



Australian Commando Association Submission in response to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee request for veteran input into the AUSTRALIAN VETERANS COVENANT BILL 2019

*'The Government will continue to support those who selflessly serve our nation and protect our interests overseas, and their families, when they come home.'*¹

ACA is pleased to respond to the FADT Committee on the Australian Veterans Covenant Bill 2019. The ACA commends all concerned with the development and intent of this historic and much needed legislation.

The only point the ACA has issue with is the definition of 'veteran' as it currently only applies to members of the ADF as defined in the Defence Act 1903. (Part 1, paragraph 4)

Since WW2, the world has witnessed a shift from the traditional Two- dimensional form of warfare to a more complex form of warfighting, such as Hybrid and Total Warfare. Australia has had to and did respond to this complex form of international threat to peace and stability and deployed personnel other than ADF to UN Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, Humanitarian, and Regional Security Missions. Unfortunately, these deserving categories of 'veterans' have been left out of the Covenant.

It is respectfully submitted that in order to redress this anomaly and make the Bill 'inclusive' rather than 'exclusive' there ought to be inserted within the draft bill a footnote at Part 1, paragraph 4, indicating that the Minister for Defence may make a determination so that 'other persons as defined by the Minister for the purposes of this covenant' are also included in the definition of 'veterans'.

To identify who these 'veterans' are - the Pearce Report of 2008 identified the UN Missions that Australia has participated in and DFAT have lists of the humanitarian mission personnel who have served in Humanitarian Overseas Missions in the Australian National Interest.

¹ <https://www.budget.gov.au/2018-19/content/essentials.html>

Dr Brendan Nelson AO included such classes of persons described above in his speech at the AWM on the 1 November 2018 announcing the half-billion dollar refurbishment project of the AWM displays. (statement quoted below).

“For 77 years, the Australian War Memorial has stood at the base of Mount Ainslie. Located in line of sight of Parliament House, the Memorial reminds the nation of the cost of war, of service and the price of freedom. Although in a context of war, the Australian War Memorial is instead **a place that reveals our character as a people, our soul. It tells the stories of love and friendship, selflessness, courage and endurance.**

Within its galleries, the Memorial tells the stories of those who serve in Australia's military forces **and those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in war, warlike operations, peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.**

Just a fraction of the collection is on display. In crowded galleries the stories of Australian military service from the Boer War through to the First and Second World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam are all largely told. **Yet, the service of 70,000 young Australians in the Middle East Area of operations of the past two decades currently covers only 2 per cent of available space.**

The opportunity, and the responsibility our nation now has, is to proudly tell the stories of what has been done in recent years in **Afghanistan, Iraq, the Solomon Islands, and East Timor, and in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.** We must tell these stories not years or decades after they have occurred, but now. It is also the stories of families who love and support them.”

Dr Brendan Nelson, AWM, 1 November 2018.

The construction and dedication of the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial on ANZAC Parade in Canberra was widely applauded and I believe the Australian people have an expectation that this class of Australian veterans be recognised in this legislation.

RECOMMENDATION

The definition of ‘veteran’ at Part 1, paragraph 4, carry a footnote permitting the Minister for Defence to designate other classes of persons as ‘veterans’ who have ‘Defended the Nation’ through their overseas service, in Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, Security operations and Humanitarian Missions, in the Australian National Interest.

Jack Thurgar SC MBE OAM RFD
National Secretary

Australian Commando Association

19 Feb. 19