



Committee Secretary

Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Subject: Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner Bills 2025

Dear Committee Members,

On behalf of Trojans Trek, I write to express our strong support for the Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner Bills 2025 and to provide recommendations to ensure the Commission fulfils its intended purpose as outlined by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

About Trojans Trek

Trojans Trek is an organisation dedicated to supporting current and former Australian Defence Force members in rebuilding identity, purpose, and wellbeing following service. Our work focuses on transition, trauma recovery, prevention of suicide, and long-term reintegration into civilian life.

Through direct engagement with veterans navigating the Defence and Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) systems, we observe firsthand the cumulative effects of systemic inefficiencies, institutional mistrust, administrative burden, and prolonged claims processes on mental health outcomes.

From this lived-experience-informed perspective, we provide this submission.

Support for the Establishment of the DVSC

Trojans Trek supports the establishment of the Defence and Veterans' Service Commission as an independent statutory authority.

The Royal Commission made clear that systemic failures, not isolated incidents, have contributed to adverse outcomes for serving members, veterans, and their families. A permanent, independent oversight body is essential to:

- Monitor and evaluate reform implementation
- Identify systemic risks early
- Strengthen suicide prevention mechanisms
- Improve coordination across Defence and veteran-serving agencies
- Ensure transparency and accountability

The creation of the DVSC represents an opportunity for meaningful structural reform rather than incremental administrative adjustment.

The Need for Full Operational Autonomy

For the Commission to succeed, it must be genuinely independent, both structurally and operationally.

We recommend:

- Full statutory independence from Defence and DVA
- Independent funding arrangements
- Independent staffing and appointment processes
- Legislative safeguards protecting the Commission from political or departmental influence

Oversight bodies cannot effectively scrutinise systems if they are embedded within them. The credibility of the DVSC will depend on visible and enforceable independence.

Trust within the veteran community is fragile. Independence is foundational to restoring it.

Governance and the Importance of Structural Separation

Trojans Trek further recommends that the leadership and governance of the DVSC be entirely independent of legacy advocacy bodies, including the larger ESOs.

This recommendation is not directed at any single organisation but reflects the need to:

- Avoid perceived conflicts of interest
- Ensure generational and contemporary representation
- Rebuild trust among modern veteran cohorts
- Demonstrate a genuine reset in veteran oversight

Many contemporary veterans, particularly those who served after 1999, express significant mistrust of traditional representative structures. Whether perception or reality, that mistrust affects engagement and wellbeing.

To restore confidence, the Commission must be seen as independent, modern, and free from historical institutional alignment.

Appointments should prioritise contemporary operational experience, military rank equality, governance capability, integrity, and demonstrated independence.

Focus on Systemic Reform and Prevention

The DVSC should maintain a clear focus on systemic oversight rather than becoming an alternative to individual complaints.

Priority areas for investigation and monitoring should include:

- Transition processes
- DVA claims processing systems
- Administrative delays and communication failures
- Suicide prevention effectiveness

- Data transparency and reporting mechanisms
- Long-term wellbeing outcomes

The Commission should have the authority to:

- Initiate its own investigations
- Compel the production of documents
- Publish findings transparently
- Make reform recommendations without restriction

Prevention must be central to its mandate. Suicide and mental health crises rarely arise from a single cause. They result from intersecting pressures, including identity loss, bureaucratic fatigue, institutional mistrust, financial strain, and social isolation.

A whole-of-system lens is therefore essential.

Conclusion

Trojans Trek supports the passage of the Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner Bills 2025.

However, to fulfil its intended purpose, the Commission must:

1. Be fully independent and autonomous
2. Be structurally separated from Defence, DVA, and legacy advocacy organisations
3. Operate with strong investigative and transparency powers
4. Focus on systemic reform and prevention
5. Rebuild trust within the contemporary veteran community

The Royal Commission made clear that reform must be structural, not symbolic. The establishment of the DVSC presents an opportunity to embed long-term accountability and strengthen suicide prevention efforts across the defence and veteran system.

We urge the Committee to ensure that the final legislation reflects the level of independence and authority required to achieve meaningful reform.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Vincent

Chairperson

Trojans Trek

16 Feb 2026