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**Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention Bill 2020 and the
National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention (Consequential
Amendments) Bill 2020
Answers to questions on notice from the Veterans' Affairs portfolio**

Question 1

Outcome: All Program: All

Topic: Agencies assisting in the development of policy options - National Commissioner
(Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Hansard Proof , p57)

Senator Kimberley Kitching asked:

Ms Cosson: Leading into the Christmas period, Defence, DVA and some other agencies looked at a range of different policy options and we presented those to government. Certainly, with the Attorney-General's being announced as the lead, responsible for developing the office of the national commissioner and also the legislation, as part of the normal government process of consultation, we have been involved throughout that process.

Senator KITCHING: What other departments or agencies were involved?

Ms Cosson: Defence, the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Attorney-General's, probably Prime Minister and Cabinet, and Finance. There would have been a range. I'm sorry, I don't have them all, off the top of my head.

Senator KITCHING: If you could take that on notice and give a complete list, that would be helpful.

Answer

The Departments of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Defence, and Veterans' Affairs, with input from other relevant agencies, developed initial policy options for consideration by the Government. Various options were later considered by Cabinet prior to the Prime Minister's announcement of the National Commissioner on 5 February 2020. Documents related to this process are Cabinet-in-confidence.

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Question 2

Outcome: All Program: All

Topic: Updates on Inquiries and Reviews

(Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Hansard Proof , p.57)

Senator Kimberley Kitching asked:

Senator KITCHING: If you could take that on notice and give a complete list, that would be helpful. How many recommendations of the report of the previous Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee inquiry, The constant battle: suicide by veterans, have been implemented?

Ms Cosson: In regard to The constant battle recommendations, we provide a regular update on our website, which gives feedback on each of the recommendations and the status of the implementation of those recommendations. I believe The constant battle had 19 recommendations, and 15 have been implemented. If you like, I can make sure that the committee has access to the links to the reports, because there was not only The constant battle; there was also the joint inquiry into Jesse Bird's suicide, for which we have an independent review on the status of implementation of those recommendations. That's also on our website. Similarly, there was an ANAO report into the operations of the department, for which we've given an update on all those recommendations. I'm happy to provide the links to the committee.

Senator KITCHING: Thank you.

Answer

In relation to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee inquiry, *The Constant Battle: Suicide by Veterans* (The Constant Battle), the implementation of 22 of the 24 recommendations have been assessed as complete or substantially complete. Work on the remaining two recommendations is ongoing and relates to the continuing implementation of veteran centric reform. A detailed report on progress on these recommendations, as at 31 January 2020, is publicly available on the DVA website at: <https://www.dva.gov.au/about-us/overview/reporting/reviews-and-reports/constant-battle>.

The implementation of 15 of the 19 recommendations of the Joint Inquiry into the facts surrounding the management of Mr Jesse Bird's case (the Joint Inquiry) have been assessed as complete or substantially complete. The remaining four recommendations relate to longer term projects and initiatives, with three assessed as partially complete and one in progress. A detailed report on progress on these recommendations, as at 31 May 2020, is publicly available on the DVA website at: <https://www.dva.gov.au/about-us/overview/reporting/reviews-and-reports/jesse-bird-reviews-and-reports>.

DVA has completed the implementation of 5 of the 6 recommendations of the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) performance audit of the efficiency of veterans service delivery by DVA. The remaining recommendation is in progress and expected to be complete in June 2021. A

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detailed report on progress on these recommendations, as at 31 July 2020, is publicly available on the DVA website at: <https://www.dva.gov.au/about-us/overview/reporting/reviews-and-reports/efficiency-veterans-service-delivery-department>.

DVA publishes reports on the progress of the implementation of recommendations of recent reviews and inquiries at: <https://www.dva.gov.au/about-us/overview/reporting/reviews-and-reports/government-reports>. Ongoing monitoring and reporting of progress in implementing key reviews continues.

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Question 3

Outcome: All Program: All

Topic: Costing of a Royal Commission

(Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Hansard Proof , p.59-60)

Senator Kimberley Kitching asked:

Senator LAMBIE: I have just one last question. Can I clarify an answer that the Attorney-General's Department gave to Senator Kitching before: are you saying that the government never asked for a costing of a royal commission on veteran and Defence suicides before developing this bill?

Mr Anderson: That's not what I said to Senator Kitching. What I said was that the Attorney-General's Department was given responsibility for developing this when the government made the decision to go down the path of the national commissioner, so the costing that we developed, in conjunction with the Department of Finance, was the costing for the national commissioner.

Senator LAMBIE: So you did not cost a royal commission. That's what I'm asking.

Mr Anderson: We weren't asked to cost a royal commission, because we were asked to cost the national commissioner. That was the model that we were asked to implement.

Senator LAMBIE: Thank you. I have no further questions.

Senator KITCHING: Just to clarify that: is Defence, DVA or A-GD's aware of whether Finance costed it?

CHAIR: I invite them to take that on notice.

Senator KITCHING: Thank you.

CHAIR: Does anybody have an immediate answer? No? Alright. Take that on notice.

Answer

Any costings would constitute documents relating to Cabinet processes, and as such would be Cabinet-in-confidence.

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Question 4

Outcome: All Program: All

Topic: PMO Consultation - National Commissioner
(Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Hansard Proof , p.60)

Senator Kimberley Kitching asked:

Senator KITCHING: In relation to my question previously on whether the CDF's office or the Prime Minister's office was consulted, I think we got a response back about the CDF but not about the PMO. I'm just wondering if there was consultation with the PMO. I'm happy for that to be taken on notice as well.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Answer

The Departments of Defence and Veterans' Affairs do not consult directly with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

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Question 5

Outcome: All Program: All
Topic: National Commissioner
(Written Question on Notice)

Senator Kimberley Kitching asked:

Can the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) and Defence advise why the Government decided to establish a permanent National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention, rather than an independent Royal Commission into veteran suicide? What was the policy rationale for this?

Can the departments advise the origins of the idea for the National Commissioner? Can they advise if there was any consultation with the Prime Minister's Office and the Chief of the Defence Force?

Were any costings for a Royal Commission undertaken within government?

Answer

The National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention and related options were considered by Cabinet. Documents related to this process are Cabinet-in-confidence.

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Question 6

Outcome: All Program: All

Topic: National Commissioner Consultation

(Written Question on Notice)

Senator Kimberley Kitching asked:

What input or consultation have DVA and Defence had to the National Commissioner since it was announced and established in the Attorney-General's Department, including as part of the review of past suicides?

Answer

The Departments of Defence and Veterans' Affairs have participated in the consultation processes established by the Attorney-General's Department's National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention Taskforce. Consultations have related to topics such as the draft National Commissioner Bills, as is standard process in legislative development, the draft Terms of Reference for the Independent Review of Past Defence and Veteran Suicides, and preparatory work on provision of data to support the Independent Review.