

16

Hundreds punished for theft, snooping, rudeness

Bad bureaucrats

HUNDREDS of federal public servants were sacked, demoted or fined in the past year for serious misconduct.

Investigations into more than 1000 bureaucrats uncovered bad behaviour such as theft, identity fraud, prying into private files, leaking secrets and being rude to clients.

The most common breach was improper use of taxpayer-funded internet and email.

But investigators uncov-

Fiona Hudson

ered a wide array of offences, including two officials on overseas duty sanctioned for not behaving in a way that would uphold the good reputation of Australia.

Almost 80 public servants were sacked in 2007-08 for breaching their code of conduct, while 162 resigned while under investigation.

Fines were handed to 218 public servants, 111 were

counselled, 93 took a pay cut, and 26 were shifted sideways.

About 50 were found to have made improper use of inside information or their power and authority for the benefit of themselves, family or friends.

Some of the offences were committed at social functions outside working hours.

Theft allegations were levelled against 16 officials, while 25 were accused of leaking information.

Details of the investigations

and sanctions are contained in the latest *State of the Service* report by the Australian Public Service Commission.

"The public has much higher expectations than ever before about what the Government and the public service can deliver," the report said.

"The Australian Public Service must adapt and reform to keep in step with these developments."

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Department of Immi-

gration reported the most investigations per 1000 staff.

Centrelink and the Department of Defence were among those to take the hardest line on breaches.

About 40 of the sanctioned staff sought reviews by the Merit Protection Commissioner, with many still to be heard or decided.

The report also noted a significant increase in the number of public servants who reported feeling harassed or bullied at work.

Two unnamed agencies were blamed for the surge in bullying reports, from 15 to 19 per cent of all Australian Public Service staff.

A much higher percentage of women than men believed they had suffered at the hands of others, with superiors largely blamed.

"It is of great concern that some agencies appear to have a culture in which managers who bully may be tolerated," the report said.



Grocery watch

16