



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Hansard

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CORRECTIONS

This is a **PROOF ISSUE**. Members may suggest corrections to their own speeches within 15 non-sitting days by contacting the Hansard office.

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

The ability to make standards is essential to ensure that the government can respond if the market fails to deliver quality or equitable mobile services. This is consistent with arrangements under the existing universal services framework.

While the UOMO provides the underlying framework for baseline connectivity that can support triple 0 access, the bill does not explicitly reference access to an emergency call service as a requirement for the mobile operators to meet the bill's objectives.

This is because there is a longstanding requirement for providers of public mobile telecommunications services to provide equitable access to triple 0. This is governed by the rules set out in the Telecommunications (Emergency Call Service) Determination 2019, made under part 8 of the Telecommunications (Consumer Protection and Service Standards) Act 1999.

Any voice services carried by public mobile telecommunications services are currently captured by the Emergency Call Service Determination 2019. As voice services will need to be supplied outdoors to fulfil the UOMO, the Emergency Call Service Determination 2019 will apply to mobile telecommunications services offered and supplied in compliance with the UOMO. Accordingly, this means the UOMO will support access to triple 0 regardless of the technology used to supply voice services to consumers.

Public consultation on the exposure draft of the bill took place from 18 September 2025 to 19 October 2025. There were 88 submissions on the bill from industry, individuals, consumer representatives, and state and local governments.

Submissions included the mobile network operators, Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association, National Farmers' Federation and ACCAN. The government has worked closely with stakeholders in drafting the bill, and I would like to thank them all.

This bill will modernise Australia's universal service arrangements to provide equitable access to basic mobile coverage outdoors and provide all Australians greater access to essential telecommunications services, improving public safety and ensuring critical new technology is available as widely and as equitably possible.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner Bill 2025

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum, and to the Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2025, presented by **Mr Keogh**.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr KEOGH (Burt—Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel) (09:18): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Introduction

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide delivered its final report in September last year. It contained 122 recommendations.

Recommendation 122 was that the government establish a new statutory entity to oversee system reform across the whole defence ecosystem. The royal commission said that this was its most important recommendation. It went on to say that it considered that this recommendation would 'underpin all the recommendations that precede it' and be 'the most significant action the Australian government can take to address defence and veteran suicide'.

In acknowledgement of the significance and urgency of this recommendation, in February 2025 the Albanese Labor government legislated the creation of the Defence and Veterans' Service Commission, and it has been up and running since the end of September.

The current enactment within part VIIIE of the Defence Act 1903, by way of schedule 9 of the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025, passed the parliament in February 2025 and ensured that the commission could be up and running by September and not be subject to the vagaries of an intervening federal election.

The role of this new statutory oversight entity is to provide independent oversight and evidence based advice to drive system reform to improve suicide prevention and wellbeing outcomes for the defence and veteran community. The commission will have a dedicated and sustained focus on suicide prevention.

It will ensure agencies implementing royal commission recommendations will be held to account by promoting long-term change and driving the system reforms needed to reduce the rates of suicide and suicidality among serving and ex-serving ADF members.

Importantly, the commission will be publicly reporting on the government's progress on implementing the government's response to the recommendations of the royal commission on the third and sixth anniversaries of the government's response; by 2 December 2027 and 2030.

To meet these objectives, the commission must have the independence, functions and powers necessary to meet these objectives and maintain the trust of the defence and veteran community.

This bill delivers on the full implementation of this by enshrining the legislative establishment of the Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner and commission into its own standalone legislation as always intended.

Senate committee recommendations addressed

This is also why the government was happy for there to be a review of that legislation by the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, with a view to its recommendations being included in this bill.

The committee reported on 29 August 2025, and I thank all those who contributed submissions and provided evidence to the committee. The submissions, evidence and the committee's report have informed the development of this bill.

Recommendation 1: Standalone legislation for the commission

On 4 September this year I updated the House on the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. In that statement, I indicated that the government would implement standalone legislation for the Defence and Veterans' Service Commission to reflect its independence.

This is also the first recommendation of the Senate committee report on the current enabling legislation in part VIIIE of the Defence Act.

This bill delivers on that commitment.

