of the most striking features of the consultative meetings I conducted for this study was the extent to which service families felt they lacked access to quite basic information that would make their lives easier. This lack of information was frequently vividly demonstrated in meetings when quite heated disputes broke out among participants about particular aspects of service life.

89. Other features I observed in these meetings that I believe are relevant to this area of my study included a great lack of self-esteem among service families - they seemed to reflect and perhaps exaggerate a perceived hostility towards them by the civilian community and a perceived indifference to
their problems by defence authorities. This latter point was particularly striking. Many of the spouses I spoke to felt that there was no sympathetic point of access for them even within the service systems designed to help them. There was also a widespread apprehension about repercussions on the serving member's career if the family was seen to have problems or to be 'making waves'. While I received many assurances at the highest levels that this was not the case, I can only observe that this message is not getting through to many serving members and their families.

90. While I will examine in greater depth in the final section the adequacy of existing mechanisms for providing support to service families, there are some specific recommendations that I wish to make in the area of information flows to families:

a. A co-ordinated internal public relations strategy should be implemented immediately, designed to reinforce the self-esteem of families associated with all three services and improve their access to information about the services and service life and conditions.

b. That strategy should include the production of simple and understandable information materials (including non-print materials where appropriate) to cover some of the major areas canvassed in this report. Examples would be a simple pamphlet giving advice about settling children into new schools; a booklet on helping toddlers to cope with separation from one parent and adjusting to their return; a reading list of children's books about moving house that would help in preparing families for removals.

c. It should also include the establishment of a network of family liaison officers, as part of the Australian Defence Families Information and Liaison Service - preferably with at least one position at each service establishment, or in each service location where establishments are very small. These positions should be established on a job-sharing basis and would be an excellent employment opportunity for some spouses of serving personnel. Their role would be to
act as an information and referral point for all families attached to the base or in the area. The range of assistance provided would be very wide and might extend from advising newly arrived families about shopping facilities in particular areas, to helping families obtain professional counselling for particular problems. Preferably spouses should not have to go on to a base to visit the family liaison officer.

d. Family liaison officers would be responsible for developing a more systematic approach to the problem of settling families into new postings (which is now tackled rather patchily from base to base) and providing information to help in the settling-in process. At its most basic this information could consist of the telephone number of the family liaison officer for the base. This might be all that some families require, and as specific problems arose they could make contact and seek advice. However, the liaison officer should also be responsible for producing attractive local information material which could be distributed to families posted into the area, preferably while they are still at their old location.

e. Family liaison officers should also ensure that events such as 'family days' take place regularly at bases (and also on ships for the Navy), as many families I spoke to said that such events were very helpful in developing family support for the serving member's career.

f. They should also develop local programs of family support at times when serving spouses are absent from their homes for service reasons. These might include assistance with gardening or minor home maintenance or 'time out' days for young mothers, when group child care could be arranged to give mothers and children a rest from one another. Particular attention should be given to programs of support for families of Navy personnel at sea and the special needs of
these families for access to reliable information about ships' movements in order to maintain family contact.

g. In many of their activities, and particularly in developing programs for 'welcoming' new families or for providing family support in the absence of spouses, family liaison officers will need to mobilise volunteer labour from among the service families within their area of responsibility. The encouragement of self-help and mutual support among families would be an important part of their role. Encouraging spouses of service people to volunteer for activities in this way would also be an important way of encouraging better self-esteem, and of developing new skills that might later be useful in seeking paid employment.

h. However, family liaison officers will need some financial resources to enable them to carry out their work. In particular they will need money to produce information materials and to pay expenses such as fares for spouses who volunteer to welcome other families to the area. Certainly people who volunteer to take part in this kind of mutual support activity should not be at a financial disadvantage as a result, and if funds would extend to a small honorarium in addition to expenses, so much the better. To provide for this sort of expenditure I recommend the establishment of local family liaison funds to be administered by family liaison officers.

91. The funds should be provided by a contribution through the central co-ordinating unit of the Families Information and Liaison Service, based on the population served in the area, supplemented by local fund raising activities and by any contributions the base wished to make by way of such avenues as mess funds. In this way a local commitment to the Families Information and Liaison Service and support for its activities could be developed based on a sense of contribution to one's own community needs.
Other family needs

Child care:

92. One area where family support needs for service families are particularly pressing is in child care. There are strong arguments that the Australian Defence Force as an employer has a responsibility to assist in the provision of a suitable mixture of occasional and full-day care for the below-school-age children of its employees. These arguments have their roots partly in the special demands that a defence career places on those who choose it, and partly in the disadvantages that families suffer as a result of frequent geographical moves. The benefits for both employer and employee of responding to the special child care needs of service families have already been recognised by a number of overseas defence forces, including the United States and in Scandinavia.

93. Lack of support from an extended family carries with it the penalty of a lack of emergency or occasional child minding; and many young service wives are in dire need of help when they become ill or when the pressure of caring for young children - often in their spouse's absence - becomes too acute. It is in these circumstances that a reliable occasional child care system is needed.

94. Of course child care is also necessary if a spouse wishes to have a paid job, and while some civilian families respond to this need by arranging to work complementary shifts so that one spouse is always available to care for the children, the unpredictable and long hours worked by many service people close off this option. I spoke to a number of women who, having secured a job for themselves, found it a particular financial strain to obtain adequate child care when their spouse was away from home for service reasons. They were, however, quite reasonably reluctant to give up their own jobs to meet these short-term service demands, given the difficulties they often experienced in obtaining work.
95. Another problem is that many service houses are located in isolated or remote areas that are not well served by community child care facilities, and where such facilities exist, it is frequently necessary to join a long waiting list - something not compatible with an unpredictable pattern of postings.

96. The fact that pregnant servicewomen are no longer automatically entitled to discharge is another important factor which will logically create greater child care needs, and the increasing number of couples where both spouses are service personnel will also create an increasing need for child care at hours that suit their pattern of duties.

97. These are all strong arguments for the provision of child care facilities in the vicinity of defence bases; and I believe they are different from - and more cogent than - the arguments for work-based child care for other Commonwealth employees.

98. Some bases have already responded in a creative way to the obvious needs in this area; in some cases providing empty married quarters which can be used as child care centres by groups of service spouses operating as co-operatives. These initiatives are to be welcomed, but there is still a need for a coordinated policy that will give some national consistency to developments in this area, and recognise the element of employer responsibility that clearly exists here.

