

## **CDF Opening Statement to Senate Estimates (05 June 2024)**

Thank you, Secretary, for your kind words.

Good morning Chair and Senators,

### **D-Day**

Tomorrow marks the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the D-Day landings. On that day, with the eyes of the world upon them, Allied forces landed more than 160,000 personnel by air and sea.

Thousands of Australians would serve during the liberation of Europe, with approximately 3,200 Australians participating in the D-Day landings on 6 June 1944.<sup>[1]</sup>

Alongside our partners – the United States, United Kingdom, France, Canada, New Zealand, and many others – our troops fought courageously, devoted to duty and skilled in battle.

Tomorrow's anniversary is a stark reminder of the tragedy of war, and why we so diligently seek peace and stability.

So that I could be here with you, Lieutenant General John Frewen, Chief of Joint Capabilities, is representing the ADF at the D-Day commemoration in France.

### **Royal Commission**

In March, senior Defence leaders provided evidence to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide in the 12<sup>th</sup>, and final, public hearing.

We acknowledged we have let some of our personnel down, and we're committed to doing better. Deliberate and sustained efforts are already underway to promote a more positive, inclusive, and psycho-socially safer workplace.

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<sup>[1]</sup> [D-Day 75th Anniversary | Australian War Memorial \(awm.gov.au\)](https://awm.gov.au)

The Royal Commission will release its final report on 9 September 2024, and the Defence Taskforce, which continues to support the Royal Commission in the final stages of their Inquiry, will pivot to support the Government's response to the Final Report and to implement agreed recommendations with the urgency the community rightly expects.

Again, I want to thank Defence personnel, veterans, and their families for their courage in sharing their experiences. I sincerely appreciate these efforts, and acknowledge the Inquiry has been a difficult time for many in the Defence community.

## **Retention and Recruitment**

Recruiting and retention continues to be a priority for Defence.

Separation rates have returned to the long-term average of 9.7 per cent, but the inflow rate remains below the required level.

Reducing the separation rate has enabled the ADF to retain experienced personnel, particularly in our middle ranks, but it can't make up for the shortfall coming into the ADF.

As at 1 May 2024, our total workforce is 58,284 people: 7.1 per cent, or around 4,400 people, below its authorised strength.

Inflow across all avenues into the permanent ADF is at 66 per cent of the target for the financial year to date. This includes lateral international transfers and part time personnel undertaking a period of full time service. Defence Force Recruiting is forecast to deliver 57 per cent of the full-time ab-initio target this financial year.

Australians are interested in joining the ADF: there are currently 30,000 applications in the recruiting pipeline at various stages of processing, but one of our primary challenges, which is relatively unique as an employer, is the medical and psychological screening required.

We are working closely with our recruiting partner to build this capacity quickly, and Defence has undertaken a review of medical entry standards to change outdated policies. As of May 2024, fourteen conditions that restricted entry into the ADF based on a diagnosis rather than a functional assessment have been changed.

Another initiative to assist in widening the aperture for enlistment is the introduction of the Basic Skills Builder tool. The tool has now been approved as an Alternative Education Entry Pathway to broaden the eligibility criteria for candidates applying to the ADF who would normally not be eligible due to education variables, such as not having an education certificate or not completing years ten or twelve.

As the Government announced yesterday, some permanent residents who have been living in Australia for 12 months will be eligible to join the ADF from next month. From July 2024, this will apply to New Zealanders, before expanding to the United Kingdom, United States and Canada in January 2025.

Permanent residents will need to be able to attain Australian citizenship, meet the same entry standards and security requirements as all applicants, and not have served in a foreign military in the preceding two years.

Defence is also streamlining the existing Overseas Lateral Recruitment Scheme, which allows the ADF to fill capability shortfalls by recruiting from partner defence forces.

As I've previously highlighted, recruiting performance is highly correlated with unemployment. Defence is seeking to expand our recruiting initiatives so as to de-link our inflow performance from national employment conditions.

We have indicators to suggest that substantially better recruiting outcomes will start to become apparent by December 2024 as our effort to widen the aperture, accelerate the flow, and increase the volume being processed all come into play at much enhanced levels of effectiveness.

## **Current Operations**

Turning to operations, the ADF continues to contribute to the whole-of-government effort to protect Australia's borders and offshore maritime interests. We have committed maritime, land, and air assets as a matter of priority.

To our south, the ADF recently air dropped supplies to Mawson Research Station. Fifteen tonnes of cargo, including food, logistics,

infrastructure, and scientific equipment will assist the Australian Antarctic Programme throughout the winter.

In northern Australia, the Marine Rotational Force-Darwin (MRF-D) has recently rotated back for the dry season. A contingent of up to 2,500 United States Marines will train alongside the Australian Defence Force and our regional partners. This rotation marks the 13<sup>th</sup> since the first in 2012, and underscores the strength of our Alliance.

In our immediate region, ADF personnel have supported the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force to provide security during the Solomon Islands' elections in April. As the Deputy Prime Minister highlighted in his recent visit to newly-elected Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele, Australia is keen to work closely with the Solomon Islands on common security challenges.

More recently, RAAF aircraft have delivered humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to Papua New Guinea following the landslide in Enga Province on 24 May. DFAT is working closely with the PNG government to coordinate our whole-of-government support at this critical time.

And since 21 May, Defence has transported 450 people from New Caledonia to Australia due to civil unrest.

We continue to deepen our engagement with partners in the region. In April, the ADF conducted a maritime cooperative activity alongside the Philippines, United States, and Japan. Activities such as this reinforces our commitment, alongside our partners, to promote and strengthen regional cooperation and support a safe, secure, and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

We acknowledge we're facing a more challenging international environment, and recognise the importance of cooperating and collaborating with partners to minimise the risk of misunderstanding or miscalculation.

Disappointingly, one of our helicopters did experience an unsafe and unprofessional incident at sea while participating on Operation ARGOS – our commitment to the international effort to enforce United Nations Security Council sanctions on North Korea.

Further afield, since February the ADF has provided non-operational support to coalition forces defending commercial shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden from Houthi attacks.

In Europe, Defence has an ongoing contribution as part of the Government's support to Ukraine. To date, Australia has provided more than \$880 million in military assistance and over \$1 billion in overall assistance to Ukraine – recently including counter-drone systems, de-mining and explosive ordnance disposal equipment, body armour, medical supplies, and combat rations.

We'll continue to provide support tailored to Ukraine's needs and complementing our partners' contributions.

Under Operation KUDU Australia has also provided assistance through the United Kingdom's multinational training mission since January 2023. More than 30,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been trained with support from ongoing rotations of ADF personnel in the United Kingdom.

More generally, the ADF is continuously operating, both near and far, with our partners across the world, to defend Australia and its national interests.

## **Close**

This will be my last Senate Estimates, and I continue to appreciate the value of these hearings in preserving our vibrant democracy.

Vice Admiral Johnston will shortly return from leave. He has most ably served as my deputy over the last six years, and I wish him all the best as the next Chief of the Defence Force.

Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to say what a privilege it has been to serve in and lead the ADF. While it's been challenging at times, I'm very proud of the Australian Defence Force, and more generally the whole Defence Enterprise, and the great people who volunteer to serve our nation.

Thank you.