Recommendation 2: Commissioner functions include reference to veterans' families

The Senate committee review into schedule 9 provided an opportunity for stakeholders to raise their concern with the VETS Act enabling legislation. These submissions were reviewed and considered in the development of this legislation. Key themes included strengthening the independence of the commissioner, ensuring families were formally recognised, and ensuring that the commissioner has the necessary powers to conduct inquiries effectively.

There is no doubt that families of veterans play a vital role in the health and wellbeing of veterans but also face unique challenges themselves. I'm pleased that through this legislation we're able to acknowledge the significance of veteran families in line with the recommendations of the Senate committee by expressly referencing families in the functions of the commissioner.

Recommendation 3: Commission functions and powers reviewed

At the beginning of this year the government appointed Michael Manthorpe PSM as the interim head of the Defence and Veterans' Service Commission, to commence work on getting the commission up and running, as well as advising the government on any improvements to the legislation that may be required. Mr Manthorpe made a comprehensive submission to the Senate committee review, suggesting amendments to the functions and powers of the commission. In line with recommendation 3 of the Senate committee inquiry report, the government has reviewed these proposals in detail and adopted these in the amendments.

Strengthens commissioner independence

This bill strengthens the independence of the commissioner by ensuring that the role is appointed by the Governor-General after a merits based and public recruitment process. A person will not be eligible for appointment as commissioner if they have served in any capacity in the ADF within the past five years.

In addition, the commissioner is not to be subject to direction in relation to the conduct of an inquiry, with the exception of a minister-directed inquiry where the minister may set the terms of reference and timeframe, and select the individual to run the inquiry based on advice from the commissioner. A minister-directed inquiry function is consistent with the functions set out for the commission by the royal commission.

Additional parameters have been placed around the minister's power to direct an inquiry, such that the minister must have regard to the objects of the legislation, the resources of the commission and its other planned inquiries.

Strengthens the commissioner's powers

The bill also strengthens the powers of the commissioner in the following key ways:

- Significantly, it empowers the commissioner to further report to the prime minister and minister where they are of the opinion that adequate and appropriate action has not been taken by a Commonwealth entity in respect of recommendations contained in a report of the commissioner.
- It places a duty on the heads of Commonwealth entities to ensure that the entity uses its best endeavours to assist the commissioner in the performance of the commissioner's functions. A similar duty is placed on officials of the entity. The bill also includes entry to premises powers and powers to obtain access to documents by remote means, for Commonwealth entities and their contractors for the purpose of a special inquiry. This will ensure that the commissioner can be confident that they have all relevant information needed for the inquiry.
- It includes new offences for the provision of false and misleading information or documents or the destruction of documents or things.

Strengthens witness protections

It is critical to the success of the commission that those with relevant information feel supported and protected in providing information to an inquiry by the commissioner. This will ensure that the commissioner is fully informed. To assist with this, the bill has expanded the scope of witness protections to ensure that a person does not suffer detriment due to providing this information. Protections from criminal and civil penalties which may arise where a person gives information to the commissioner have also been expanded to include where that information is provided voluntarily.

Strengthens transparency of the commission's work

Lastly, a number of the new measures in the bill will improve the transparency of the work of the commission and ensure accountability of both the commission and those persons or bodies subject to oversight. These measures include:

- Enshrining procedural fairness requirements in the law by requiring the commissioner to afford an opportunity to respond before including information critical of an agency, official or other person in a draft report
- Requiring Commonwealth entities, officials or other persons to provide to the commissioner information about the implementation of recommendations relevant to them
- Requiring the Commonwealth government to table a statement setting out its response to an inquiry report in parliament
- Clarifying that the commissioner is empowered to publish reports at the commissioner's discretion and make public statements about an inquiry or the performance of the commissioner's functions where the commissioner considers it in the public interest to do so
- Including statutory deadlines for the completion of two inquiries into the Commonwealth's implementation of the government's response to the royal commission recommendations
- Clearly setting out when a person in the commission can disclose protected information
- Outlining how an inquiry commences and the specific notice requirements
- Specifying the powers of delegation on the face of the bill
- Providing the terms and conditions of appointment of the commissioner in the standalone bill rather than in rules

Government has listened and acted

The government has listened to feedback from stakeholders and has taken action. These changes in the bill will ensure that the commissioner has the tools necessary to ensure that the Defence and Veterans' Service Commission is enabled to drive system reform to improve suicide prevention and wellbeing outcomes for serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members.