99. I therefore recommend that the Department of Defence should adopt a policy that recognises the special child care needs of service personnel and their families and should implement a program to assess, in consultation with the serving members and their spouses, the particular needs in this respect of each defence base or location and to devise within 12 months strategies for meeting those needs over a phasing-in period of five years.
100. I recommend this approach because the needs in each area will be different and different strategies will be needed to meet them. In some areas the need will be particularly for an occasional care program which might be adequately provided by use of an empty married quarter, with the family liaison officer co-ordinating a group of volunteers to provide the service and funding it through modest fees from users and a small contribution from the family liaison fund.

101. In other areas there will be a more clearly established need for full-day care, which might be able to be facilitated through liaison with and support for local family day care schemes; through arrangements using Children's Services Program funding to supplement a Department of Defence contribution and provide a mixed defence-civilian facility where it can be established that the requirements of that program are met; and in some cases through the establishment of defence-funded and operated facilities - probably using a mixture of professional and volunteer staff - that would recover a proportion of their operating costs through fees charged to users.

102. One small matter that needs to be resolved in this context is a consistent policy on the use of married quarters by spouses of service personnel who wish to become family day care mothers. In some areas there was a question mark over their right to do so. Given that this is an excellent source of employment for some spouses, any unnecessary obstacles to their pursuit of such employment should be removed.

103. In the area of child care it is also important to note the special needs of single parent serving members. I spoke to a number of people, both men and women, who had sole custody of their children, and for many of them this was a major factor in a decision to leave the defence force. Apart from the child care problems caused by working irregular hours, there were particular difficulties for them in making transition arrangements at the time of postings and special arrangements when they needed to be away on exercises or courses. Family liaison officers at bases should be able to assist such people in securing adequate individual arrangements to suit their circumstances.
Emergency housekeeping:

104. Another major area where lack of extended family support creates special problems is in the need for emergency housekeeping or child care when the spouse of a member is too sick to undertake normal household duties and when the member is unable to be released from duty to help or is away from home for service reasons. Again, if people have access to their own family members or are in places where they have developed networks of support, this is a problem that most people can cope with. It is when people are newly arrived in strange communities that it is a particular difficulty.

105. In some areas there are emergency housekeeping services which can be used, and some Navy bases I visited were using them very effectively, with the costs met either by the users or from an emergency welfare fund. A base family liaison officer could facilitate access to such services if necessary, perhaps with discretion to meet any costs from the family liaison fund in circumstances of special hardship. Where these services do not operate, family liaison officers might develop a network of spouses who would be prepared to help in special circumstances in return for a small payment from the family using the service, which could be subsidised from the family liaison fund in cases of special need.

Family counselling:

106. Another disadvantage of prolonged absence from extended families is the lack, particularly by younger spouses, of the kind of support and advice on family problems that is frequently sought from members of one's own family. There were a number of areas in which spouses said they would like help and advice and there is scope for the development of counselling programs and information materials to fill this need. A few examples, but by no means an exhaustive list, would include: induction programs for new service families and potential service families; programs to help spouses and children cope with members' absences on service business and to help in the reintegration of the family on the members' return (this was a particular need strongly expressed by Navy spouses); programs designed for serving members to give them advice on managing family commitments and a demanding career; retirement counselling for both members and families to assist them in severing their reliance on
service supports. These programs could be developed in consultation with the Families Information and Liaison Service as part of internal public relations activities.

Reunion travel:

107. One issue frequently raised in relation to the absence of service families from their own extended families was the time and costs involved in travelling on reunion visits to families. This was a particular problem for families posted to Western Australia whose family ties were in the east, and vice versa; and for families in Tasmania whose home base was elsewhere, because of the lack of land transport options, which are generally cheaper. In some cases RAAF 'indulgence flights' are able to be used to return 'home' - but this is a very unreliable method of travel, because places on aircraft can never be guaranteed, making it hard to co-ordinate overall arrangements for travel with employment or other commitments, or to meet connections with civilian transport.

108. It seems not unreasonable that service families should be assisted in returning on a visit to their extended family's home base at least once they have completed the average posting period in a State away from that home base, even if their next posting is elsewhere in Australia.

109. If the first instance I recommend that an investigation be made of whether, within the constraints of service requirements, a more reliable system of using empty space on RAAF transport could be developed to meet the needs in this area. If this cannot be achieved, then other avenues of assistance should be explored.

Local facilities:

110. Another role for family liaison officers is to give attention to facilities available on or around bases and the access of dependants to them. This can be a particular problem in isolated or remote bases, and I was grateful for the many comprehensive submissions I received from spouses attached to such bases, and to the delegations who travelled long distances from them to talk to me about the difficulties they faced.
111. Obviously this is very much a matter that needs to be addressed locally according to the location of the base in relation to major towns, shopping facilities, public transport and so on and the location of married quarters in relation to the base. However, some guiding principles that need to be applied are that service personnel should have access to reasonable public transport facilities to take them to and from work (and that where these facilities are not provided by civilian authorities, use of service transport at suitable times should be arranged). At some isolated establishments a transport allowance is paid to assist with the costs of commuting and anomalies in the availability of this allowance were a consistent source of complaint.

112. Where married quarters are located on bases the same principle in regard to public transport should apply to families to enable them to have access to shopping, banking and health facilities where these are not available on the base. On some bases I visited there were adequate local arrangements to meet this need; on others there were obvious deficiencies.

113. Where the sorts of facilities I have referred to are not available on the base or near any main concentration of married quarters, family liaison officers should devise strategies for facilitating the access of families to them (for example by encouraging visiting banking services, mobile shops, sessional visits by health professionals, baby health sisters etc).

Health services:

114. In areas outside cities the health services available to dependants of service personnel were sometimes a problem. Some families took the view that they would like to have access to the medical facilities provided on bases; for others this was not a popular option. However, there would seem to be considerable logic where bases are located at some distance from local medical facilities, in encouraging qualified medical personnel on those bases to obtain local registration and to conduct fixed surgery sessions and after hours care for dependants - preferably on a bulk billing basis. This is already done in some areas and I recommend this course be pursued wherever possible.
115. Continuity of health care was a problem frequently raised as a consequence of a highly mobile life style, particularly in the area of gynaecological and obstetric services where many women felt particularly deprived by being unable to have a continuing relationship with a doctor they knew and trusted. A related problem arose in areas where local obstetric facilities were limited and it was reasonably common to take pregnant women out of the area for delivery if complications were at all likely. This caused very special problems in providing family support at the time of the birth, particularly if there were other children in the family to be cared for. This seemed to me to be a potential problem for the proposed new air force base at Tindal, and is one to which I recommend special attention be given by those involved in planning support facilities for that base.

116. One other health related issue that needs to be noted is the case of children with special health needs - particularly children with disabilities who require regular access to special facilities for treatment or therapy. My impression was that this was one area where sympathetic assistance was frequently available, provided that those in a position to help knew about particular problems. However, I also met a number of very distressed mothers of disabled children who simply did not know where to start looking for help, and to whom the existence of a sympathetic liaison officer who could identify channels of assistance for them, would have been of great benefit. This is one of the special areas where requests to provide greater geographic stability for the family are often particularly well justified.

