

OPENING STATEMENT
SECRETARY LIZ COSSON AM, CSC
BUDGET ESTIMATES 2021-22
FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE LEGISLATION
COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY 2 JUNE 2021
MAIN COMMITTEE ROOM, PARLIAMENT HOUSE

Thank you Chair, I offer the following brief update to the Committee.

I acknowledge the announcement on 19 April 2021, that the Government will recommend to the Governor-General the establishment of a Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. I recognise the feedback and concern in the veteran community about this important issue and I welcome this inquiry as it is an opportunity to make findings and recommendations to ensure we reduce the incidence of suicide. The Department facilitated over 1400 comments on the themes for the Terms of Reference. Comments for which we have consent to publish are available on our website. The Department is ready to respond to the Royal Commission once established.

The Department is also focused on delivering the outcomes of the 2021-22 Budget and continuing to support the veteran community. I acknowledge the backlog of claims and the impact this is having on the veteran community. In the 2021-22 Budget, DVA has been provided with additional funding and staffing to address the increased workload of claims. I am happy to take questions on how we will allocate these resources, and the strategies and initiatives we are implementing, including proactive outreach to veterans waiting for their claims to be finalised, prioritisation of claims for at risk veterans and continuing to streamline and improve processes.

I also want to respond to the recent reporting in Estimates hearings last week, regarding the 42% contracted DVA workforce. With the additional staffing allocated to DVA in the 2021-22 Budget, this figure will reduce, however, DVA will always have a blended workforce and it is important to acknowledge the work of all DVA staff, APS and contractors for the work they do supporting the veteran community.

Finally, I take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all staff of the Department for their efforts maintaining services to veterans and families, including responding to the current COVID situation in Victoria. I particularly want our staff and veteran community in Victoria to know we are thinking of them.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of our veteran community, including ex-service and veteran organisations and the advocate community for their ongoing commitment to veterans and their families during this challenging time.

Chair, I welcome any questions from Committee members.

Thank you.

ENDS