

Scientists 'bullied or forced out' of CSIRO

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Two of three CSIRO employees who blew the whistle on alleged "criminal or civil breaches of the law" by the scientific organisation were later made redundant, it has been revealed.

But those officials who were the subject of the complaints remain employed, the CSIRO has confirmed.

The details have emerged after a group of former CSIRO employees began a campaign for a change in culture at the science agency, alleging mismanagement and bullying are rife.

Last Thursday, a parliamentary inquiry examining workplace bullying in Commonwealth agencies published the group's submission. It claims the group is aware of 60 cases involving top-flight scientists and other officials who were bullied or otherwise forced out of the organisation.

This list has names on it such as **Maarten Stapper, a soil scientist allegedly pushed out because of his criticism of genetically modified crops**, globally recognised oceanographer Trevor McDougall and award-winning entomologist Sylwester Chyb, who has begun litigation against the CSIRO for misleading conduct and unlawful termination.

The CSIRO has declined to respond to the allegations, but the group says some of those forced out had tried to report misconduct or maladministration. Among the group's recommendations is improved protection for whistleblowers.

"Current whistleblower legislation does not adequately protect from persecution those making public interest declarations," the document says. "This is particularly true in circumstances in which it is hard to identify a direct link between a whistleblower complaint and subsequent, seemingly unrelated adverse action against the employee in his or her workplace."

The organisation is also grappling with a spike in the damages it has had to pay as a result of occupational health and safety claims made to the Commonwealth OH&S regulator and insurer, Comcare.

The increased costs of the claims has meant the premiums Comcare charges the CSIRO have nearly tripled from \$1.9 million in 2011-12 to \$4.9 million this financial year.

"The CSIRO has consistently achieved lower than average claim frequency and claim cost but has had an upward trend in the average cost of its claims," a Comcare spokesman, Russ Street, said.

At a budget estimates hearing in May, Tasmanian senator David Bushby asked the CSIRO about its handling of whistleblower complaints and those who made them. In answers provided last month, the organisation confirmed two complaints were lodged in 2010 and one in 2008, all of which made serious allegations about unlawful activity.

But while the CSIRO did not retrench any of those against whom allegations were made, it did retrench the complainants.

"One CSIRO employee, who had lodged a whistleblower complaint on March 10, 2008, was made redundant on August 23, 2010, as there was an insufficient volume of current and projected work to sustain the position," the CSIRO said.

"A second employee, who lodged a whistleblower complaint on February 23, 2010, was made redundant on September 4, 2011, as CSIRO no longer required the job be performed by anyone because of changes in the operational requirements of CSIRO's enterprise."

A CSIRO spokesman, Huw Morgan, declined to describe the nature of the allegations made by the whistleblowers, saying it could help reveal their identity.

Read more: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/scientists-bullied-or-forced-out-of-csiro-20120917-262yb.html#ixzz26mF39Nt4>