

I would like to make a submission in relation to **The Review of Schedule 9 of the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025**.

Schedule 9 of the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025 (the Act) establishes the Defence and Veterans' Services Commission to inquire and report on issues relating to systemic reform to improve suicide prevention and wellbeing outcomes for current and former veterans of the ADF.

Schedule 9 inserts Part VIIIE – Defence and Veterans' Services Commission into the *Defence Act 1903*.

Schedule 9 of the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025 (Schedule 9) must be removed at this stage. It requires a thorough review by Parliament, veterans, and all stakeholders in order to be realigned with the intent of the Royal Commission.

I believe that the intent of the RCDVS (Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide) recommendations have not yet be honoured.

It is vital that veterans are supported by a completely independent Defence and Veterans Services Commissioner and associated non corporate Commonwealth statutory agency.

#### Key points

- The Royal Commission operated within strictly defined parameters. While this ensured a focused investigation, it also meant that certain critical issues—such as diminished trust in the IGADF, the impact of offsetting practices, retrospective reclassification of service and its relationship to long-term healthcare entitlements were left unaddressed. These are key drivers that have adverse effects on Veteran mental health, well-being and psychological safety.
- The practice of offsetting and its relationship to DFRDB, MSBS, and ADFSuper needs to be properly and fairly addressed. Instead of receiving full and fair support, injured veterans are forced to self-fund their own compensation, undermining the principle of equality in entitlements. Limiting pensions to a fraction of salaries at the point of discharge, also fails to properly compensate for potential lost earnings at higher levels of employment that a person would likely achieve if not inhibited by service injury.

I was retired after decades of full time service via CITER (Command Initiated Transfer to Reserves)( retirement pay). The whole ugly process of my management by the ADF as I left, very much affected my health . Now I am not being compensated for a

reduced ability to work, but rather the practice of “offsetting “ now means my hard earned super over many years of investment by me, is now funding compensation I should be entitled to separately. Simply, if I could work full time unhindered in any way by health issues; I would still be getting my retirement pay via my MSBS and comfortably earning extra salary ( based on my skill sets , qualifications and years of experience). If unaffected by health issues, it is reasonable to expect the skills and experience of a veteran would increase over extra productive work years; resulting in earned salaries greater than those being achieved at the point of retirement. This is not compensated for by the current system.

- The Independent Defence and Veterans Services Commissioner (Recommendation 122) must be exactly that. It cannot be a person heading an investigative organisation that ultimately reports up to a Minister.

What is needed:

A truly independent Defence and Veteran Commission having:

- The broadest investigative powers; and the
- Unhindered ability to implement the Royal Commission's Final Report recommendations.

## Conclusion

It is important to always remember that Australian Defence Force members make the ultimate commitment to our nation. They step forward voluntarily, surrendering personal freedoms to serve in a strict military environment that demands unwavering dedication, courage, and honour. This profound sacrifice deserves an equal commitment in return.

While most veterans transition successfully to civilian life, those who emerge injured or ill, face a devastating reality. A broken wellbeing and compensation system has contributed to the loss of between 2,000 and 3000 veterans to suicide in just 25 years. This is not merely a statistic—it represents thousands of families shattered, communities diminished, and sacrifices dishonoured.

The Commonwealth's response to the Royal Commission reveals a system more focused on cost-cutting than care. Veterans and their families are treated as budget items, with retirement benefits unfairly offset against compensation payments. After spending \$200 million on a Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, the government has not yet implemented the most crucial recommendation: establishing an independent, non-corporate Commonwealth entity with real power to hold successive governments accountable through specific enabling legislation.

Actions requested:

1. Remove Schedule 9 from the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025. It requires a thorough review by Parliament, veterans, and all stakeholders in order to be realigned with the intent of the Royal Commission.

2. Implement Recommendation 122 from the Final Report by the Royal Commission so there is no repeat of the last 30 years, and do it through consultation with both houses of parliament, veterans, families, other stakeholders and then introduce it as a Bill so it can become an Act after bipartisan support.
3. Implement and Fund all 122 Recommendations from the DRCVS Final Report through consultation with both houses of parliament, veterans, families, other stakeholders and then introduce needed changes in a Bill so they can become an Act after bipartisan support.