



ADSO ALLIANCE OF DEFENCE SERVICE ORGANISATIONS

**PO Box 4166
KINGSTON ACT 2604**

25 November 2019

The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister of Australia
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

On behalf of the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations (ADSO)¹ that numbers 18 National ex-service Associations with a combined membership base of over 90,000 members, I am writing to inform you that the Alliance does not support a Royal Commission into veteran suicide and would strongly encourage you to not agree to such a narrow inquiry when suicides has become such a national tragedy. There is little doubt that the cost of a judicial inquiry would be immense. If funds are to be expended, they would serve best if directed towards the urgent delivery of programs to assist those veterans that are vulnerable and most at risk now, rather than deferring action until the results of a Royal Commission are made public.

Having personally attended The Daily Telegraph's 'Save Our Heroes Summit' on Wednesday 6 November 2019, you will have undoubtedly experienced firsthand the pressures bearing down on you and your Cabinet colleagues to accede to a Royal Commission into veterans' suicides. High ongoing media attention will have unquestionably added to those pressures.

Not surprisingly, the veterans' community is being pressured to not only support such a judicial inquiry but to lobby strongly and campaign for you to authorise one. Many veterans and some veteran representative bodies do support such a Royal Commission. Their intentions are well meaning. But such support is not universal.

After all, there have already been a series of varying inquiries into veterans' suicides over the last few years, not the least of which included a Senate FADT Committee Inquiry "*The Constant Battle: Suicide by Veterans*" that concluded with a report in 2017. Of the 24 recommendations therein, the Government agreed to 22 outright and to two in principle. While work is known to be in progress to implement them, every priority should be applied to making sure all elements of the recommendations are addressed comprehensively and advised to the veteran community promptly.

In this context, ADSO is conscious that unanimous agreement exists for a new Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and a National Action Plan on veterans' mental health and wellbeing, including suicide prevention. These initiatives evolved from the Senate Inquiry, the comprehensive report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare into Veteran Suicide (2002 to 2016), and from the 2016 National Mental Health Commission's inquire into suicide prevention services for current and former members of the ADF.

¹ ADSO comprises The Defence Force Welfare Association (DFWA), Naval Association of Australia (NAA), RAAF Association (RAAFA), Royal Australian Regiment Corporation (RARC), Australian Special Air Service Association (ASASA), Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (VVAA), the Australian Federation of Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Ex-Service Men and Women, the Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia, Partners of Veterans Association of Australia, Royal Australian Armoured Corps Corporation (RAACC), the National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association Australia (NMBVAA), Defence Reserves Association (DRA), Australian Gulf War Veterans Association, Australian Commando Association, the War Widows Guild of Australia, Military Police Association Australia (MPAA), the Australian Army Apprentices Association, the Women Veterans Network, and the Combat Support Association.

The Commission found that suicide is a complex issue requiring a multi-faceted service response to ensure veterans have access to the support they need at the right time.

The above does not deny that a suicide among veterans' is not a national tragedy and heartbreak for family and friends alike. This particularly is felt among the various ex-service organisations that are often called upon to answer the question as to, 'Why'?

But it must be acknowledged that suicides are equally a tragedy within the general community. That being the case, ADSO proffers that suicide must be addressed as a national issue, not one that is exclusive to the veterans' community only. If a suicide Royal Commission is to mean anything, such an inquiry must be all encompassing and examine the tragedies within the broad Australian community.

As to an exclusive Veterans' Royal Commission, ADSO cannot support yet another inquiry that is likely to merely rake over old ground already covered numerous times at great cost by other inquiries. A Royal Commission will cause great disruption to the work of DVA and Defence which are already making considerable progress in implementing reforms and fixing the issues and concerns surrounding the health and wellbeing of their respective constituencies. Suicide prevention is high on their list of priorities.

Finally, an exclusive veterans-only Royal Commission will undoubtedly add a further burden to families and those individuals who, for a variety of reasons, suffered because of their service. The additional cost of extra studies and the time spent will further divert the nation's focus from confronting a national tragedy.

Calls for a Royal Commission into the suicide rate and its causes among members and former members of the ADF, while well meaning, are not supported.

Yours faithfully,



Kel Ryan
National Spokesman
Alliance of Defence Service Organisation

Phone: (02) 6265 9530 | Mobile: 0418 759 120
PO Box 4166 KINGSTON ACT 2604

CC Hon Darren Chester MP – Minister for Veterans Affairs
Ms Liz Cosson – Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs