

## **SUMMARY OF NASH REVIEW OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN THE AUSTRALIAN ANTARCTIC PROGRAM**

This study was commissioned by the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) and independently conducted by Associate Professor Meredith Nash – a University of Tasmania researcher – as part of her AAD role as Senior Advisor – Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity. The study was designed to collect key information that can be used to inform the AAD’s approach to diversity, inclusion, and equity into the future. The study has now concluded, and we would like to update staff with a summary of the project findings and key recommendations.

### **Methodology**

Key research questions in this study included:

- What are the attitudes and experiences of AAD employees?
- What are AAD employees’ perceptions of organisational leadership?
- How can the organisational culture of the AAD be improved?

The methodological approach included:

- In-depth interviews with 22 AAD employees in Tasmania and Antarctica (March – May 2021). Participants comprised employees in all branches, as well as current and recently returned expeditioners.
- Dozens of informal conversations with AAD employees, participation in various AAD committee meetings, and engagement with AAD senior leaders over 12 months
- Review of relevant AAD policies and processes
- Review of relevant international research and data

### **Key terms**

Organisational culture	A frame of reference that allows group members to make sense of their environment and their experiences and to share these experiences, feelings and thoughts with others.
Sexual harassment	An umbrella term that refers to behaviour that derogates, demeans, or humiliates an individual based on that individual’s sex.
Gender harassment	A sub-category of sexual harassment that ‘communicates hostility that is devoid of sexual interest’ like name-calling and insults.
Cisgender	The term to refer to people whose gender identity and expression matches the biological sex they were assigned at birth.

Everyday sexism	Any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice, or behaviour based upon the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline.
Intersectionality	An analytical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege.

## Results

### *Organisational culture in Head Office in Tasmania*

Interview participants described the distinctive cultures which operate across the AAD and the various factors influencing their organisational experiences. Key cultural themes emerging from interviews included the siloed branches of the AAD, fixed mindsets from the ‘old guard’ of long-serving employees, and problematic and/or inattentive equity and diversity leadership at all levels.

Participants described how power and gender inequality had a unique impact on their experience of AAD culture. Women’s experiences of Head Office (HO) culture were distinctive, especially in more heavily male-dominated branches. Participants described various types of inappropriate behaviour (e.g., sexist jokes) that are incentivised and rewarded and an accompanying sense of entitlement by male colleagues who wield power in their branches. Gender inequality and a broader lack of diversity at the AAD are key drivers that entrench this power within some branches and women felt especially devalued.

Women experienced instances of everyday sexism in HO. The most common manifestations of everyday sexism was in women’s voices and experiences being devalued and sexist jokes and remarks. To illustrate, women described an ‘old boys club’ culture in which women must work twice as hard as their male peers to gain recognition and to be seen as competent. Women across all branches also generally described poor branch and team meeting cultures. Women in both junior and senior roles noted the challenge of having their voices heard in meetings – they discussed being talked over, ignored, or treated with disrespect. Women discussed the credibility gap that they face in male dominated AAD teams (e.g., not being seen as competent compared to men) and they also experienced role stereotyping in which assumptions are made about suitability for tasks based on gender. Women also observed that everyday sexism at HO was evident in the artefacts on the walls and in the building infrastructure (e.g., all AAD buildings in Kingston are named after men).

Study findings suggest that the persistence of gender inequality and everyday sexism in HO is a function of structural barriers preventing progress as well as an infrastructure that is not inclusive.

Women's experiences in HO especially point to unclear and inconsistent standards of behaviour across the branches as well as leadership deficits and inconsistent role modelling. In general, women felt that leaders at all levels were not equipped to manage people, nor did they have the deep knowledge required to implement the AAD's aspirations for gender equity. Women did not trust HR systems to make formal complaints about inappropriate behaviour given the fear of losing their positions (especially if employed on fixed-term contracts) or being stigmatised in their respective teams.

Most participants in this study who worked in HO demonstrated awareness and commitment to improving the culture at the AAD which is why they likely self-selected into this study. However, they recognised significant resistance to gender equity across the organisation and that their managers/supervisors (or they themselves) lacked the deep knowledge necessary to become change agents and to progress ideas/initiatives. Most participants expressed deep frustration at the pursuit of gender equity as a 'box ticking exercise'.

