

15 FEBRUARY 2018

Sovereign Hill appoints former sex discrimination commissioner to lead fresh investigation

The Board of Sovereign Hill today appointed former Sex Discrimination Commissioner Susan Halliday to lead a new and independent investigation into sexual harassment allegations raised by female employees in local media last week.

The Board also made the appointment of harassment research and policy firm, Rapid Context, to run an independent review of Sovereign Hill's harassment and discrimination policies and procedures.

Sovereign Hill CEO Jeremy Johnson said:

"The Board moved decisively last Thursday to commission a new independent investigation in addition to Sovereign Hill's own 2017 investigation. They also resolved to conduct a new review on policies and procedures. Since then, we have moved quickly to consult some senior harassment and workplace equality experts in an effort to find appropriate external examiners.

"In Ms Susan Halliday and Dr Samantha Crompvoets and her team from Rapid Context, the Board has commissioned two extremely qualified and experienced independent experts to lead two very important investigations."

Ms Halliday was Sex Discrimination Commissioner from 1998 - 2001 and Disability Discrimination Commissioner in 1999 and 2000. She received a Federal ministerial appointment in 2012-2016 to the Defence Abuse Response Taskforce. Ms Halliday served on the board of the State Library of Victoria for nine years and was appointed the Inaugural Chairperson of the state's largest professional regulator – the Victorian Institute of Teaching, in 2002. Today, among some board positions, Ms Halliday runs her own employment law, workplace investigation and cultural assessment and training firm.

Rapid Context provides clients with qualitative and quantitative research and analysis that forms an 'evidence base' that helps organisations develop improved policy and procedure and organisational change. Dr Crompvoets is a sociologist with 20 years' experience in sensitive topic research and a PhD in Public Health from the National Centre for Epidemiology.

"The volunteer Board and executive management of Sovereign Hill is unified in an extremely strong position against workplace harassment and discrimination," Mr Johnson added.

"We are resolute in our attempts to ensure that, as a workplace, Sovereign Hill lives its values of fairness, respect and integrity every day and that, as a community organisation, we are forever cognisant of our social license to operate.

"We are confident that in the appointment of Susan and Samantha a full and frank investigation and review will be carried out and we are committed to implementing any recommendations that may come forward. We will work with the examiners in coming days as terms of reference and scope are finalised.

“Ultimately, the management team at Sovereign Hill, strives to ensure our iconic and award-winning outdoor museum is a supportive workplace for our talented employees and volunteers, and if these significant investigations help us maintain an inspiring and inclusive culture, then we are committed to them.”

At the extraordinary board meeting in Ballarat this morning, the Board also resolved to initiate its international search for a new CEO, after Jeremy Johnson announced his retirement last December. The Board has appointed an external firm to conduct the search, with Mr Johnson agreeing to remain in the role until the middle of the year, or until a candidate is appointed.

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For more information, please contact: Genevieve Manley, on 0438 349 662.

Note to editors:

Sovereign Hill is a not-for-profit, community-based, cultural tourism organisation administered by The Sovereign Hill Museums Association. The Association is controlled by a Board, which is elected by members of the Association, and serves in a voluntary capacity.

The Board, which consists of five women and seven men, meets regularly to monitor Sovereign Hill’s progress against the goals and objectives. [More information here.](#)

A EY 2017 study into Sovereign Hill’s economic and social impact found that the tourism destination:

- contributed \$260 million and 1665 jobs (part-time, casual and full-time) to the Victorian economy in 2015-16; and
- generates social, cultural, recreational, educational and environmental value of around \$40 million.