This will mean agencies are held accountable to consider and respond to the commissioner's recommendations. The enduring nature of the commission will ensure that the voices of our veterans continue to be heard and that systemic issues that contribute to suicide in our veteran community are continually reviewed and addressed.

Conclusion

As I said in the House on 4 September, it is our nation's duty to empower and support the mental health and wellbeing of our defence and veteran community, with a view to reducing the elevated rates of suicide and suicidality.

The commission will be a powerful force for change, overseeing sustained improvement in how we protect the lives of those who protect us.

This bill provides the foundation for what the royal commission deemed to be the most significant action the Australian government can take to address defence and veteran suicide—an independent commissioner and commission. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2025

First Reading

Bill presented by **Mr Keogh**.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr KEOGH (Burt—Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel) (09:29): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2025 is part of a package of two bills which together will enshrine the legislative establishment of the Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner and commission in their own standalone legislation as was always intended.

This bill makes consequential amendments necessary to implement the measures in the Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner Bill 2025, which I have just introduced. In particular, the bill makes minor consequential amendments to the Archives Act 1983 and the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security Act 1986, arising from the movement of the provision establishing the Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner from the Defence Act 1903 into its own standalone legislation. The details of the measures in this bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum for the primary bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures No. 2) Bill 2025

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Mr Keogh**.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr KEOGH (Burt—Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel) (09:31): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures No. 2) Bill.

This bill continues our government's response to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide and furthers the implementation of a simpler veterans entitlement system. The bill before us today complements the amendments made in the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures No. 1) Bill that was introduced into the parliament at the end of October.

Positioning

In September, I came to the House to give an update on the important work underway to enact the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

The passage of the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025 (the VETS Act) earlier this year, is one part of the Albanese government's response to the recommendations in the royal commission's interim report.

The VETS Act will simplify veterans legislation from 1 July 2026 and do away with the current tri-act system. From 1 July 2026 all veterans rehabilitation and compensation claims will be dealt with under a single piece of legislation, the new and improved Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004, also known as the MRCA.

To be ready for 1 July 2026 and to ensure all the great work that is coming out of the VETS Act is in place in time, there are some minor technical amendments that are required.

What is it?

The bill proposes a number of minor technical amendments to that legislation.

They will help to ensure the smooth implementation of these reforms and the transition from the complicated tri-act arrangement to the single ongoing act.

These changes do not change the key settings agreed to with the passage of the VETS Act.



Australian Government

**Australian Government response to the
Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and
Trade report:**

**Review of Schedule 9 of the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment
and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025**

Additional recommendations of Jacqui Lambie Network

NOVEMBER 2025

Recommendation 1: Improve independence of the DVSC by:

- a) establishing the DVSC under standalone legislation within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet rather than the Department of Defence;**
- b) amending section 110ZJE to require the appointment of the DVSC by the Governor-General or an independent panel to guarantee impartiality; and**
- c) omitting the Minister's power to withdraw or amend inquiries under subsection 110ZFB(5).**

Summary of Response: Recommendation 1a) is Agreed in Part; Recommendation 1b) is Agreed; Recommendation 1c) is Not Agreed.

1a) The Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2025 will repeal Part VIIIIE of the *Defence Act 1903* and the Bill will replace it with standalone legislation establishing the DVSC. The DVSC will be an independent statutory agency. The DVSC's portfolio under the Bill will not relate to Schedule 9 of the VETS Act. The DVSC's portfolio will be determined in the relevant Administrative Arrangements Order.

1b) The Bill requires that the Commissioner be appointed by the Governor-General following a merit-based, publicly advertised recruitment process and assessment of candidates by an assessment panel.

1c) The Minister's power to withdraw or amend inquiries requested by the Minister remains in the Bill. This power is limited only to inquiries that the Minister has requested. It does not apply to inquiries that the Commissioner initiates under their own motion power, in which the Commissioner cannot be directed by anyone. Retaining this provision ensures that, should an event supersede the need for, or change the scope of, an inquiry into a specific matter requested by the Minister, the Minister can withdraw or amend their original request. This provision will ensure flexibility is retained, and that the Commissioner's resources are not utilised for an inquiry that is superseded, or are continued to be utilised on matters in an inquiry that has changed in scope. If the Minister withdrew a request and the Commissioner considered that the matter still warranted inquiry, the Commissioner could inquire into the matter on their own motion.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen reporting requirements to capture the DVSC's exercise of statutory powers, numbers of notices issued and other related matters.