Separations for family stability:

117. It was also brought to my notice that an increasing number of service families were responding to their needs or preferences for geographical stability at certain times by choosing to leave the civilian spouse and children at one location while the serving spouse takes an unaccompanied posting. This is a particularly noticeable trend among Navy families where large amounts of sea time may be involved at the new posting, but it was reported to me by the other services as well.

118. In these cases it was put to me that considerable savings may result because the cost of
removing the family and its personal effects, short-term motel accommodation, and allowances associated with removals, all of which would be the member's entitlement, are forgone. If the family remains behind living in a home it owns the saving may be even greater because there is no use of a married quarter or entitlement to a temporary rental allowance.

119. If the choice is made to leave the family behind for certain specified reasons (no suitable accommodation at new location, illness of dependant, educational stability for a child in secondary or tertiary education, child serving an apprenticeship or a handicapped child attending a special school or rehabilitation centre), then an allowance is available for reunion travel every three months. However a number of families who would prefer the option of leaving the spouse and children in one location while the serving member accepts an unaccompanied posting do not meet the criteria to qualify for the travel entitlement. Such families may be influenced by such factors as the spouse's employment, better extended family support in the old location, frailty of parents living in that location, or a whole range of other considerations. Many of these families find the cost of reunion travel a severe financial burden, but also need regular reunions to maintain family stability. One undesirable result of the high costs involved is that serving members are choosing low cost travel options (such as self-drive) which are physically very exhausting over extended periods. Even where the member qualifies for the travel entitlement, many felt it was inadequate to maintain family cohesion.

120. While this method of coping with the need for geographic stability would not be one that the majority of service families might choose, I have been persuaded that a greater degree of assistance should be provided with travel for those families who do regard it as a feasible option for them. I therefore recommend that where members who would be entitled to a family removal to another State for a posting choose to take an unaccompanied posting instead, they should, regardless of the reasons for that choice, be entitled to six domestic economy return air fares between the place where they are posted and their family's location for every 12 month period of their posting. These fares should be able to be used by the members themselves, their spouses, or their dependent children, at the members' own discretion.
121. Where a family that chooses not to accompany the serving member on a posting is occupying a married quarter in the old location, then as a guiding principle it should only be required to vacate that quarter in exceptional circumstances (for example if it is one of a very small number of quarters located on the base itself and needed for someone whose duties require them to live on base). If the married quarter has to be vacated, then another married quarter or temporary rental allowance should be provided. These principles may need to be applied flexibly in some areas to meet particular local difficulties, but still with sympathy for the position of the family seeking to remain in an area.

Areas of specialised need:

122. Finally, three areas of very specialised family needs were drawn to my attention, where I believe some action is desirable. On some aspects of these I have specific recommendations. Others I simply note for the future attention of the Australian Defence Families Information and Liaison Service.

123. The special problems of the treatment of spouses when marriages break down were put to me on a number of occasions. There are two aspects that can cause difficulty here. The first is when the spouse has accompanied the member on a posting away from her or his own family area of residence, and wishes to return to that area after the marriage breaks down. Currently the serving spouse may agree to claim a removal entitlement (as a 'final' removal) for the spouse and household goods - but there is no guarantee of this to the spouse. Informal arrangements are also sometimes made using service transport, but again there is no guarantee to the spouse that this will be available.

124. There are obviously some fine questions of responsibility that could be debated in relation to this issue, but I believe the simplest and most compassionate solution would be to grant a removal entitlement within Australia to the spouse of a serving member who reports the breakdown of a marriage and ceases to claim service benefits in respect of that spouse.
125. The other, and perhaps even more difficult area in relation to separated spouses is when the spouse remains in occupation of a married quarter after the marriage has ended. There is obviously no entitlement to remain there, but in some cases described to me, proceedings to evict the spouse had been insensitively handled. In some areas, where the married quarter in question is leased from a State housing authority, it is possible to negotiate the return of that house to the State with the tenant in residence. In other areas long waiting lists and the reluctance of individual authorities work against this option. Again, this is an area where I believe a system of family liaison officers, who are seen as helpers for service families rather than part of the service system, will be able to provide some help. They can at least be a legitimate point of contact for such spouses and can assist in working out the best solutions and sources of help according to local conditions.

126. Another highly specialised area of family support concerns the Asian wives of service personnel. I was only made aware of the special needs of many of these women on visits to some air force bases, and possibly the pattern of postings of air force personnel means they are more likely to have Asian spouses. In some areas I visited, support groups were operating which provided a range of assistance including basic English tuition and help with various aspects of integration into a foreign community. In other places potential support groups were floundering for lack of a little help. Where family liaison officers become aware that there is a group of spouses associated with their base or area of responsibility who need this kind of special help, they should give this a high priority in their efforts to develop local programs of family support.

127. The problems caused by postings for families who are trying to adopt children were raised with me on a number of occasions. Long waiting lists and residence requirements imposed by the various States were obvious stumbling blocks for them. In most cases the people I spoke to had eventually successfully adopted children, but felt they would have been spared much family stress had they been able to obtain better advice about the options open to them when facing interstate transfers. This is one area where the central co-ordinating unit of the Families Information and Liaison Service could operate as a source of information and advice.
Employment

128. Employment presents major problems for many of the spouses I consulted during the study. Many service establishments are located in areas where civilian employment opportunities are limited; and some employers in those areas are reluctant to employ people they know will be moving on in a couple of years. Even in metropolitan areas some employers have this attitude, and jobs can be hard to find. In one town I visited my attention was drawn to a job advertised for a part-time employee in a shop, which specified that the applicant must be a permanent local resident. Another very stark example I was given of the difficulties that can exist in this area was from a group of women whose husbands were stationed at Wallangarra on the NSW/Queensland border. They told me that of 21 service families in that area, only one spouse had found employment in the last 30 months - and that involved a 98 km drive north to Warwick.

129. When spouses do secure work, postings mean that they suffer great discontinuity in their employment and have limited opportunities for career development or for accruing such benefits as long service and sick leave or superannuation. The problems are different, but equally serious, whether professional or non-professional work is sought. People with professional skills may find limited opportunities to use them in remote areas, while some, such as teachers, report difficulties in transferring their qualifications from State to State. I was particularly disappointed to hear of the many difficulties experienced by spouses who were Commonwealth Public Servants in transferring to suitable positions in areas where their spouses were posted. Where non-professional, and particularly unskilled, work is sought, competition is usually fierce and a history of disrupted employment can be a disadvantage that excludes service spouses from consideration.

