



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Reference Committee Inquiry Report: Defence honours and awards system.

19 September 2025

Introduction

On 3 July 2024, the Senate referred an Inquiry into the integrity and efficacy of the Defence honours and awards system for report by 28 November 2024.

On 17 April 2025, the committee presented a progress report and extended the reporting date to 12 June 2025. The Committee tabled its final report on 19 June 2025.

The Defence Honours and Awards system provides appropriate and tangible recognition for acts of gallantry and bravery; distinguished, conspicuous, meritorious or noteworthy service; and acknowledges individual, or group, commitment and contribution of Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel. Defence upholds a responsibility for maintaining the principles and integrity of the honours system.

The Government thanks the Committee for its work on the inquiry, as well as those who provided submissions and appeared at hearings.

The Government's response to the Report's recommendations follows below.

Response to the recommendations

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Australian Government take steps to increase the transparency of the Defence honours and awards nomination process, particularly by preserving the text of original recommendations and ensuring subsequent commentary and qualifying statements sit alongside this original text, with authorship disclosed, such that the full documented history is visible to the Honours Board.

Response: The Government agrees with this recommendation.

Defence will examine current practices and refine where appropriate to ensure a consistent approach is taken in the management of honours nominations and Honours Board practices across the Defence organisation.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the Australian Government give consideration to formalising the provision of updates at relevant milestones in the nomination process. These updates should be provided to the original nominator and nominating chain of command on the content, status and outcome of a nomination.

Response: The Government agrees with this recommendation.

Defence will examine current practices and refine where appropriate to ensure the provision of feedback to relevant individuals occurs at suitable milestones.

The Government notes that to maintain the integrity of the honours system, confidentiality of the nomination chain should be maintained.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that the Australian Government provide guidance on the specific criteria for Defence honours and awards and make this guidance publicly available. In particular, the committee recommends that clarity be publicly provided on the definition of the terms 'in action' and 'in warlike operations' in relation to Distinguished Service Decorations, so the eligibility is clear.

Response: The Government notes this recommendation.

Defence provides information about honours and awards to the public through the Defence website. Defence will examine current website content and external messaging to ensure accuracy and completeness of publicly available information.

The Government notes the use of the term 'in action' was retired in 2011 in favour of 'in warlike operations', and is contemporarily used to determine eligibility for Distinguished Service Decorations.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that the Australian Government consider the establishment of an end of war list to review the Defence honours and awards nominations for conflicts since the Vietnam War, and for future conflicts.

Response: The Government agrees in principle to this recommendation.

Defence will examine the feasibility of the establishment of an 'End of War List' to review the Defence honours and awards nominations for conflicts since the Vietnam War, and for future conflicts.

Recommendation 5

The committee recommends that the Australian Government considers how to implement the recommendations from the 2021 Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal inquiry report 'Recognising their sacrifice' to create new forms of medallic and emblematic recognition for current and former Australian Defence Force members and their families who are injured, wounded or killed in, or as a result of, their service.

Response: The Government agrees with this recommendation.

The Government is currently considering the Tribunal's report and its recommendations. The matters raised in the Tribunal report are complex and many different perspectives were provided to the inquiry. The Government appreciates the patience shown while recommendations are carefully considered in detail.

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that the Australian Government instructs the Department of Defence to work alongside the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal to undertake a review of Part VIIC of the Defence Act 1903 to improve the tribunal's review and inquiry functions, while ensuring that the tribunal's operational independence is maintained.

Response: The Government agrees with this recommendation.

The Government acknowledges the important and independent role of the Tribunal. Australia is the only Commonwealth nation to have an independent body for Defence honours and awards reviews.

The Government supports reform of Part VIIC of the *Defence Act 1903*.

The Defence Amendment (Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal) Bill was introduced into Parliament on 28 August 2025.

Additional Recommendations – One Nation Dissenting Report

Recommendation 1

The Minister for Defence to direct the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal to review all nominations for Distinguished Service Crosses and Medals to Senior Officers from 1991 to 2012 for integrity assurance, with specific assurance that the 'in action' criteria was satisfied.

Response: The Government does not agree with this recommendation.

The process of reviewing individuals for Distinguished Service Decorations awarded for service is not an anomalous process, and Defence applies a rigorous standard and considered approach to the review of all awards issued to ADF personnel.

Recommendation 2

Return the criteria for the Distinguished Service Cross and Distinguished Service Medal to require the recipient's conduct to be 'in action'.

Response: The Government does not agree with this recommendation.

The Government has no plans to restore the Distinguished Service Cross or the Distinguished Service Medal to be awarded for service considered as 'in action'. The Sovereign approved amendments to the Distinguished Service Decoration Regulations in 2011 to align with contemporary ADF service.

Since that time, the reference to 'in action' criterion applies only to Gallantry decorations.

Recommendation 3

Create the class of Meritorious Service Decorations to be awarded for leadership and/or command in warlike operations as recommended by the 2008 review.

Response: The Government does not agree with this recommendation.

In response to this recommendation and recommendation two, a full account of the history of amendments to the Distinguished Service Decorations and the proposal for the introduction of a Meritorious Service Decoration was addressed in Defence's submission to the Senate Inquiry.

Recommendation 4

Empower the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal to (retrospectively) review decisions to cancel awards parallel to their current review powers.

Response: The Government does not agree with this recommendation.

The Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal is not the appropriate body to (retrospectively) review decisions to cancel awards parallel to their current review powers.

Medal regulations provide the Governor-General the authority to cancel an honour or award, based on the recommendation of the Minister for Defence, or the Minister with responsibility for the administration of the Defence honours system.

Any proposal to recommend the cancellation of an award requires careful consideration of the relevant factors, consultation and review at the highest levels of Defence and Government.

Recommendation 5

The Australian Government make clear announcements and implementation on a policy to establish command responsibility as a binding doctrine in the Australian Defence Force.

Response: The Government notes this recommendation.

Australian Defence Force (ADF) Doctrine has undergone extensive review since 2020 and is issued through the ADF Command Series of publications. Of particular relevance, is the development of ADF-P-0 Command, the doctrine that includes definitions and discussion on command accountability and command responsibility. The doctrine codifies the ADF thinking on command. It provides a foundation for understanding command and the related subject of control.

Recommendation 6

The government must make stronger efforts to root out all hints of a culture of reprisal as it has a cancerous effect on the morale of the ADF and Parliament's ability to provide oversight of Defence.

Response: The Government agrees with this recommendation.

Defence is committed to driving cultural reform where all personnel feel safe and included.

To achieve cultural reform and improve the wellbeing of ADF Members, Australian Public Service employees and industry partners, Defence is:

- Implementing with urgency the Government agreed recommendations from the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide;
- Committed to the implementation of a Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy; and
- Continuing to progress actions under the Defence Culture Blueprint.