

# JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE & TRADE

MEDIA STATEMENT FROM THE CHAIRMAN  
SENATOR ALAN FERGUSON

## NEW EVIDENCE ON AFGHAN 'WEDDING PARTY' INCIDENT

A first hand briefing from Australian Special Air Services forces in Afghanistan has thrown new light on the alleged 'Wedding Party' incident, which, in May this year, was reported as an engagement where Australian troops had inadvertently fired upon an Afghan tribal wedding.

I tabled a report in Parliament earlier today which reveals that an SAS Squadron Commander briefed the Joint Standing Committee on the circumstances of the incident during the Committee's recent visit to Afghanistan. The Squadron Commander reported that:

... the engagement involved hostile enemy forces, not a wedding party. He provided photographs and first accounts to support his description of the event, which involved an Australian patrol being fired upon by an aggressive, heavily armed force employing a range of weapons, including heavy machine guns. The restraint, professionalism and response of the Australians involved was, by all account, remarkable in the circumstances and the incident is now used as a 'best practice' example for all Coalition forces deployed to Afghanistan (page 49 of the report).

The report canvasses many other aspects of the Committee's visit, which involved meeting the Australian forces deployed in Kuwait, the Persian Gulf and Kyrgyzstan, as well as in Afghanistan. It was a remarkable opportunity to meet with the many Australians at the front line of the War Against Terrorism; to better understand the nature of the operations in which they are engaged; and to appreciate the circumstances and environments in which they are operating.

We were extremely impressed by the outstanding professionalism being displayed by our service men and women - they are performing with great distinction and have earned the respect and admiration of the international forces with whom they are working.

We were grateful also for the opportunity to demonstrate Parliament's strong bipartisan support, and the support of an overwhelming majority of Australians, for the Defence personnel deployed on these operations.

A copy of the Committee's report is available from the Secretariat or on our web site at: [www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt/reports.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt/reports.htm)

Canberra  
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