130. The particular problems experienced by service families in relation to child care which have already been discussed also contribute to spouses' difficulties in joining the workforce.

131. Where the attempts of service spouses to find work are frustrated by the sort of factors described above, they may not only suffer personal frustration if
they would prefer to work, but are also deprived of an important channel through which they can form links with a new community and develop support networks for themselves within it. Furthermore, the result is that many service families are either reluctant one-income families, with aspirations to a higher standard of living than the serving member's salary alone can sustain, or at best precarious two-income families, unable to enter into financial commitments that depend on a second income, because of the ever present possibility that that income will be lost on posting.

132. The employment of family members who are young school leavers presents a problem, also. If they choose to remain part of the family unit they suffer the same employment disadvantages on posting as do their civilian parents. On the other hand, if they choose to remain in a location where they have secured work (as many do in the current employment climate) it can cause great individual and family stress when the rest of the family moves on to a new posting.

133. Of course not all spouses of service personnel want to join the paid workforce, and this is particularly so for women during child bearing years. However, where they do wish to join the workforce any assistance they can be given in coping with the disruptions caused by postings can only contribute positively to service morale.

134. There are basically two ways of assisting: either the spouses can be given defence related jobs or they can be helped to find jobs in the community. Given that there are some 38,000 married service personnel and assuming that about half their spouses would like at least part-time employment; given also that their range of job aspirations and skills is as diverse as any other randomly chosen group of about 20,000 citizens, the second option is likely to be the more effective of the two.

135. This is not to say that spouses should not be given civilian jobs on defence bases where they exist. Indeed many now hold such jobs and their numbers could be increased by a greater awareness of the potential of this avenue of employment and by encouraging the wives of serving personnel at least to consider employment in more traditionally male areas, such as gardening. I do not believe, however, that civilian jobs on bases
can be specifically restricted to the spouses of serving personnel. The practice of designating positions in this way would not sit well with general Australian employment practices, and in many areas the availability of civilian employment on bases is an important link and creator of goodwill between the services and the local civilian community.

136. However, defence establishments should beware of practising the same sorts of discrimination against service spouses as civilian employers have openly described to me. Bases where there is a large civilian workforce might well consider their own 'affirmative action' programs for service spouses to ensure that no inadvertent discrimination is practised. A monitoring of the representation of service spouses and other dependants in civilian jobs on the larger bases would be a useful activity for the central Families Information and Liaison Service to pursue, with a view to ensuring that these avenues of employment for spouses are being fully explored.

137. There are also areas throughout this report where I have recommended the creation of new activities on or around defence establishments to help in meeting some family problems. In staffing these positions, a sympathetic knowledge of the particular problems facing spouses of service personnel would be an important qualification and the positions would present ideal employment opportunities for such spouses. In all these areas I recommend that the new positions be established on a job sharing basis, both to meet the very widespread demands of service spouses for part-time employment and also to provide some buffer against any marked adverse effects on the functions carried out that might be caused by a spouse's posting.

138. The first area where I recommended positions that would be suitable for such an arrangement was in the outposted family liaison officers of the Families Information and Liaison Service. I also recommend that Service include a number of spouse employment officers, with at least one such position in each area where there is a major base or group of small bases. The role of these people would be to maintain a register of spouses seeking work in the area and to be a first contact point for spouses who know they are to be posted there and wish to obtain work. Spouse employment officers would also familiarise themselves with the local employment market and make contact with major employers in the area and groups such as the Chamber of Commerce.
139. Theirs would be very much an entrepreneurial role, involving active marketing of the skills and experience of the spouses they would be seeking to place in employment. They would also try to overcome to some extent the reluctance of some employers to take on spouses of defence force personnel - including perhaps by drawing their attention to the average tenure of employees in general in particular jobs.

140. These spouse employment officers would also be well placed to identify civilian positions on bases that would be particularly suitable to the employment of service spouses, and to encourage people coming into the area with suitable skills to apply for them.

141. Finally, they would develop, through their observation of the local employment climate, the ability to counsel spouses, particularly those seeking to re-enter the workforce after a break, about the types of employment that might best develop transferable skills. (From my own relatively limited observations I was able, for example, to conclude that larger employers, like the big retail chains, are a better employment prospect for service spouses than small local businesses.) Working in close co-operation with local family liaison officers, they should also be able to assist spouses to identify ways in which their range of marketable skills might be extended by participation in some of the volunteer activities associated with local family support programs.

142. The central co-ordinating unit of the Families Information and Liaison Service would provide a mechanism for monitoring the employment needs of service spouses on a national basis and for evaluating the success of the out-posted officers in assisting them. It would also provide support and guidance for those officers, develop co-ordinated national strategies for improving the employment opportunities for service spouses, and hold a central bank of information for the use of spouse employment officers and individual spouses on such matters as transferring professional qualifications from State to State.
Education

143. Education was the most frequently raised problem area for the people I consulted with. Every group I spoke to reported the difficulties of moving children from school to school and in and out of different State school systems. They spoke about the problems of continuity in education when curriculums - and even the subjects offered - vary so widely from State to State. They also spoke about the difficulties caused by varying school starting ages and varying ages for making the transition from primary to secondary education.

144. These disruptions are particularly distressing for families with children in high school, many of whom believe that changes in schools during the senior years will have an adverse effect on performance in final school examinations and so on their children's ability to secure satisfactory employment or tertiary education.

145. My attention was drawn to a number of studies in this area, some of which purport to show that this kind of turbulence does not generally have an adverse effect on educational achievement for the children involved, some of which claim that the opposite is the case. Interestingly, in some of these latter studies the primary school years are identified as those when stability is most crucial.

146. I note that Senator Susan Ryan, the Minister for Education, has recently funded a study in Western Australia on the effects of education turbulence, which may throw further light on the issue. However, whatever the long-term impact on children's educational performance, the short-term impact in terms of family stress is self-evident. The people I spoke to told me they found it difficult to negotiate their children at appropriate levels into new schools and new systems every couple of years. They believed it was having an adverse effect on their children's education, and consequently it was one more cause of family stress associated with postings.

147. Other problems raised with me in this area were the difficulties mid-year moves cause for school-age children; and the additional expense this causes for families in buying new books, school
uniforms, and so on - costs that are certainly not offset by the $75 component of disturbance allowance that is meant to compensate for children's education expenses.

148. Service families also felt it was difficult for them to enrol their children in advance in private schools, and particularly kindergartens, because it frequently meant joining long waiting lists (and sometimes incurring a registration fee) with no real certainty about where the family would be located at the relevant times. In addition they felt that their options in using the public education system were frequently limited by the availability and location of married quarters at a particular posting.

