

Submission to the Inquiry into the Defence Amendment (Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal) Bill 2025 by the Commando Welfare Trust Chairman

The **Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal Bill 2025** provides a critical opportunity to review and modernise the criteria for distinguished military honours, particularly the **Distinguished Service Cross (DSC)** and the **Distinguished Service Medal (DSM)**. It also presents a chance to ensure proper and consistent recognition for personnel **killed in action (KIA)** and **wounded in action (WIA)**. This submission advocates for a comprehensive review of the current criteria and underscores the enduring importance of appropriate recognition for the service and sacrifices of Australian Defence Force members.

Review of Criteria for the DSC and DSM

The DSC and DSM are prestigious awards recognising exceptional service and acts of bravery. However, the criteria for these honours have long been criticised for being overly restrictive and disproportionately favouring senior officers. This approach does not fully reflect the evolving character of modern warfare, where acts of leadership, courage, and service occur across all ranks and in diverse operational contexts.

A comprehensive review should include:

- ❑ **Broader Eligibility** – Ensure the criteria recognise exceptional service at all ranks, particularly within complex, high-risk operational environments such as asymmetric and counterinsurgency warfare.
 - ❑ **Peer and Command Nominations** – Introduce pathways for peer and direct-command recognition to better identify individuals whose contributions may otherwise be overlooked.
 - ❑ **Timeliness and Transparency** – Streamline the process to ensure recognition is delivered promptly and with transparency, reinforcing trust in the system and sustaining morale across the force.
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Recognition of Killed and Wounded in Action

The sacrifice of those killed or wounded in service must be honoured consistently and visibly. Current provisions for posthumous and injury-related recognition are fragmented and lack a standardised approach.

- ❑ **Killed in Action (KIA):** Families must be assured that their loved one's sacrifice is formally and appropriately recognised through a consistent and dignified medallic framework.
- ❑ **Wounded in Action (WIA):** Those injured in service endure both visible and invisible scars. Introducing a formal medallic recognition for WIA personnel would honour their resilience, raise awareness of their sacrifices, and provide enduring acknowledgement of their contribution to national service.

End-of-War Review – Afghanistan Campaign

With the conclusion of Australia’s Afghanistan campaign, now is the appropriate moment to conduct a **comprehensive end-of-war review of honours and awards**. Over two decades, operations spanned combat, training, stabilisation, logistics, and coalition support roles. Recognition must capture the full breadth of contributions and sacrifices, ensuring that personnel across all functions are acknowledged fairly and appropriately.

Such a review should:

- Assess the application of existing criteria across the campaign.
- Identify any gaps where meritorious service or sacrifice was not adequately recognised.
- Inform reforms to ensure future campaigns embed fairer, more inclusive recognition practices from the outset.

Conclusion

The **Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal Bill 2025** represents a pivotal opportunity to establish a more inclusive, transparent, and respectful system of military recognition. By revising the criteria for the DSC and DSM, and by ensuring consistent medallic recognition for those **killed or wounded in action**, Australia can more accurately reflect the realities of contemporary service.

This process will strengthen trust in the honours system, uphold the values of **courage, commitment, and community**, and ensure that all who serve are appropriately recognised for their sacrifices in defence of the nation.

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Chairman
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