

A VETERANS' PERSPECTIVE

DOCUMENT TABLED BY JOHN PHILLIPS AND NOEL TURNBULL TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE HEARING –

This statement is tendered as further comments by Noel Turnbull and John Phillips.

We recognise what the outcome of this Committee's deliberations will be and note the positions taken by the Defence Minister, Richard Marles, and Committee members in committing the Government to the existing policy.

We also note the submission of the Department of Defence. This submission is indicative of an intransigent position on war powers by the government and departments - a position which they don't believe should or can be subjected to critical evaluation. In one section the Department claims:

"Any shift in these decision-making powers to the Parliament would risk significant adverse consequences for Australia's national security interests. The Office of National Intelligence and the Defence Intelligence Group have been consulted on this submission and have provided input regarding potential consequences and risks."

In another it states:

"Requiring Parliamentary approval to respond to each and every development that arises in the course of a deployment, including Parliament potentially imposing conditions on the nature of these deployments." (to be filled in later).

The first statement employs a term which is more often invoked than defined. It has become a catch all designed to restrict debate and conceal information which the Australian public ought to know.

The second statement is clearly nonsensical. At no stage has anyone proposed that giving war powers to Parliament would give them power over specific operational matters.

In reality there have over the years been debate after the event about military operations and public inquiries such as the Brereton Inquiry into incidents in Afghanistan. These incidents are indicative of the moral injury argument we have made in our formal submission. Too rapid deployment of special forces being used in a role normally followed by regular forces were a major cause of what the Inquiry found.

The implication of the Department of Defence submission seems to arguing that such inquiries and debate about actions should not be held.

In the years to come, as a result of our addiction to follow America into its endless wars there will be more Vietnams, more Iraqs, more Afghanistans.

One of the questions facing this committee and future governments is: what they will say to the traumatised veterans and their families, the widows, widowers and families of those who

will be killed in these wars and who ask whether there could have been a better way to have decided whether and how we should go to war?

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