149. A small number of the people I spoke to had responded to the problems of educational turbulence by choosing boarding schools for their children, especially during the high school years. There was a very mixed reaction to this approach from the larger groups I consulted with. Boarding schools do not seem to have any great appeal for Australians generally, and many expressed the view that it was more important to keep the family unit together and to compensate in other ways for any additional disadvantages to their children. However, the minority who choose, or would like to choose, boarding schools were very vocal in their criticism of current arrangements for financial assistance. There is currently some assistance available for boarding children in the last years of secondary school, but the extremely stringent restrictions on the circumstances in which this assistance is available mean that currently only about 100 people receive the allowance at an annual cost of about $400,000.

150. I acknowledge that a small group of people may in fact be disadvantaged by the very narrow conditions under which this allowance is available. However, I am not convinced that the high cost of extending the allowance can be justified as a priority over the provision of some assistance to the majority of service families for whom boarding school is not a preferred option and who currently have no avenues of assistance for the problems they encounter with educational turbulence.
151. Of course it is not only the families themselves who find educational disruptions a difficulty. Schools located close to married quarters have to cope with the particular social and educational problems presented by a fluctuating student population. They may also have to accept a high turnover in supporters of their various parents groups. Sometimes temporary variations in numbers of students associated with the postings cycle lead to reductions in staff numbers; and most schools I visited which had high concentrations of pupils from service families identified a need for additional staff resources to assist their students in making the transition from school to school or from system to system. In some cases they saw a need for remedial teaching to assist children who had failed to acquire basic learning skills. In other cases the need was for special tuition to cope with curriculum differences.

152. Since the possibilities of achieving a more standardised approach to education from State to State seem, if anything, to be receding, and since even with greater stability in postings, moves at some times in a child's educational career are almost inevitable in the services, my recommendations in this area are aimed at finding practical ways to assist families in making educational transitions, rather than at avoiding them altogether.

153. They are that:

a. Wherever possible, postings for service members with school-age children should be delayed until the end of a school year. Where this is not possible members with school-age children should be fully informed of the existing provisions for the removal entitlement in relation to the new posting to be postponed until the end of the school year so that the spouse and children can remain at the old location until then. If the removal is so postponed the member should receive assistance with family reunion travel in the intervening period as has been recommended for unaccompanied postings (paragraph 120).

b. The system of providing individual educational assessments of students when they leave an area should be improved. Currently there is a short form provided by the Department of
Defence which teachers can be asked to complete, but many parents and teachers have suggested to me that this is inadequate in itself. Some schools I visited with heavy concentrations of children from service families had developed their own, more comprehensive assessment reports. Parents reported that these were very helpful in negotiating their children's placement in new schools. I therefore recommend that a small group of service wives who are also qualified teachers be commissioned to review the current assessment form in consultation with relevant service personnel and recommend changes to it.

c. A number of positions should be created on the same model as other out-posted positions of the Families Information and Liaison Service to provide education liaison officers in areas with large concentrations of service personnel. These officers, many of whom might themselves be qualified teachers married to service people, would:

- provide a liaison point with schools to keep them informed about such matters as posting patterns into the area and other information needed for planning purposes;

- encourage schools to co-operate in the individual student assessment program, by persuading them of the benefits to schools of participation in such a system;

- be a source of information for parents and schools about different State systems and assist students in making educational transitions;

- draw on a fund to provide additional tuition for students from service families making educational transitions. The exact use of these funds would vary from area to area, depending on the particular features of the local education system that presented problems for students entering it from elsewhere and the needs of individual students.
However, there is obvious scope here for employing other qualified teachers who are also service spouses on a sessional basis;

provide additional tuition themselves for students at times of transition, in areas where they are qualified.

154. I would envisage these education liaison officers working with a number of schools in a particular area, and perhaps negotiating with the school authorities for the use of facilities such as classrooms after hours, in return for the general assistance and support provided to the schools. They would also need to be supported by the central co-ordinating unit of the Families Information and Liaison Service which would have a monitoring and evaluation function, provide current information and back-up about differences between State systems and develop national strategies for dealing with problems of education turbulence among service families.

155. The difficulties encountered by children from service families who wish to pursue tertiary education were also raised with me, since many families are faced with the need to leave children behind to complete courses while the rest of the family accompanies the serving member to another part of the country. The same difficulty can also occur when children have embarked on apprenticeships. However, while I again acknowledge that some families may encounter particular hardships in this respect and that for many such separations are very stressful, I do not believe that the responsibilities of the Australian Defence Force as an employer can readily extend to accommodating the needs of members' children beyond their secondary school years. Nor do I believe that defence families are significantly worse off in this respect than many other Australian families - who, for a variety of reasons, live at a distance from the tertiary institutions attended by their children.

156. One final area related to education which was frequently raised with me was the difficulty that spouses have in pursuing any further education in their own right. Frequently, postings into areas occur after the close of enrolments for courses, so that the
The first year of a posting may be 'wasted' in educational terms. It is also very difficult to complete courses without interruptions by postings or to transfer to a different educational institution without loss of credits. This is an area where education liaison officers may be able to act as an information and support mechanism to enable spouses who wish to pursue this kind of educational activity to make the most informed choices about the various options open to them in particular areas.
Housing

157. I heard many complaints about housing from service families, and visited a number of defence married quarters which persuaded me that many of these complaints were entirely reasonable, and that the low standard of service housing is a significant contributor to poor family morale in the services. At times when families are suffering all the other stresses associated with a change of location, it would at least lessen the trauma a little if they could be confident of being offered a reasonable standard of accommodation on arrival at their new location.

158. The most frequent area of complaint and a source of great frustration for the people I consulted was the poor standard of maintenance in service housing, particularly in that leased from the various State housing authorities. Tenants complained of delays in carrying out maintenance and of poor quality of work and materials when maintenance was done, resulting in rapid deterioration. In some cases I was also told of problems encountered by spouses in reporting maintenance needs themselves when the serving member was away from home for service reasons.

159. I am of course aware that the whole issue of service housing has been an area of great concern recently and that initiatives have now been put in place with the intention of improving the quality and management of the housing stock. I have no wish to complicate this issue unduly by making specific recommendations at this stage in an area where so much work is being done.

160. However, there are some observations from my study that I wish to place on record for the benefit of those involved in the establishment and operations of the new Defence Housing Authority. I have also included at Appendix B a list of the most frequently raised complaints about the fittings and design of married quarters.

