

27 July 2025

Committee Secretary
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee
Department of Senate
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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Review of Schedule 9 of the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025

Dear Committee,

I am writing as a veteran of the ADF, having served for over 40 years both on full time and reserve service, to convey my support for having a new statutory entity to provide independent oversight and evidence-based advice in order to drive system reform to improve suicide prevention and wellbeing outcomes for serving and ex-serving ADF members.

My service and post-service experiences have made me distrustful of the motives of some in Defence and DVA management as well as being disenchanted with the long history of political vagaries. The Royal Commission report and its recommendations have highlighted these problems and the need to create trust across the veterans' community as paramount for accountability, meaningful outcomes and successful change and cultural management across the parliament, Defence and DVA.

The proposed Schedule 9 was developed without meaningful consultation with the veteran community. The government:

- Embedded oversight provisions in healthcare legislation to avoid scrutiny
- Failed to consult veteran organisations on the structure of independence
- Ignored explicit Royal Commission requirements for Governor-General appointment
- Created legislation behind closed doors

This process violated every principle of good governance and democratic consultation and demonstrates that nothing appears to have been learnt from the lessons of the Royal Commission. The result is legislation that serves government interests rather than the primacy of veterans' needs.

THE ROYAL COMMISSION'S CONSULTATION LEGACY

For three years, the Royal Commission consulted with and heard from veterans, families, serving members, senior staff of Defence and DVA, relevant experts and written submissions. This high volume of engagement comprised of:

- 340 witnesses, including 60 people with lived experience of suicide and of suicide and suicidality;
- almost 900 private sessions; and
- more than 5,800 submissions.

This extensive consultation process identified the need for genuine independent oversight as crucial for community confidence. The government has ignored this consultation and created legislation that violates the Commission's findings and its underpinnings. If the government can't be trusted with implementing this fundamental recommendation as proposed, it will be interpreted as 'business as usual' with 'nothing to see here'.

Political leadership is needed to demonstrate support for the person, veteran or serving member, being at the centre of implementing the Royal Commission's recommendations with an independent entity ensuring this occurs now and into the future.

Accordingly, if the government intends to not follow recommendation 122 as proposed, it should explain why this is the case and ensure thorough consultation.

CONCLUSION

The redevelopment of oversight legislation represents an opportunity to restore trust between government and the veteran community. This can only be achieved through proper timelines, genuine consultation, and commitment to the Royal Commission's requirements.

The veteran community has been betrayed once by Schedule 9. We cannot allow rushed, secretive processes to betray us again. The lives of future veterans depend on getting this right. We owe it to them, to the families who have lost loved ones, and to the memory of those we have lost to ensure that oversight legislation serves veteran interests, not government convenience.

I ask that you rescind the legislation and not amend it. It needs to be designed through transparent consultation.

Regards,

Mike Smith