



15 October 2021

Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra

Dear Secretary,

**Defence Amendment (Parliamentary Approval of Overseas Service) Bill 2020**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry above. I make this submission in a personal capacity. Much of my work teaching, researching, and publishing has centred on the history of war, violence, and its consequences for humanity. I have developed deep knowledge of the patterns of decisions leading to war and the costs of the recovery from militarised conflict for countries that participate in war.

It is of the utmost importance that any decision to send Australian troops overseas to participate in military conflict require the fullest consideration of our elected representatives in both houses of parliament. Members of the public whose lives will be directly impacted by the decision and whose tax dollars will be spent waging a war, should have the time and the mechanisms to express their views to their elected representatives in the House and the Senate. And, those elected parliamentarians should have adequate time to give due consideration and conduct open debate in public forums before participating in a conscience vote in the Australian Parliament.

The decision to send Australian troops to war is far too important to remain in the hands of a single Prime Minister or Governor General.

In promoting the importance of democratic governance, Australia needs legislation that reflects the values of consultation and open debate. Currently we do not manifest these values in our laws on participating in military conflict. We are out-of-step with our global peers and democratic norms in this respect.

Broad public and parliamentary consideration are crucial because the evidence from multiple large- and small-scale wars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries tells us that:

1. many wars commence on the basis of falsehoods and misinformation, and others through misadventure or ill-considered reactions to deliberate provocations
2. governments are fundamentally weakened by the economic costs of war because:
  - money generated from tax receipts is diverted to paying for armaments that are often manufactured in other countries
  - the business, community, and public sector components of the economy are starved of funds as money is diverted to the war
  - social unrest increases as populations tolerance for the hardships war causes rapidly wanes shattering public trust in politicians
3. political and military leaders struggle to effectively plan for the immediate crises generated in wars, such as:
  - the large-scale movements of refugee populations fleeing the conflict or its aftermath
  - the spread of infectious diseases caused by shattered health services, lack of access to clean water and adequate housing
  - widespread food insecurity and famines caused by disruption to livelihoods and supply chains

Australia's national interests are best served by harnessing the strength of our democracy—open debate and public discussion—to all decisions about when, where, and whether we participate in any future wars.

Yours sincerely,

Emeritus Professor Louise Edwards, FASSA, FAHA, FAHKA  
School of Humanities and Languages