161. There was general dissatisfaction with housing leased from State housing authorities. This applied not only to the standards of maintenance of this housing, but to the general condition of the houses and to the social environment in the areas where they were. In many cases this concern seemed to me to be fully justified.
162. The management of service housing in both Sydney and Melbourne is, I realise, a particularly challenging task. However, in both those areas there was a very high and widespread level of dissatisfaction with the service provided, and I received many complaints about the attitudes of housing staff to their prospective tenants. In Sydney there were also complaints from all three services about long delays in receiving payments of temporary rental allowance.

163. On a more general management issue, where families have been granted temporary rental allowance because of the lack of a suitable married quarter, it can cause great hardship if they are later required to move to occupy a vacant quarter. Issues such as possible disruption to children's education, or to child care arrangements, and access to the spouse's employment should be considered before such moves are forced upon members.

164. A large number of people discussed with me their preferences in the matter of living either in areas of predominantly military housing or scattered through the general community. There were many individual points of view about this, but one fact that emerged was that many Navy spouses in areas where sea postings were common and spouses from the other services in areas where there were frequent absences on exercises, preferred to live at least in a small cluster of service housing. This provides a greater sense of community during periods when their serving spouses are absent.

165. On a related issue many families complained of the poor security of their married quarters. Particularly during the absence of serving spouses the lack of deadlocks, security screens or properly fastening windows in many married quarters can be a source of considerable concern. A number of people also reported that the combination of poor security arrangements and the socially disadvantaged areas in which large numbers of service houses are located resulted in great difficulties for them in attempting to insure their personal belongings. Although at least one insurance company offers a special, portable policy to service personnel, its availability was not widely known.
166. The discrepancy in the fittings provided in different service housing was a source of complaint, with such items as wardrobes going in and out of storage depending on the presence or absence of built-in cupboards, in a way that many obviously found irritating. Generally there was consensus that married quarters should be equipped with adequate floor coverings and some heating equipment; although paradoxically the policy of carpeting all new and refurbished married quarters is obviously causing some short-term irritations as the carpets join the wardrobes on the storage merry-go-round. (See further Appendix B.)

167. The shortage of married quarters with four or more bedrooms was a significant problem. In an area where housing generally was in short supply, one family I met with six children was occupying a three-bedroom married quarter. The four sons, whose ages ranged from 7 to 15 years, shared one bedroom. I would argue for the acquisition of a larger supply of four-bedroom houses to be a very high priority for the new Authority.

168. The cleaning of houses by out-going tenants and the condition of houses on occupation were major topics of discussion. As I did not personally witness any housing inspections for out-going tenants I was unable to judge whether the oppressively military character of these inspections as described to me was in fact attributable to the inspectors or was projected on to them by the tenants. In any case, many spouses find these inspections a humiliating experience and an onerous burden at a time when they are trying to cope with the other pressures associated with removals. They also complained of considerable inconsistencies in the standards applied in different areas.

169. In addition there were complaints that, after tenants have moved out, houses can often stand empty for many weeks and are in a fairly dirty condition by the time new tenants occupy them, creating additional cleaning chores. Against this background, the new Housing Authority might like to consider whether a small weekly loading on rent could be used to cover the cost of thorough professional cleaning to a high standard before a married quarter is occupied by new tenants - thus removing this burden from spouses. There was certainly widespread support for this idea among groups I discussed it with.
170. Finally, a number of home owners spoke to me about the penalty they incur in being asked by their lending institutions to pay investment rates on their home mortgage when they are forced by postings to move away from their homes. While it is obviously difficult for individuals to negotiate any more favourable arrangements in isolation, I was struck by the numbers of home owning service personnel who said they would prefer to rent their houses to other service people and who already did so through informal arrangements. If these arrangements could be formalised, perhaps through the Housing Authority with a scale of fair rents determined by it, or through the Families Information and Liaison Service, then this might provide a negotiating base of sufficient size to persuade some lending institutions to offer more favourable arrangements.
Moving and related allowances

171. Given the frequency with which most service families move from posting to posting it is hardly surprising that the question of moving and the allowances related to moving was a common topic in my discussions with spouses.

172. The adequacy of disturbance allowance was challenged by every group I spoke to. This allowance currently ranges for families from $305 to $575, depending on the number of moves a family has undertaken. There is also an allowance of $75 per child to cover the costs associated with moving to a new school (books, uniform etc). Many people I consulted estimated that the cost of each individual move to their family was at least $1000, leaving aside the amount that was reimbursed through these allowances. Expenses incurred at removal times include cost of equipping married quarters with basic items, such as carpets and curtains and in some cases heating, cost of transferring gas and electricity connections, cost of transferring drivers licences and car registrations, cost of purchasing suitable clothing for the family if a severe change of climate is involved, loss of unexpired subscriptions to local sporting and other social clubs and organisations, wasted food (particularly where the family budgets for bulk buying of frozen food) and costs incurred in setting up a new stock of household supplies, loss of items such as pot plants which it is impracticable to transport, and the purchase of minor household items at the new location.

173. A particular area of complaint was in relation to the special allowance available for removal of domestic pets (currently $78). Most people reported that this did not cover the cost of removing their animals and accommodating them in kennels, as was frequently necessary while waiting for a married quarter to become available.

174. There were two separate perspectives on this problem. One was from the point of view that domestic pets become very much part of a family and that moving them with the family gives an important element of stability, particularly for younger children. As one woman graphically put it "It's very hard to knock the children's pets on the head every time you have to move".
175. The other point of view was put by the many women who keep guard dogs for security reasons. They mentioned that these animals were in many cases essential to their own sense of well-being, given their husbands' frequent absences from home and the inadequacy of security provisions in their married quarters (which I have commented on at paragraph 165).

176. I found both these arguments for better assistance in this area very cogent.

177. I understand that an extensive survey of service members' costs associated with moving has recently been completed, and I recommend that an increase in the disturbance allowance based on the outcome of that survey be instituted as soon as possible. I was certainly completely satisfied from my discussions with spouses as to the inadequacy of the current allowance.

178. I further recommend that special attention be given to the adequacy of the allowances in relation to children and to the removal of household pets, particularly guard dogs. In both these areas I was again convinced of the inadequacy of existing allowances to cover the expenses incurred.

179. The question of changing driving licences and car registrations from State to State, which I have reported above as a significant cost incurred on removal, was a source of extreme irritation to many of the people I met. They were ill informed about their obligations in this area and had great difficulty in obtaining accurate information. I understand that extensive work has already been done within the Department of Defence to negotiate special arrangements with the relevant State authorities to cover the families of service personnel. I recommend that the development of satisfactory arrangements in this area continue to be given a very high priority and that in the meantime information about local obligations in this respect be included in information packages provided for families at the time of posting.