#### *Organisational culture in Antarctica*

Participants generally had very positive experiences of living and working in Antarctica. However, they had mixed views about station culture. Participants made apparent that the expeditioner recruitment process has a strong influence on station culture and that station leaders were pivotal in changing or reinforcing the culture. The gender of participants also strongly influenced how they discussed station cultures. For example, women overwhelmingly described stations as 'blokey' – a term describing the average (white, heterosexual) Australian man. Both male and female participants did, however, identify that when women are present on station, the culture is more positive with less aggression and swearing. Several participants noted the drinking culture on stations. However, the drinking culture generally was seen as problematic, especially by women. The AAP guidelines for alcohol consumption in Antarctica shifted significantly in 2021 to reflect some of these concerns.

Given the underrepresentation of women in the AAP (especially during winter) some women also described the culture as 'predatory' and objectifying. Women described a culture of widespread, low-level sexual harassment that permeates stations. Participants observed that women experience a range of harassment including uninvited physical contact or gestures, unwelcome requests for sex, sexual comments, jokes or innuendo, intrusive questions, displays of offensive or pornographic material and sex-based insults or taunts and unwanted invitations. Participants also described a homophobic culture on stations.

Men rarely referenced a lack of fit with the organisational culture on station. Participant perspectives on station culture raise some interesting questions in relation to expeditioner selection procedures. Several interview participants pointed out that the expeditioner selection process can be problematic

because it seems to value a white male stereotype of an expeditioner and sameness over difference when it comes to cultural fit.

Study findings also revealed that female expeditioners in the Australian Antarctic Program (AAP) must go to great lengths to make their menstruation invisible because menstruation is not considered to be an important operational concern in Antarctic fieldwork arrangements. Women in this study described their attempts to practically conceal menstruation in Antarctica in environments where the infrastructure for them to do so was absent or inadequate. Women described undertaking additional psychological and physical labour to manage menstruation while doing demanding work in an extreme environment – they change their menstrual products without privacy or adequate sanitation; carry bloody menstrual products around with them in the field for long periods of time; improvise menstrual products when none are available; keep menstrual products in their bodies for longer than recommended because they are not provided with adequate toilet stops; and alter their hormonal balance with medications (e.g. oral contraception) to make menstruation less inconvenient. Whilst women in this study found a range of ways to individually cope, the more concerning issue is that people who menstruate feel compelled to uphold a male-dominated field culture in which menstruation is concealed and controlled to meet masculine cultural norms.

### **Key recommendations**

This research highlights the crucial role of leadership at all levels in building and maintaining safe and inclusive AAD work environments. Whilst study participants shared positive stories about working at the AAD, participants also identified several areas in which the organisational culture requires improvement and leaders as lacking key people leadership skills. A key recommendation is that the AAD form an equity and inclusion taskforce. This group would comprise members from each branch and partners with the AAD Executive and HR team to drive implementation of these recommendations and to monitor and report on progress.

### **Action area 1: Create a culture of awareness and change**

- Recognise the powerful and important role that leaders and managers across the entire organisation play in promoting and progressing inclusion, diversity, and equity.
- Strong cultural focus on gender equity is necessary to reduce risk of sexual harassment, specifically.
- Strong focus on inclusion in teams required to increase employee well-being, productivity, and performance. Relying on online training is inadequate.
- Set clear expectations and build personal capacities in inclusive leadership behaviours for all leaders and managers – and hold them accountable. In other words, AAD Executive should have zero tolerance for inappropriate behaviour and/or breaches of the code of conduct – the cost to the organisation is too high.

- Prioritise inclusion as a valued skill to demonstrate as part of performance evaluation in the organization at all levels.
- Implement strategies to counter resistance to equity to enable leaders/managers to shift from being a change recipient to a change agent.
- Provide staff with access to advice and coaching on equity and inclusion issues to provide early intervention and to help the organisation spot problems that may need to be addressed on a larger scale.
- HR/Strategy and Communications teams to develop education and information campaigns around the different elements of inequality and how these manifest.
- Encourage leaders at all levels to lead regular conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion in their branches and as part of wider AAD initiatives.
- Build capacity in intersectionality and/or intersectional leadership across the whole organisation.
- Create safe spaces for staff to share their lived experiences (e.g., Food for Thought, employee resource groups).
- Ensure that AAD diversity data collection does not overlook the experiences of individuals with intersectional identities.
- Survey the workforce (especially expeditioners) on culture regularly to monitor progress.
- Invest in a widely recognised accreditation such as a SAGE Athena SWAN Bronze Award to build accountability and commitment to gender equity.

