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# Mark Carroll: SAPOL's recruitment policy fails to address retention of women

SAPOL's 50-50 gender recruitment policy completely fails to address the fundamentals – such as the retention of women throughout police ranks.

Mark Carroll  
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SAPOL celebrates the first century of women in policing in 2015. Picture: Roy Van Der Vegt.

- [Police reject 50-50 gender recruitment quota](#)
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FEMALE police officers constitute one of the great collective assets of law enforcement. The Police Association is, as a trade union, proud to count women among its members and privileged to protect their industrial interests.

The association has never asserted that enlisting more women into policing would compromise public safety. That view simply does not exist in the union I lead.

The rigid 50-50 gender recruitment policy Commissioner Grant Stevens announced last December drew – and continues to draw – much cynicism. It enjoys little if any support among rank and file officers.

Commissioner Stevens' ultimate objective – to recruit more women – is worthy. The glaring flaw lies in the means of achieving that objective. Filling recruit courses with equal numbers of each gender, when the applicant ratio is around 70 per cent men to 30 per cent women, delivers an entirely contrived result.

While Commissioner Stevens talks about “marketing” the police occupation, the recruitment policy completely fails to address the fundamentals, such as the retention of women throughout police ranks.

This is a critical issue given that, on average, women end their police careers after only seven to eight years. That is little more than half the average length of time men serve.

SAPOL must address this problem, and the reasons for it, and consider the scope for women to access flexible, family-friendly working arrangements. The need for such arrangements is obvious.

Yet the Police Association has had to advocate for many women who have found it extremely difficult to access part-time work, or whose flexible arrangements SAPOL has terminated. In six cases last year, we resolved industrial disputation with SAPOL in order to bring justice to those women.

Another dilemma for female officers is that of the limited work options SAPOL offers them after they return from absences, owing to childbirth or periods of parental leave.

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At this critical time in their careers, women often seek positions away from the front line or more flexible arrangements. And as SAPOL civilianises a number of those positions it will rob women of more options.

To determine formally why women leave after only short periods of service, the Police Association has engaged Flinders University Business School professor John Spoehr.

The Weatherill Government's \$200 million cuts to the police budget will further reduce workplace flexibility for female and, indeed, male officers. The Government must, in light of Commissioner Stevens' edict on 50-50 gender recruitment, indicate what funding it will commit to the achievement of that objective. Maternity leave replacements require extra funding, for example.

Ultimately, the onus is on SAPOL to come up with means of attracting greater numbers of women and retaining their services.

The Police Association accepts it is a major challenge for to attract quality applicants of both sexes. But the rigid 50-50 recruitment policy does not deal with the inability of SAPOL to retain women.

**Mark Carroll is president of the Police Association of South Australia**



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