

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission for:

Inquiry into transition from the Australian Defence Force (ADF)

Dear Sir/Ma'am,

I note from the terms of reference for the inquiry, that the focus of the process is the efficacy of the transition and the ability of serving members of the ADF to move from the ADF healthcare system to a supported civilian and ESO-centric model.

There are several concerns with the self-imposed limitation of the inquiry to focus on healthcare and/or mental health. The wellbeing of ADF members and as subsequent civilians is inextricably linked to non-healthcare specific factors such as employment, socialisation and retraining. Therefore, the ability for an ex-ADF member to integrate smoothly in to society is also beneficial to their health and well-being.

Currently the ADF spends weeks, months and even years physically and mentally preparing members for the rigours of service. Recruit training, Corps training, and promotion courses, along with years of team-building and activities designed to imprint esprit-de-corps in every individual. This is a good and necessary thing – it builds the strength, resilience, and teamwork needed to fight and win on the battlefield. However, this is a process of acknowledged indoctrination. A process that deeply ingrains behaviour, belief systems, identity and expectations. The ADF spends years building these unconscious changes in to individuals, yet spends three days on a Resettlement Seminar to deprogram these changes? Therefore, I request that the inquiry also review:

- a. The ADFs discharge/separation process, including content and duration of Transition Seminars, retraining delivery and funding, the mapping of military qualifications to civil equivalency, and resulting gap training if needed, and expectation management counselling; and
- b. The Inquiry should include specifically addressing the needs and delivery of de-programming ADF members as they transition from the ADF. This may include looking at the process of terminal postings to low-tempo/civilian first employment, course attendance, psychological screening and assistance if required etc.

Secondly, having now worked voluntarily for a number of ESOs in various capacities, and sat on advisory committees on veteran's issues, I have been significantly concerned that there is no accurate data on the numbers and distribution of veterans within our civil communities. Given that DVAs budget is approximately \$AUD12Billion annually, the fact that DVAs service delivery is reactive (i.e. goes to where current demand is needed) not proactive (i.e. delivered in to areas and services before the demand is apparent), funding should be prioritised to communities and services based upon accurate data of age, family situation, distribution etc of the veteran's community and is not based simply upon historical trends. DVA only has data on their client base, not true data of total numbers/locations of veterans who may not all have claims in with DVA. Having engaged with the

Australian Bureau of Statistics I was informed that the last time questions were asked of military service/veteran's status in a census was in the 1930s. I have made submissions to have the next census include questions on previous military and operational service.

I acknowledge that the post-transition/long-term provision of service to our veterans through DVA and the ESOs, and the proposed census data collection is outside the remit of this inquiry, however, some simple procedural changes during the transition phase will have a disproportionately significant impact on DVA/ESO service delivery by providing accurate and current planning data on the size/age/needs distribution of veterans after they leave the ADF. Therefore, I request the inquiry also review:

- a. The record keeping, and provision of data relating to ADF personnel as they transition (e.g. resettlement/discharge locations of ADF members transitioning out) to a centrally managed database; and
- b. The methodology of this records sharing in relation to the Privacy Act.

I applaud the conduct of this inquiry and the need to review the transition process, however, I urge you to widen the scope to include the above recommendations. The provision of de-programming and truly useful resettlement training along with accurate contemporary data (coupled with aligned data from the census) will do much to improve the efficient delivery of service and smooth the transition of those who have served back in to their civilian lives.

Regards,

Alex Thomson

10 July, 2018