### **Action area 2: Challenge and change recruitment and selection processes**

- Diversify applicant pools and make Antarctic jobs much more appealing to broader groups of people (e.g., job descriptions are fit for purpose and avoid bias).
- Design expeditioner recruitment imagery that connects with a diverse pool of talent by dispelling the heroic stereotypes associated with Antarctic expeditioners.
- Create targets to set aspirations to increase expeditioner diversity and measure/publicly report progress.
- Ensure diversity of panel members/assessors in Selection Centres to reduce potential for selection bias when certain stereotypes may be activated, or cultural fit expectations are activated in the process.
- Where possible, outsource candidate selection to reduce ambiguity or potential bias.

### **Action area 3: Promote inclusive work environments/infrastructure**

- Provide free menstrual products in all Head Office toilets.
- Provide field gear in a wider range of sizes (e.g., boots, gloves, jackets).

- Provide training on use of urinary devices and ensure that gender diverse (e.g. non-binary, transgender) expeditioners can access these devices easily. Consider eliminating references to ‘Female Urinary Device’ in documentation and use a gender-neutral term (e.g. urinary device).
- Make period underwear in different absorbencies available as part of field gear.
- Polar Medical Unit (PMU)/Operations to provide pre-expedition menstrual health education (e.g., web module, pamphlet) to all expeditioners to ensure that, even if an expeditioner does not menstruate, they can adequately support someone who does. This is especially important for cisgender men who are leading field teams.
- Ensure that toilet stops are standard operating procedure during field trips/overland traverses.
- Ensure that menstruation/toileting is covered in detail and consistently in Field Training Officer briefings to expeditioners.
- PMU to provide all expeditioners with information about menstrual suppression and contraception in advance of a deployment to Antarctica (e.g., at the time expeditioners receive their letter of offer).
- PMU to revise AAP’s Antarctic First Aid Manual to include risks/side effects of menstrual suppression methods and cross-reference relevant pages about menstruation in the 2021 Antarctic Field Manual.
- Eliminate voucher-by-request system which requires expeditioners to go through a gatekeeper to access free menstrual products. Allow expeditioners to use the allowance to purchase single-use (tampons, pads) or re-usable products (e.g., cups, period underwear) at their own discretion from any supplier and seek reimbursement for costs.
- Increase allowances for menstrual products. One pair of period underwear costs about \$30 and a menstrual cup costs about \$40. The allowance should acknowledge the higher cost of re-usable products compared to single use products (e.g., one box of tampons is about \$6-8).
- Engage expeditioners in critical dialogues (e.g., as part of Station Week or online training modules) around the differing practical, psychological, and physical needs around menstruation and toileting for gender and sexuality diverse expeditioners (e.g., transmen and non-binary folks menstruate and may use a urinary device).
- On station, vessels, and in the field, free menstrual products should be distributed in the same manner as condoms, which are widely available and easily accessible. All first aid kits should include menstrual products and emergency contraception.

#### **Action area 4: Sexual harassment prevention/hostile environments**

- Invest in a preventive approach in which the AAD takes all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment and that increases accountability of leadership.

- Launch a major outreach effort to address sexual harassment (survey + focus groups with current and past expeditioners) to guide the AAP's prevention/response efforts.
- AAD Executive delivers a statement to acknowledge people's experiences of sexual harassment and other poor behaviour and its impact on employees and lack of action in the past. The statement should outline the AAD's plan for change and accountability. This step is essential in rebuilding trust with the existing workforce and building confidence in the future workforce as the AAD embarks on a new recruitment strategy that focuses on diversity.
- Audit HR practices/policies (e.g., grievance handlings, bystander interventions, allyship, investment in leadership skills in critical conversations, effective education).
- Explicitly define sexual harassment and set out individual and institutional responsibilities in all relevant documentation (e.g., AAD website, field manual, expeditioner handbook, etc.).
- Ensure AAD sexual harassment policies are highly visible to employees and the public to increase exposure (e.g., placed in handbooks, on intranet/internet).
- Develop and provide information about multiple channels in which to make a sexual harassment complaint and clearly explain how the reporting process works with details about the support available during the reporting and investigation process and potential outcomes.
- Regularly communicate sexual harassment policies and appropriately train all staff in relation to its content.
- Ensure there is a process for reporting inappropriate behaviour from station contractors and that all contractors have robust harassment policies and codes of conduct.
- Tailor policies/procedures to be more attuned to intersectional oppression or the ways in which gender intersects with race, sexuality, ability, and other features of social identity in harassment prevention efforts.
- Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of bystander training (e.g., how useful is the training and in what circumstances are staff employing their knowledge).