180. Leaving aside financial burdens caused by moving, removals also make heavy and, in some cases, unreasonable demands on the time and energy of spouses. Because of the demands on the serving member to integrate quickly into a new position, the load of domestic administrative detail (such as enrolling the children in school; arranging telephone, electricity
and other connections; re-registering the car and so on) frequently falls on the spouse. In addition, many reported that serving members were frequently not released from duty at the actual time of removal, so that the full burden of supervising the removal, cleaning the house and moving the family may fall on the spouse, perhaps encumbered by a couple of small children or babies, or in the late stages of pregnancy.

181. Spouses also carry the burden of long stays in motels on arrival if no suitable married quarters are available (not an a pleasant experience for families with young children).

182. I have already covered the issue of cleaning houses in paragraphs 168-169. Other measures which I believe would alleviate some of the pressure on spouses at removal times are:

- the guaranteed availability of members to assist with their family's removal, or if the member is at sea or on an exercise at the time, a special allowance to cover the cost of child care or other domestic assistance for one day at the old and one day at the new location;

- a firm entitlement to two nights motel accommodation at the old location (the fixed entitlement is currently one night with endless local variations) to enable the family, once packing is completed, to move into a motel, spend a full day on the inevitable last minute chores and move to the new location on the day following that.

183. Attention also needs to be given to the length of stays in motels that families can experience on arrival at a new posting and to the location of the motels used in relation to schools and other facilities that may be used once the family moves into a married quarter. I heard enough complaints of inexplicable waits in motels for housing maintenance that was never actually carried out, to have grave doubts about the efficiency with which this aspect of removals is managed in some areas.

184. Removals to areas such as Darwin and Townsville present a special problem because of the limited entitlement to removal of a member's personal
furniture to those areas, and the rather unprepossessing nature of much of the service provided furniture in married quarters there.

185. The arrangements in these areas are generated not only by the costs of removing household goods to them, but also by a concern that the local climate may cause unnecessary deterioration in members' own furniture. While some people were quite happy with this arrangement, by far the majority of those I spoke to would prefer more choice in this matter. Many spoke wistfully and with some apprehension of the fate of furniture last seen several years ago before it was moved into storage.

186. I am aware that the comparative costs of storage and removals are currently being examined with a view to revising this area of policy, and I recommend that every effort be made in that review to accommodate the element of choice that many families are seeking.

187. Finally, the following areas were raised with me as presenting problems:

- the quality of service provided by removalists,
- the levels of compensation available for damage to goods during removals,
- the speed with which repairs or compensation for damages become available.

188. I have not developed detailed recommendations in respect of these complaints, but they all seem to me to be worthy of further attention. I recommend that the Spouses Working Party on Removals (a group of spouses of service personnel which liaises with the Department of Local Government and Administrative Services to improve the standard of removals) take note of these points and also note that, while spouses acknowledge a considerable improvement in this area in recent years, substantial problems are still being encountered. There is, for example, undoubtedly room for tightening the contracts entered into with removalists to ensure that the requisite standard of service is provided, or for developing better procedures to enable families to enforce those standards.
189. In relation to the speed with which claims for repairs and compensation are handled, the Department of Local Government and Administrative Services has itself acknowledged that the combination of a heavy load of removals in the December/January period, combined with the staff shortages created by annual leave taken in that period results in a sub-standard service to many defence force families.
GETTING IT DONE

Current structures

190. Currently the structures used by the three services to provide 'welfare' services for members and systems of family support vary considerably. The Navy has the best developed structures, through its Personal Services Organisation, which uses a mixture of service personnel and civilian social workers to provide support in the areas of housing, removals, entitlements, resettlement, education and general welfare of families. However, the system is overstretched for the amount of problems it is trying to cope with, and all the social workers I spoke to who were working in this system reported that they felt too heavily burdened with 'crisis intervention' work to undertake the types of community development and crisis prevention programs for families, for which they identified a high need.

191. The Army also has its own system, called Army Community Services, which is more heavily dominated by service personnel than the Navy's. It is not as widely represented on bases as the Navy's and its performance gives the impression of being patchy and relying very much on the goodwill of local senior officers. In some areas I visited it was a dynamic and effective force; in others it was hard to discern its influence.

192. The RAAF has no structured welfare or family support system.

193. All three services rely quite heavily on chaplains as a first point of contact for serving members and families with problems. While acknowledging the important pastoral role of chaplains in the Australian Defence Force, I am sceptical about the appropriateness and effectiveness of military chaplains as a first point of contact for service families with problems. Certainly many families I spoke to would be reluctant to use this avenue, or indeed any avenue that they see as being linked into the military structure.

194. I have already recommended the creation of an Australian Defence Families Information and Liaison Service and have indicated that I see it as absorbing
many of the functions of the current Navy Personal Services Organisation and Army Community Services into a co-ordinated system of support for families attached to all three services.

195. For many families (though not necessarily for serving members) the first point of contact with this Service would be through the system of family liaison officers I have recomended (paragraph 90) and this would undoubtedly assist in improving families' access to support systems provided by the Australian Defence Force. Family liaison officers would not be part of the military rank structure and they would preferably be accessible without the spouse having to come on to a military base. They would provide information and referral services, referring individual problems to other specialised support mechanisms within the Australian Defence Force or to external civilian agencies, depending on the particular circumstances.

196. The new co-ordinated Families Information and Liaison Service, as well as having the functions I have already described for it elsewhere (see particularly the summary at paragraphs 13-27) would bring together existing support systems in the areas of housing, removals and social work services.

197. Its exact local structure would vary from area to area, as it is particularly important that it be designed to be responsive to local conditions within a broad national framework. I would, however, envisage that its composition in terms of service personnel attached to it would reflect the relative representation in the local area of the three services. Obviously special attention will need to be given to the way in which RAAF's contribution to the co-ordinated service is developed.

198. To bring the new arrangements into operation, I would envisage that the central unit of the Families Information and Liaison Service would be established very quickly, and that its job would be to design a structure and strategy for the development of the fully co-ordinated service over a defined period of two years.

199. In addition to the extension of the support offered through the establishment of family liaison officers, education liaison officers and spouse employment officers (paragraphs 90(c), 138, 153(c)) the integration of existing support functions in
various defence locations should extend the range of support that is available in those locations to families associated with any one of the three services.

Consultative arrangements

200. Another important function for the central Families Information and Liaison Service would be to develop and monitor consultative arrangements to enable spouses of service personnel to have an influence on decisions that have a particular impact on them, and to encourage relevant policy areas to make use of such mechanisms. Such arrangements are already operating or being developed in the areas of removals and housing.

201. Family liaison officers would be well placed to encourage the development of such arrangements to address local issues, but for more broad ranging policy issues national or State mechanisms would be required.

