



DEFENCE AMENDMENT (DEFENCE HONOURS AND AWARDS APPEALS TRIBUNAL) BILL 2025

SUBMISSION OF VETERAN GAMING AUSTRALIA

Since 2021, Veteran Gaming Australia (VGA) has supported more than 42,000 Australian veterans and family members. Through this work we have witnessed how Defence honours and awards are far more than ribbons and medals: they are a tangible acknowledgment of sacrifice and service, and a vital link between generations. In preparation for this submission, we asked the community of veterans and their families what they thought about the proposed Defence Honours & Awards Bill 2025. We had a small response with 10 veterans and their families sharing their views and we have included their views throughout this submission.

The Defence Honours & Awards Bill 2025

It is in our view that the Defence Amendment (Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal) Bill 2025 presents an opportunity to modernise and streamline the process for reviewing Defence honours and awards. The intent to create clearer pathways and contemporary administrative processes is welcome.

However, several provisions in the Bill risk restricting access to recognition for veterans and their families.

Key Proposed Changes of Concern

- 20 year limit to apply for Defence honours, operational or foreign awards after the relevant operation or service ends, with power for government to shorten that period by regulation.
- Length-of-service awards reviewable only before the recipient reaches 100 years of age (or would have done so if deceased).
- Tribunal review to be lodged within six months of Defence's refusal, extendable only for "exceptional circumstances".
- Application restrictions, allowing only the original nominator who must have been a senior or eyewitness to apply, with the member's or family's consent.

Concerns Raised by Veterans and Families

- A hard 20-year cut-off would abruptly end open access to reviews dating back to 1939, closing the door on unresolved World War II, Korea and Vietnam cases.
- A six-month appeal window is extremely short, particularly when grief, operational deployments, training courses, or serious health conditions can impede timely action but may not fit "exceptional circumstances".
- Narrow applicant rules would exclude historians, advocates or distant relatives who often play a crucial role in preserving and pursuing recognition.



- Allowing government to shorten time limits by regulation risks future reductions without full parliamentary oversight.
- The Ex-Service Organisation Round Table (ESORT) should not be treated as the sole voice of veterans and families.
- Terms of reference not provided, and this needs full consultation with wider engagement for veteran and family cohorts.

Recommended Amendments

To protect fairness while enabling modernisation, I urge the following:

1. Maintain no time limit for pre-2010 operations, introducing a 20-year cut-off only for operations that ended from 2010 onward, preserving historic cases while easing future administrative load.
2. Extend the tribunal appeal window to one year, still allowing extensions for exceptional circumstances.
3. Broaden the definition of “immediate family” so that distant relatives such as nieces, nephews, or great-grandchildren can apply where no direct next of kin remain, and include a provision for accredited historians or recognised veteran advocates in such circumstances.
4. Require fresh legislation, not regulation alone to shorten any statutory time limits in the future.
5. Place this Bill on hold until broader consultation occurs with the veteran and family community.
 - Wider engagement across the full veteran and family cohort is essential to ensure this bill is fit for purpose.

Conclusion

I respectfully urge the Parliament to adopt these amendments and to pause the Bill for comprehensive consultation with Veterans and Families. It is important that Veterans and Families are meaningfully consulted for legislation which will affect them. It is important the Defence Amendment (Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal) Bill 2025 achieve its aim of modernisation without diminishing the right to recognition for past, present and future generations of Australian veterans and their loved ones.

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