

Marcus Fielding

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Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
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Dear Sir/Madam,

Submission to Inquiry into transition from the Australian Defence Force (ADF)

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

Transition from service in the military (demobilisation) is an issue that seized the attention of the Australian Government at the conclusion of the two world wars and witnessed a considerable amount of national resources being devoted to its execution.

At the conclusion of the First World War it became apparent that governments were unable to provide all the transition assistance that was required and so a number of what we now call Ex-Service Organisations were created. It was in the 1920's and 1930's that the 'delineation of responsibility' between the government and Ex-Service Organisations (ESO) for support to veterans was first cast.

The nature of military service has changed considerably in the last 50 years – especially with the creation of a permanent full-time Defence Force. National mobilization for war (and subsequent demobilization) is a concept and practice whose days seem over. Full-time professional career Defence Force members can typically expect to undertake multiple postings and multiple deployments in the course of their service.

And yet, the division of responsibility between the government and ESOs for veterans support has changed little since the inter-war period. The veterans' community is expected (absent a future mobilization event) to decrease and taper off at about 500,000 – a constituency that represents about 2% of the Australian population.

Rather than an incremental adjustment of that boundary I believe that a first principles review is warranted. In broad terms I believe that there are many functions currently performed by ESOs that should morally be the responsibility of governments. For too long ESOs have voluntarily carried a responsibility that the government earns in return for service in the armed forces. The functions historically performed by government during the demobilisation events would be a good place to begin such an examination, as would the experience of other countries such as NZ, the UK and the USA.

Such a review will also create a strategic opportunity for the recalibration of the 'psychological contract' or relationship between the Australian Government and individuals who serve in the ADF – a military covenant per se.

Regards,
Marcus Fielding