

# Ex-officer claims she was bullied out of the force

EMILY COSENZA

AN ex-SA Police officer who alleges she was bullied out of her job when her colleagues discovered her partner was Aboriginal is mounting a workplace claim against the force.

The Police Association of South Australia is assisting ex-Operation Mandrake officer Gabriella Capponi, including helping her seek legal advice, after she resigned this month.

Miss Capponi met with her lawyers yesterday afternoon and confirmed she will pursue a workplace claim.

She claims racist comments started in January this year while she was working on Operation Mandrake – a task force that investigates Aboriginal offenders – and were made continually over a six-month period by a small number of colleagues.

The Advertiser has seen email correspondence between Miss Capponi and SA Police's Diversity and Inclusion Branch and the SA Police Association, where she has diarised events she claimed to have experienced.

Miss Capponi said a bullying and harassment report was filed in April over one incident where a colleague asked if she "received benefits now her and her partner are living together".

"One person said 'does your mate work or does he just steal cars for a living?', Miss Capponi said.

"I'd hear them making comments like 'just another David'.

I asked what it meant and they said 'Get it? David Boon. Rhymes with coon'.

"I got scared going into work, worrying about what comments would be next."

She contacted SA Police's Aboriginal Policy Officer in May and was told to write a briefing paper – a report that needed to be approved through the police hierarchy – in order for training to be implemented.

After filing her report in May, Miss Capponi said she was removed from the operation that month and placed in her previous role in the state tactical response group.

She said she was refused a secondment with another branch and went on stress leave in October. She resigned from SA Police on November 12.

"I was scared to come forward ... but it's important now that change is made," she said.

"It's really hard to stand up for yourself in the police because ... the culture is if you're the one who stands up and says something then you're the one that then becomes the target."

She said the ordeal caused her severe anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder and affected her relationship with partner Anthony Wilson, a wingman at the Norwood Redlegs Football Club.

State Parliament's Budget and Finance Committee heard earlier this year that SA Police has had difficulty providing cultural awareness training since August last year because the provider had a lack of staff.



LEGAL ACTION: Former SA Police officer Gabby Capponi.

Picture: MATT TURNER

When questioned by The Advertiser, a police spokesman said: "SAPOL has worked closely with Miss Capponi and has provided significant support to her over an extended period of time.

"The other concerns raised by Miss Capponi are ongoing, including her resignation, which has only been recently received.

As such, it would be inappropriate to comment further."

The spokesman confirmed SA Police has had difficulties with its cultural awareness training provider, but was committed to providing an "inclusive workplace".

"Cultural awareness training has been delivered to all police officers across the or-

ganisation and it remains compulsory training for all new recruits," he said.

"The recruit program includes a number of modules focused upon indigenous people. There has been some difficulty since August 2018 in consistently sourcing indigenous presenters but the training has continued irrespective of this."

## School's bid to end period poverty

TIM WILLIAMS  
EDUCATION REPORTER

PARENTS and school staff overwhelmingly want the State Government to follow Victoria's lead and reduce "period poverty" by funding free sanitary products in public schools.

About 80 per cent of 1362 respondents to a survey by parent group SA Association of State School Organisations were in support of the move.

The results come as SA-BEST and Labor today bring legislation to Parliament for a formal pilot program of dispensing machines with free sanitary products in high schools.

SA-BEST wants the pilot to inform a state-wide rollout, including primary schools.



MLC Connie Bonaros, pictured, said period poverty caused girls to skip school activities or "miss school altogether", affecting their education and "potentially the rest of their lives".

The Victorian Government announced in September that it would spend \$207 million over four years providing free pads and tampons from dispensing machines in bathrooms at every public school.

While the SAASSO survey found many SA schools provided sanitary products in "emergencies", the Victorian model ensures girls who are too embarrassed to ask staff for supplies still get what they need.

SA Labor MLC Irene Pnevmatikos argued sanitary products were as necessary as toilet paper and no student should ever have to request them.

"Imagine the outcry if ... students had to go to the front office to obtain a (toilet paper) roll," she said.

Education Minister John Gardner said it was "already common practice in schools to have sanitary items available for students who need them".

## Senior Government MP centre of police investigation

ENERGY Minister Angus Taylor will not be stood down while NSW Police investigate allegations his office forged documents to attack the City of Sydney council for its travel spending.

Mr Taylor is under scrutiny after his office accused the

council of spending \$15.9 million on travel in a letter to Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore, when the actual cost was about \$6000.

The federal MP has since apologised to Ms Moore and conceded the figures were incorrect, but has maintained

neither he or his staff altered the annual report from which the false numbers were quoted.

NSW Police yesterday confirmed the launch of Strike force Garrad to investigate the matter after it was referred to them by Labor's Attorney-General spokesman Mark

Dreyfus last month. NSW Police said the investigation was in its "early stages" as detectives from the financial crimes squad sought to determine if any criminal offences had been committed.

As part of the investigation NSW Police will examine doc-

uments and metadata information to be provided by the council.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison yesterday refused to bow to pressure from Labor to use his discretionary powers to stand down Mr Taylor while the investigation took place.



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