



Submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee

Inquiry into the Defence Amendment (Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal) Bill 2025

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From: Gunnedah RSL Sub-Branch,

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1. Introduction

The Gunnedah RSL sub-Branch of RSL New South Wales welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee regarding the Defence Amendment (Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal) Bill 2025.

We represent veterans of all services and conflicts across multiple generations. Our role is to honour their service, advocate for their welfare, and uphold the solemn promise: 'We will remember them.'

2. Summary Position

We oppose the Bill in its entirety and call for its full repeal.

The proposed 20-year limit on reviewable actions for military honours and awards is unjust, unnecessary, and inconsistent with Australia's obligation to respect and honour the service of its veterans without time limit.



3. Key Concerns

3.1 Arbitrary Time Limit

3.1.1 The Bill would bar recognition of service older than 20 years, even where compelling new evidence emerges.

3.1.2 Acts of heroism often remain classified or hidden for decades. Recognition must not expire.

3.2 Real-World Consequences

3.2.1 The Tribunal's independence has already delivered historic outcomes, including:

- The posthumous award of the Victoria Cross to Teddy Sheean (WWII).
- The Victoria Cross for Vietnam veteran Richard Norden, 58 years after his actions.
- Recognition of Delta Company, 6RAR, for bravery at Long Tan.

3.2.2 None of these cases would have been possible under a 20-year cap.

3.3 Tribunal's Warning Ignored

3.3.1 The Tribunal itself stated the impact of a 20-year limit would be to 'abolish and curtail current and significant rights of ADF members, veterans and families' to seek independent review.

3.3.2 The Government has provided no evidence that the current system is broken.

3.4 Inconsistency with National Values

3.4.1 The Ode of Remembrance was never meant to come with a use-by date.

3.4.2 By legislating a 20-year limit, the Government undermines the very principle of perpetual remembrance.

3.5 Mental Health and Morale

3.5.1 Veterans already feel neglected and excluded.

3.5.2 Removing avenues for recognition and appeal further damages morale and risks exacerbating issues of alienation highlighted in the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

4. Broader Context

4.1 Internationally, allies are moving towards removing time limits on honours (e.g. the US 'Valor Has No Expiration' Act).

4.2 Australia should not regress by legislating an arbitrary cut-off that diminishes recognition of its own veterans.



5. Recommendations

5.1 Full repeal of the Defence Amendment (Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal) Bill 2025.

5.2 Retention of the Tribunal's current powers to review honours and awards dating back to 1939.

5.3 Commitment to meaningful consultation with RSL NSW, RSL Australia, and the broader veteran community before any future reforms.

5.4 Alignment with Royal Commission recommendations, ensuring reforms strengthen, rather than diminish, recognition and respect for veterans.

6. Conclusion

“Recognition of military service must be timeless. The courage and sacrifice of those who have served can never be diminished by the thresholds or classification of time. Veterans and their families deserve absolute confidence that their deeds will forever remain open to fair and independent recognition because gallantry and valour, has no expiry, and remembrance has no end.”

On behalf of our Veterans, members and community, the Gunnedah RSL Sub-Branch urges the Committee to recommend the rejection of this Bill in full.

Signed

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