



Australian Government
The Repatriation Commission

PRESIDENT
DEPUTY PRESIDENT
REPATRIATION COMMISSIONER
COMMISSIONER FOR DEFENCE ENGAGEMENT
VETERAN FAMILY ADVOCATE

Committee Secretary
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

This submission is made on behalf of the Repatriation Commission.

The Repatriation Commission was established on 1 July 1920 by proclamation of the *Australian Soldiers' Repatriation Act 1920* and it provides services under the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986*, to veterans and members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and their partners, widows, widowers and children.

The Commission welcomes the introduction of the *National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention Bill 2020* and the *National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2020*. The introduction of these Bills to establish a National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention (*National Commissioner*) is an important step in improving understanding of the factors and systemic issues contributing to ADF and veteran suicides, and informing actions and strategies to support the prevention of future suicides. In particular, we welcome engagement of the *National Commissioner* with the newly appointed Veteran Family Advocate.

The definition of 'veteran' in the *National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention Bill 2020* broadly encompasses all current and former serving ADF members (see clause 5). This is consistent with the definition of 'veteran' in the *Australian Veterans' Recognition (Putting Veterans and Their Families First) Act 2019*. The August 2021 Census will include, for the first time, a question about service in the ADF. The data obtained will help understand the size of the veteran cohort that are not known to Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) and will also inform future responses by the Commission to issues facing veterans. The Commission welcomes the broad information sharing provisions included in the *National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention Bill 2020*.

The Commission would be interested in receiving regular updates of the work of the *National Commissioner* noting that this topic is of significant interest and benefit to veterans and their families.

The Commission is mindful of the potential impact on DVA from the large number of information requests likely to be received, particularly in first few years of the *National Commissioner's* operations as they develop a knowledge base. DVA will make sure internal procedures support these requests.

The Commission welcomes transparency, openness and frankness in the findings and publication of the interim and final reports as this will promote better public understanding of the impact of military service and public interest in understanding the background and risk factors for veteran suicide.

The Commission anticipates that the work of the *National Commissioner* may trigger mental health challenges for veterans and their families and that DVA, in cooperation with other agencies such as Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling, will continue to provide support to those impacted.

The death by suicide of any ADF member or veteran is tragic for their family and felt by the entire community. The Commission is committed to supporting prevention of these suicides and supports the role and powers of the *National Commissioner*, as outlined in the Bills. The Commission will commit full support to the *National Commissioner* and their office.

Yours sincerely

Liz Cosson AM CSC
President, Repatriation Commission

9 October 2020