



MEMBER UPDATE

AFPA Position on Uniform Policy - Tattoos

10 August 2018

Good afternoon members

Over the past couple of weeks, we have been seeking your views about the change in the AFP Uniform Guideline (the Guideline) which now requires tattoos to be covered when in uniform or while wearing AFP insignia. The amount of feedback received by the AFPA in relation to this issue has been extraordinary and highlights to us the depth of feeling among members about what is for many a very personal change.

A significant portion of feedback has been from members without tattoos who remain concerned about the nature of the change and the circumstances in which it was imposed.

First and foremost, your Association does not support the change to the Guideline given the changes were imposed upon you without any consultation with either the workforce or the AFPA.

Importantly, no one denies the right of the organisation and the Commissioner to decide what an appropriate uniform appearance looks like. However, this change provides another example of the AFP deliberately seeking out committed and intelligent employees, then treating them like fools. The imposition of a change like this in the absence of any conversation with employees is the organisation's way of communicating that it does not care what you think.

The AFP as an organisation has been on a diversity drive for some years now. The AFP Corporate Plan 2017-18 commands that the organisation is an ethical and values-driven organisation, embracing diversity and inclusion. The need for diversity and the benefits which flow are also at the heart of the Broderick Report into the AFP. That document is almost two years old now, so the concept is well entrenched. Yet through this decision, the AFP as your employer is saying it is either embarrassed or offended by the way you look, starting now. An inclusive organisation does not require you to hide your identity.

Justification for the policy change has not been clarified. Consistency of appearance for uniform agencies within the Home Affairs portfolio has been espoused, however ABF and AFP employees in uniform could not look less alike. Dark uniforms versus light, accoutrements versus none, BSRV versus not, there are NO similarities in appearance between AFP members in uniform and our ABF colleagues. And where the AFP pointed to this already being ABF policy, the ABF claims it is following the AFP lead.

Policing organisations draw authority and legitimacy from reflecting the societal expectations of the community they serve. Police officers neither live nor operate in a vacuum and the public has come to expect police to be of the people. The AFP once had a policy requiring tattoos to be covered up. That was changed and allowed non-offensive tattoos to be visible. Arguably, the AFP was ahead of its time when that change occurred, but society has now caught up.

We encourage every member with visible tattoos to seek an exemption from covering them. Cultural, religious or medical grounds have been offered as points upon which exemptions can be sought, but none has been expanded upon. I would hypothesise that each tattoo wearer got their ink for deeply personal reasons. That it contributes to your own personal narrative is frankly no business of your employer and the AFP should butt out.

We are still confirming whether this decision was pushed down to the AFP from Home Affairs or whether it was firmly a head of agency initiative. Many of you have expressed dismay that if the decision came from on-high, then this is the first sign of capitulation. Whilst a small thing, it doesn't instil confidence for the operational autonomy of the AFP, if even the small things can't be defended against. This is a regressive policy shift which serves no practical purpose but to segregate police officers from the communities they serve, for the apparent aesthetic satisfaction of an unknown decision maker.

Your Association calls upon the AFP to abandon this change in policy.

Regards,

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