202. These mechanisms should not rely solely on existing spouses associations, although these would obviously be one important area of input. Indeed in some cases new or different types of spouses associations might emerge in response to the opening up of local consultative channels; or existing associations might change their emphasis slightly. This sort of consultative network must be allowed to develop its own momentum to a large extent, if the consultative mechanisms are to have wide credibility and acceptability in the longer term.

203. If some channels are opened up and if there is a real desire on the part of families to contribute to this area then a representative consultative base should eventually emerge and it would be a grave mistake to seek to impose it or dictate its nature. In the short-term, attention should be given by those establishing consultative groups to a good mix of representation by different services, different geographical locations, different ranks, older and younger spouses and spouses who are or are not in the paid workforce.

Links with community services

204. One of the most difficult areas to address in providing support systems for defence force families is how much such support should be entirely
service-based, and how much it should draw on the resources available within the local community. If there is a tendency towards the latter option, there is a further question of how much responsibility the Department of Defence has for underpinning those community-based services, in recognition of the additional burden placed on them by the presence in their local area of service personnel and their families.

205. Of course service families, as tax and rate paying members of the general community, have as much entitlement as any other citizens to access to community facilities in the areas where they live. However, in many areas where I visited community support facilities, I heard the same underlying story - that the representation of service families among their clients was disproportionately high, given their representation in the general community. One agency I visited reported that 50 percent of its clients came from a defence force population which represented 10 percent of the local community; another reported that 75-80 percent of its clients were drawn from a defence force population representing 20 percent of local residents.

206. This seems to me to bear out what I have said about the special needs of defence force families for family support mechanisms. It also indicates very strongly the preference of a large number of defence force families for using community-based support where this is available.

207. The central Families Information and Liaison Service should look closely at the relationships between service-based and community support. One possible model is for the service-based facilities to be involved basically in community development and preventative programs which bring to bear their special knowledge of service life to prevent families reaching crisis; and to rely more on community professionals when crisis actually occurs.

208. Nevertheless, there is a need for the Australian Defence Force to recognise that the special family support needs of service families can place additional burdens on community facilities in the areas where they live. Family liaison officers and service social workers need to form good working relationships
with these facilities, and may sometimes be able to offer local support as part of their own community development activities.

209. However, in many cases the real need is for additional staff members or other resources to help cope with the additional load and I recommend that the Families Information and Liaison Service be provided with a fund from which grants could be made to local authorities or community groups operating facilities close to bases with a demonstrated heavy use by members of the Australian Defence Force and their dependants. As a starting base I would see a fund of some $150,000 a year being appropriate - allowing say 10 grants of $15,000 each as a partial contribution towards a salary.
Implementation mechanisms

210. Some of the recommendations contained in this report fall clearly within the responsibility of existing areas of the Department of Defence or the Australian Defence Force; for others, notably the Families Information and Liaison Service, new structures are required. In the short-term I believe their implementation will best be achieved by a mechanism that will both involve the existing responsible areas and also ensure that a clearly identified group of people has responsibility for carrying the activity forward.

211. I therefore recommend that Deputy Secretary A in the Department of Defence, jointly with the Assistant Chief of the Defence Force (Policy) be responsible for co-ordinating implementation by the responsible areas. They should be supported in this task by a small, full-time secretariat, headed by a senior officer of appropriate level. The secretariat should, within six months, co-ordinate the implementation of those recommendations that can be put into effect immediately and prepare a detailed strategy of implementation for those recommendations with longer-term implications. At this point a progress report should be made to the Minister for Defence, and the brief and composition of the secretariat should be reviewed and adjusted as necessary.

212. To assist it in its task and to ensure that people most directly affected are involved, it should be able to call on a National Consultative Group of Service Spouses. Ideally this group would have 9 members (1 representative of each State and Territory, plus a convenor). Of those 9, there would be 3 spouses of personnel in each of the three services, and at least 4 of the group would be spouses of officers and 4 spouses of other ranks. The contribution of this group should be recognised by the payment of sitting fees.
### AREAS AND BASES VISITED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Bases/Establishments Visited</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-11 Dec 85</td>
<td>Nowra NSW</td>
<td>HMAS ALBATROSS</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>HMAS CRESWELL</td>
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<tr>
<td>17-18 Dec 85</td>
<td>Wagga NSW</td>
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<td>Army 1st Recruit Training Battalion - Kapooka</td>
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<tr>
<td>29-31 Jan 86</td>
<td>Townsville Qld</td>
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<td>RAAF Base Townsville</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-7 Feb 86</td>
<td>Perth/Exmouth WA</td>
<td>RAAF Base Learmonth - Exmouth</td>
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<td>Naval Communications Station - Harold E. Holt - Exmouth</td>
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<td>Navy Command Personal Services Organisation - Melbourne</td>
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<td>HMAS CERBERUS - Crib Point</td>
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<td>23-26 Feb 86</td>
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<td>RAAF Base Edinburgh</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-28 Feb 86</td>
<td>Darwin/Tindal NT</td>
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<td>HMAS COONAWARRA - Darwin</td>
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<td>18-19 Mar 86</td>
<td>Melbourne/Queenscliff Victoria</td>
<td>Command and Staff College Port Queenscliff</td>
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<td>25 Mar and 3 Apr 86</td>
<td>Canberra ACT</td>
<td>Meetings with spouses from three services - Canberra</td>
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<td>17-19 Apr 86</td>
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<td>21-22 Apr 86</td>
<td>Hobart Tas</td>
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MOST FREQUENT COMPLAINTS ABOUT MARRIED QUARTERS

The following items were most frequently identified as desirable, but not consistently available, in married quarters (in order of priority):

. Carpets or other floor treatments appropriate to the area
. Adequate security equipment (security doors, deadlocks and, in some areas, window locks)
. Heating equipment that can be run at moderate cost (in some quarters no such equipment whatever is supplied)
. Built-in wardrobes
. Curtain rods
. Fly screens
. Insulation
. Fences high enough to enclose toddlers
. Exhaust fans in kitchen and bathroom (necessary in some areas to control mould)
. Lock-up sheds or garages
. High cupboards or shelves for poisons, etc
. Non-slip surfaces on outside steps
. Safety rails on high verandahs (for toddlers etc)
. Adequate cupboard space in bathrooms
. Lavatory separate from bathroom
. Adequate and properly placed power points in kitchens
. Regular pest control measures appropriate to the area
. Airconditioning equipment in tropical areas
. Annual allocation of topsoil and basic plants to assist in garden maintenance (in some areas there were also complaints about the high levels of excess water rates incurred in maintaining gardens)
. Shower cubicle as well as bath
. Telephone sockets
. TV antennae
. In tropical areas only, a secure under-house area with a hard surface (other surfaces get boggy in wet weather and are breeding grounds for insects in dry weather).