Summary of Response: Agreed.

Clause 87 of the Bill includes a requirement for additional information to be included in the Commissioner's Annual Report, including the number of inquiries commenced and concluded, the number of notices or summons issued and whether the access to premises or search warrant powers have been utilised in the reporting period.

Recommendation 3: Guarantee independent and adequate funding for the DVSC's, separate from Defence budgets

Summary of Response: This Recommendation does not relate to Schedule 9 of the VETS Act.

The Commission will receive operational funding of \$44.5 million over four years.

Recommendation 4: Ensure DVSC staffing includes expertise in mental health, suicide prevention and veteran support with lived experience.

Summary of Response: Noted.

The Bill provides for the engagement of staff under the *Public Service Act 1999* (see clause 83), as well as contractors (see clause 84), the secondment of staff from Commonwealth agencies and State or Territory governments (see clause 85) and the engagement of consultants (see clause 86). This ensures that the Commissioner can engage persons with relevant experience as required to exercise their functions, including those with expertise in mental health and suicide prevention. As the Commissioner is independent, the engagement of personnel is a matter for the Commissioner.

Recommendation 5: Expand investigative powers to allow entry to Commonwealth premises without judicial warrants.

Summary of Response: Agreed

The Bill includes new provisions which will provide the Commissioner with the power to enter the premises of a government entity or a Commonwealth contractor without a warrant (clause 34) and to obtain access to documents from these entities by remote means (clause 35).

Recommendation 6: Strengthen witness protections to guard against reprisals, destruction of evidence and adverse impacts on entitlements.

Summary of Response: Agreed in part

The Bill has significantly strengthened the protections available to witnesses and includes offences available to the Commissioner where a person destroys documents (see clause 59) or provides false or misleading evidence (see clauses 58 and 67).

Clause 64 of the Bill provides an offence for causing detriment to a person because it is suspected or believed that that person has provided information, documents or other things for the purpose of assisting the Commissioner with their functions or exercise of their powers. Detriment is not defined and as such there is no specific reference to adverse impacts on entitlements.

Clause 65 extends, subject to limited exceptions, immunity from civil penalties or prosecution of an offence to a person who provides information voluntarily to the Commission and provides that that information is not admissible against the person in any court or any proceedings before a person authorised to hear evidence.

In addition, a person appearing as a witness at a hearing has, subject to the Bill, the same protection as a witness in proceedings before the High Court (see clause 93).

Recommendation 7: Establish an independent appeals and dispute resolution process for veterans and families dissatisfied with DVSC decisions.

Summary of Response: Agreed in Part

It is important to note that the DVSC's existing functions are aimed at systemic reform, including through monitoring data and trends regarding suicide and suicidality, inquiring into the state of the defence and veteran ecosystem as it relates to the prevention of suicide and suicidality, monitoring the implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations and promoting understanding of suicide risks and improved supports around veterans. Consistent with the existing legislation, subclause 10(2) of the Bill makes it clear that the Commissioner's functions do not include making findings on manner or cause of death, or inquiring into a single exercise of a power or performance of a function. That is, the Commissioner does not review and make findings on individual cases. Accordingly, the Commissioner will generally not make decisions affecting individuals that would be subject to review or appeal.

However, the Commissioner can determine whether to accept or reject a claim of legal professional privilege made over a document (see clause 60). This is a decision affecting an individual and as such, the Bill includes the right to seek merits review of a decision to reject a claim of legal professional privilege by the Administrative Review Tribunal (see clause 94).

Recommendation 8: Bring forward the first review to 18 months, with subsequent reviews at longer intervals

Summary of Response: Not Agreed

The Senate Committee process has effectively undertaken a review of the current provisions in Part VIIIE of the *Defence Act 1903*. The DVSC commenced on 29 September 2025.

The Government does not consider that 18 months from the date of commencement of the new Act will provide sufficient time to determine the effectiveness of these reforms. Inquiries are likely to be complex, involve a large number of interested stakeholders and take time to complete. The current three year review period will provide sufficient information for a comprehensive review.