

ATSIC woman to stay after apology

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ATSIC commissioner Alison Anderson yesterday withdrew her resignation as chairwoman of a women's committee set up to tackle indigenous violence, after receiving an apology over an intimidating email.

Ms Anderson, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission's sole woman board member, verbally resigned on Tuesday after ATSIC and its bureaucratic arm failed to address her concerns about an email from Cairns regional chairman Terry O'Shane.

But she withdrew her resignation after receiving a written apology from Mr O'Shane and "100 per cent support" from fellow board members during a telephone hook-up yesterday.

"I've accepted Terry O'Shane's apology," she said. "It's good we've come to this resolution. But I don't regret going public in order to stop this kind of thing from happening in the future.

"I refuse to be a victim and I urge all my fellow women around this country, black and white, not to suffer in silence but to speak out."

Before the meeting, Ms Anderson said her intention was to drive out an abusive culture in ATSIC and its bureaucratic arm, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services.

"We can't even begin to talk about violence outside in communities amongst Aboriginal people if it's happening within ATSIC-ATSIS," she said. "It's happening within ATSIS itself. That little boy's club - it's entrenched culture."

Mr O'Shane's email of August 29 accused Ms Anderson of "mischief making" by attending a meeting in Cairns of a women's group, which could embroil her in a "political hotspot".

He said if she ignored his council's request for her not to meet the group, he would seek advice from the Indigenous Affairs Minister on whether she could be sacked for misbehaviour.

Yesterday, Mr O'Shane would not answer questions on the matter. "I don't think you serve a purpose by trying to prolong any mischief like that," he said.

Mr O'Shane has previously sent abusive emails to ATSIC commissioner Robbie Williams, who he called a "little weasel", and editor of the National Indigenous Times

Chris Graham, who he called a “sook”.

He was also named under parliamentary privilege by Senator Bill Heffernan as being the man accused of sexually abusing family members of Evelyn Scott, the former Reconciliation Council chairwoman - allegations Mr O’Shane said were false.

Acting ATSIC chairman Lionel Quartermaine said the incident raised issues about protocols for visits by ATSIC officials to regions other than their own. In indigenous culture, people seek permission before entering another region.

Ms Anderson said she was invited by the women to attend their September meeting and she informed Mr O’Shane she would be visiting his region.

”That permission was actually given,” she said.