

'Unprecedented' rise in defence force complaints following Brereton release, stalled IGADF report shows



By [Sarah Basford Canales](#)

Updated July 15 2022 at 6:47pm, first published 12:30pm

Australia's military watchdog experienced an "unprecedented" increase in defence force complaints in the year following the Brereton report's release, a [document stalled by the former federal government has revealed](#).

The Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force's 2020-21 annual report has also shown a "significant" uptick in the number of possible professional standards breaches by Military Police.

The oversight body's routine annual report was publicly released on Thursday afternoon [nearly eight months after it was handed to former defence minister, and now Opposition Leader, Peter Dutton](#) while he held the portfolio.

It covers the seven-month period [following the release of the Brereton report into alleged war crimes](#) committed by [defence personnel during the Afghanistan war](#) - the result of a decade-long inquiry, which cost a total of \$7.2 million.

Inspector-General James Gaynor described the office's "operating tempo" as higher than previous years and characterised by ["unprecedented" increases in complaints and referrals](#).

Over the period, the IGADF received nearly double the amount of submissions and complaints, compared to previous years with 112 submissions regarding suspected misconduct and 49 relating to possible breaches by Military Police.

Mr Gaynor said he considered the increased visibility of the office after the Brereton report's release to have contributed to the growing workload but adequate additional resources hadn't been provided. "Some of the increase may be attributed to the relatively higher profile of the office as a result of the media reporting following the completion of the IGADF Afghanistan Inquiry," Mr Gaynor wrote.

"The significant increase in submissions has not been matched by an increase in staffing, and has therefore resulted in an increase in the average time taken to resolve each matter."

Mr Gaynor described the outcome of multi-year surveys of ADF members, which sought [to find correlations between workplace culture and incidences of unacceptable behaviour](#).

The data showed there had been a strong correlation between [confidence in the chain of command's ability to take action and falling rates of unacceptable behaviour](#).

Other correlations indicated unacceptable behaviour increased when personnel faced excessive workloads while a weaker correlation showed the behaviour decreased when members were aware of complaint avenues.

"The combined analyses of almost a decade's worth of military justice survey data are instructive," Mr Gaynor wrote.

"They demonstrate that the incidence of unacceptable behaviour is likely to be lower in a unit if members are confident their command will take action to address unacceptable behaviour."

The military watchdog revealed it had also been working with the Office of the Special Investigator - an [office established to commence possible legal proceedings into the Brereton report's findings](#) - to support the legal, welfare and administrative considerations of its investigation.

The IGADF said it had also intervened in federal court proceedings undertaken by former special forces soldier Ben Robert-Smith to "preserve the integrity of IGADF inquiry processes" and keep information obtained during the inquiry from public disclosure.

IGADF report gathered dust for months

Department and agency annual reports are typically released in the final quarter of a calendar year but the IGADF's report still remained unavailable in the first few months of 2022.

A spokeswoman for Mr Dutton told *The Canberra Times* in March [the report's release wasn't being stalled](#), and its tabling deadline for the lower house was May 9.

The Inspector-General's office advised Mr Dutton he must present the report on, or by, that date, according to reasons outlined in a refused

freedom of information request for an explanation lodged by *The Canberra Times*.

But the former defence minister's office refused to release the report in the lead up to the 2022 federal election, explaining it was in "caretaker" mode.

The tabling office separately said there was no barrier to ministers presenting reports out of session.

The offices of Mr Dutton and acting Opposition Leader Sussan Ley were contacted for comment.