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THE SENATE

MEDIA RELEASE

Today, the chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Senator Mark Bishop, launched the committee's report on Australia's involvement in peacekeeping.

The inquiry focused on the challenges faced by Australia's peacekeepers as a result of the increasingly complex and multidimensional nature of peacekeeping.

'Despite these dramatic changes and Australia's increased commitment to peacekeeping operations, there is no one policy document that presents a whole-of-government approach to peacekeeping', Senator Bishop said. He announced that the committee has recommended the government produce a white paper on peacekeeping.

While the committee acknowledged the government's establishment of an Asia-Pacific Centre for Civil–Military Cooperation, Senator Bishop advised that the committee recommended expanding the centre's mandate. The committee recommended that 'a task force be established to conduct a scoping study to ensure that the centre becomes a regional centre of excellence and a vital part of a web of similar institutes throughout the world'.

Senator Bishop noted the committee's finding that the ADF and the AFP have not always been able to operate smoothly in the field due to a lack of familiarity and differences in work culture, and stressed the need to develop effective interoperability and whole-of-government programs for training and preparedness.

In considering the health, safety and wellbeing of Australian peacekeepers, Senator Bishop identified a number of concerns related to the accessibility of data on the health of Australian peacekeepers; and inadequacies in the ADF's health records management and post-deployment care of peacekeepers with mental health problems.

The committee made a number of other recommendations that seek to improve Australia's contribution to future peacekeeping operations. These include committing only to missions with stated objectives and a clear exit strategy; better coordination between the government and NGO sector; developing closer partnerships with host countries through language and cultural awareness; converting lessons from operations into policy or practice; and promoting UN and regional cooperation.

In concluding, Senator Bishop noted that the conduct of the inquiry coincided with the 60th anniversary of Australia's commitment to peacekeeping operations and acknowledged all military, policing and civilian personnel who have contributed to the history of Australia's peacekeeping.

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