

**OPENING STATEMENT**  
**SECRETARY LIZ COSSON AM, CSC**  
**SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES 2021-22**  
**FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE LEGISLATION**  
**COMMITTEE**  
**WEDNESDAY 27 OCTOBER 2021**  
**MAIN COMMITTEE ROOM, PARLIAMENT HOUSE**

Thank you Chair, I offer the following brief update since we last appeared before the Committee.

On 2 July 2021, the Hon Andrew Gee MP was appointed as Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel. I congratulate the Minister on his appointment and I look forward to working with him to continue our shared commitment to delivering support to veterans and families. I also acknowledge Mr Darren Chester MP for his service as Minister for Veterans' Affairs from March 2018 to 1 July 2021.

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide was established on 8 July 2021 and the Department is responding to the Commission's work and will continue to support veterans and their families during the conduct of its inquiry.

On 29 September 2021, the Preliminary Interim Report from the Interim National Commissioner, Dr Bernadette Boss CSC, was tabled in Parliament. I thank Dr Boss and her Office for this important work. The Government is currently considering the 41 recommendations from the Preliminary Interim Report.

On 7 October 2021, the Government response to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee inquiry into the Totally Permanently Incapacitated (TPI) payment was tabled in Parliament. The Government response noted the recommendation of the Committee and will take this, and the views of the ex-service community as presented to the Committee into account when considering future policy options for support to TPI veterans.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the service, sacrifice and loss as a result of Australia's over 20 year commitment in Afghanistan. The recent situation in Afghanistan has impacted the veteran community and I want to reinforce the message to all veterans that their service is greatly valued, and all veteran families that their sacrifice is especially acknowledged, and that if needed, support is available.

Chair, the Department is focused on continuing to deliver the outcomes of the 2021-22 Budget and supporting veterans and their families. Last week was our annual Veterans Health week, and I would be pleased to outline how the Department supported National, Regional and Local initiatives to promote the wellbeing of veterans and their families.

As I mentioned at our last appearance, I acknowledge the backlog of claims and the impact this is having on the veteran community. Removing the claims backlog is a key priority for the Minister and the Department. I am happy to answer questions on the strategies and initiatives we are implementing, including the allocation of the additional resources provided for in the Budget to address the increased workload of claims.

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 COVID situation across the Nation, and most notably in Victoria, NSW and here in the ACT.

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, particularly in Victoria and NSW.

Chair, I welcome any questions from Committee members.

Thank you.

ENDS