

CDF Statement to Senate Estimates

06 November 2024

Good morning Chair and Senators,

Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention continues to be a critical priority. Our people are, and will always be, our most important capability, and I am committed to investing in our people by giving them the tools, training, and support services they need to be successful during and after their career in the ADF.

As at 01 October 2024, our total ADF workforce was **58,699 people**.

Recruitment across the last three years has been low. This financial year across all avenues into the permanent ADF inflow is sitting at 66 per cent of the target.

Defence has made a considerable effort over several years now to improve the recruiting process, including increasing the potential field of candidates, accelerating the application process, and increasing the volume of applications being assessed. We have positive indicators to suggest that better recruiting outcomes will start to become apparent by the end of 2024, and separation rates have now stabilised at the long-term average [9.4 per cent].

Yesterday, the Deputy Prime Minister announced the Defence Workforce Plan. It outlines how Defence will increase recruitment rates; better support personnel, families, and transitioning members; improve health services, including mental health and wellbeing; manage the integrated workforce; and collaborate with industry.

Additionally, Defence has extended the continuation bonus for eligible permanent members – who may receive \$40,000 for ongoing service.

OFFICIAL

This is alongside multiple initiatives already underway across Defence, including the Rent Allowance trial to improve housing flexibility and certainty, ADF Leave Reform as part of the ADF Modernisation Program, and the Suicide Prevention Program, which will promote wellbeing, improve mental health awareness, and support people seeking help.

Collectively, these initiatives contribute to the ADF offering an appealing, inclusive, and rewarding career.

Royal Commission

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide has brought into focus what we need to address and the impact these issues have had for serving and former serving personnel, their families, and the broader Defence community.

The Final Report marked the culmination of the most significant and comprehensive inquiry conducted into suicide and suicidality in the Defence and veteran communities. Over the course of the Royal Commission's three year inquiry, Defence provided over 192,000 documents (totalling more than 3.2 million pages), 135 official Defence witnesses, over 4,200 written responses to questions, and facilitated 27 base visits.

While the Royal Commission was underway, Defence progressed a number of significant reforms to better support the health and wellbeing of our people.

We have implemented all recommendations of the Royal Commission's Interim Report, released the Defence Culture Blueprint, and improved the way we train and select our leaders to bolster their individual accountabilities for performance and culture within their command.

We have enhanced our suicide prevention program, continued to refine the transition process, and updated our complaints and military justice frameworks to ensure they better support all parties.

The establishment of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Branch and the appointment of the first Chief of Personnel were central to these reforms,

OFFICIAL

and we are working with the Australian Human Rights Commission to continue to assist us reform culture in targeted areas.

Importantly, we have acknowledged more needs to be done. Defence will continue significant reforms as we implement Government's agreed recommendations from the Final Report. The lessons from the Royal Commission will directly shape how we continue to improve our culture and support our people.

I acknowledge the enormous contributions that were made across Defence and the broader Defence and veteran community, and extend my gratitude to all those who participated in the Royal Commission – particularly those who courageously shared their lived experience. I and Defence leaders are committed to improving the lived experience of our workforce.

Operations and Activity

Regional

Finally, turning to our operations, Defence continues to contribute meaningfully to regional security and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

HMAS *Sydney* successfully fired the Naval Strike Missile during Exercise RIMPAC in July and the Standard Missile 6 during Exercise Pacific Dragon in August. These first-of-class firings are significant milestones towards achieving the Government's direction in the *National Defence Strategy*, and a notable example of Defence collaborating with industry and international partners.

In August, Defence commenced Indo-Pacific Endeavour. As our flagship regional engagement activity, the ADF will visit 14 countries in South-East Asia and the North-East Indian Ocean for military exercises, training, and cultural activities.

In October, approximately 400 ADF personnel deployed to Exercise BERSAMA LIMA alongside our Five Power Defence Arrangements counterparts from Singapore, Malaysia, New Zealand, and the United

OFFICIAL

Kingdom. The exercise marks the ADF's first deployment of Royal Australian Air Force F-35A Lightning II as part of an FPDA exercise.

HMAS *Choules* and ADV *Reliant* both recently supported Samoa host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting – the first time a Pacific island country has hosted the event.

And the ADF and Indonesian National Armed Forces began Exercise KERIS WOOMERA on the weekend. This is the biggest bilateral exercise between our two countries, with over 2,000 participating personnel and featuring land, air, sea, and cyber components.

Middle East

Turning to the conflict in the Middle East over the last year, Defence has assisted Australian nationals evacuate from Israel and Lebanon and is continuing to support the United States-led coalition defend international shipping from Houthi attacks in the Red Sea.

This is alongside Defence's longstanding contributions to United Nations peacekeeping operations based in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria; as well as our ongoing engagement with the Combined Maritime Forces coalition based in Bahrain to counter regional maritime piracy and terrorism.

The safety of our people is a priority for me, and I can confirm all ADF personnel assigned to the region are safe with ongoing attention provide to their protection.

[Pause].

The ADF's deployments, near and far, demonstrate our ongoing and resolute commitment to international security and stability in order to protect Australia and advance our national interest.

Finally, I'd like to thank our members and their families for their ongoing service each and everyday.

Thank you.

OFFICIAL