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Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Australian Veterans' Recognition (Putting Veterans and their Families First) Bill 2019

In making this submission I am drawing my experience as a career army officer, a business consultant and leader of a national ex-service organization. I was National President of the Defence Force Welfare Association (2007-2017) as well as Convener and Spokesman for the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations (ADSO) from its formation in 2010 until stepping down in 2017.

In considering this Act the Parliament of Australia is taking an important step towards formally acknowledging the unique nature of military service and the sacrifices demanded of those who commit to defend our nation as members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). Individuals serving in the ADF forfeit their human rights as defined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which Australia is a signatory. ADF personnel can also be ordered into situations which are potentially lethal and as well be lawfully ordered to apply lethal force on other human beings. To refuse such orders can constitute a criminal offence. In no other occupation does such a situation apply. To say personnel training for and being deployed into operational areas are adversely impacted is an understatement. Equally it is a fact that the vast majority of ADF personnel are resilient enough to cope with the aftermath of their service and go on to live healthy and productive lives in the general community. However in saying that, their experiences can never be fully erased from their memories.

In all this the families of our ADF members whose support is crucial also pay a price. The effect on them of ADF members dealing with the impacts of operational service, and impacts of compulsory mobility which is so much part of life in the ADF are born in large part by partners and children who very often cope with the disruption of moving to new locations where they

have to re-establish themselves with new schools, child care arrangement and health support etc. The Act recognizes this to an extent but would benefit with the inclusion of an additional sub clause in **Part 2—Recognition of veterans and their families; 5 General recognition** which states that;

(7) The Government is committed to ensure no veteran or veteran family will suffer disadvantage as a result of ADF service.

Such a clause would give more substance to the words of the Minister, *“the bill also provides for acknowledgement of the demands and challenges that a veteran or their family may experience during and after military service. For these sacrifices, we acknowledge that additional support may be required and where support is required it will be provided in a way that is appropriate and sensitive to their individual circumstances and in a way that elevates their self-esteem.”*

This Act and the Veterans' Covenant it incorporates is potentially a trigger for other tiers of government and the general and business community to understand and highlight the qualities imbued in our service personnel which are of immense value to the Nation. These qualities of dedication to the task, sense of team, concern for mates, the pursuit of excellence and persistence will enhance any entity serving and former ADF members participate in.

Quite apart from the practical benefits that will flow from this piece of legislation, the symbolism of the Act cannot be overstated. It is an expression of appreciation that will help our veterans, current serving members and their families walk just a little taller.

This year marks the 100th Anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles that ended the state of war between Germany and the Allied Powers in World War I. This enactment of this legislation is an appropriate way to conclude the “Centenary of ANZAC” events and leave a lasting legacy from these commemorations.

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