

# Work bullying's ugly toll

TAMARA MCDONALD

WORKSAFE has accepted about 180 claims involving possible bullying in the Geelong region in less than five years, with local psychologists warning some victims of workplace harassment are so traumatised they could not return.

Since 2018, WorkSafe has accepted rising numbers of injury claims involving possible bullying across the City of Greater Geelong, Surf Coast Shire, and Borough of Queenscliffe.

Accepted claims have been

slowly increasing, with 37 for 2018, 38 for 2019, 45 for 2020 and 47 for 2021.

The data reflects the year incidents allegedly happened, rather than when they were reported.

Those incidents can also include staff affected by interactions with clients, not only colleagues.

As of April 30, 13 claims involving possible bullying had been accepted in 2022.

Psychologists Zora Bradonjic, from Chris Mackey and Associates, and Carol James, from CJ Psychology and Asso-

ciates, have both worked with WorkCover clients.

Dr Bradonjic said workplace bullying could include exclusion, blocking people from progressing or not providing them what they needed to fulfil their role.

She said the bullying could impact physical health and relationships.

"When it becomes more serious, they might need to stop working or leave their jobs altogether," Dr Bradonjic said.

She said working from home had provided a sense of

relief to victims, however they could be subjected to online forms of bullying, such as exclusion.

"People are also isolated from their supports at work, too," she said.

"It's been really hard with Covid because people have been anxious generally.

"It just raises people's anxiety about what they're stepping back into and whether things might be worse because of that extra stress."

Ms James said trauma was the key response among workplace bullying victims, with

some "absolutely" unable to work afterwards.

"It decreases their trust in the capacity of a workplace to keep them safe," she said.

"You've got people who find it difficult to drive past, let alone get in."

Ms James said there was often no consequence for perpetrators.

Slater and Gordon Lawyers' Geelong workplace injury associate Audrey Gunn said occupational bullying and harassment was a serious issue that could have really serious psychological and physical

consequences. "No one should be subjected to this sort of treatment at work and employers must be held accountable for unsafe workplaces," Ms Gunn said.

"Workplace bullying can be and is often perpetrated in a variety of ways.

"The written word in a Microsoft Teams message, WhatsApp or email can be just as damaging as verbal or physical abuse, particularly if the online abuse is consistent, targeted and repeated behaviour towards a specific individual in the workplace."

## LITTLE LAMBS GET A HAND

OLIVIA SHYING

MORE orphan lambs will get a new lease of life thanks to state government funding.

Lamb Care Australia was granted more than \$70,000 through the state budget to improve care for lambs in need.

Western Victoria Animal Justice Party MP Andy Meddick said the funding

would allow carers, including those at Bannockburn, to provide better support to orphan lambs.

He said Lamb Care Australia carers nurtured lambs who could not be cared for by their mother or farmers.

Mr Meddick said lamb carers took the orphan lambs in and ensured they had the right care to

thrive, before going off to loving homes and living a full life.

"In many ways, their misfortune of being born into this situation is part of their good fortune," he said.

The funding will help Lamb Care Australia pay for feed store costs and will also go towards vet bills, which exceed \$50,000 a year.

MP Andy Meddick with lambs Primrose, Amari and Griffin, who will benefit from a Lamb Care Australia funding boost. Picture: Alison Wynd



## Festival of Sails dates revealed

THE 2023 Festival of Sails dates have been announced by the Royal Geelong Yacht Club, with sailors set to be welcomed back to Corio Bay in January.

From January 26-29, sailing enthusiasts will return to Geelong for the four-day event, with world-class racing on show.

"After two years of pandemic-induced restrictions, we also look forward to a return to a comprehensive and exciting program of activities along the Geelong waterfront," the club said.

The club will also celebrate the 180th anniversary of the Melbourne to Geelong Passage Race on January 26, and anticipates a record number of boats will join in the milestone.

The race was won in 2022 by Geelong yacht Extasea, skippered by Paul Bucholz.

The 2022 event boasted two champion series – the Melges 24 National Championship and the Double Handed Victoria Championship – as well as about a dozen other class series for boats of almost every shape and size.

The 2020 and 2021 festivals were cancelled due to the Covid pandemic.

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