

ADSO ALLIANCE OF DEFENCE SERVICE ORGANISATIONS



PRE-ELECTION POLICY SUBMISSION 2025 -2028

INTRODUCTION

[ADSO](#) is a non-partisan alliance of defence service organisations across all Australian military services and Branches of Defence. It was formed as a peak national advocacy body for our Defence Family (DF) to protect their wellbeing and service entitlements by providing a united voice to governments and the Australian people.

The Family comprises both current (Regular and Reserve Forces) and past serving persons, their immediate dependent family and their broader kin: estimated at five million Australians resident in all Federal electorates.

More about ADSO can be found on our [website](#)

REQUEST

Our Submission seeks to establish the policy position of each political party, independent MPs and senators and House of Representatives and Senate candidates on the key issues affecting our Defence Family. The veteran's policy questions below are drawn from our [Veterans Policy Platform](#).

Please circle your YES/NO response to each question below with any additional comments and return it electronically as soon as possible to:

ADSO National Secretary
Lt Col E.A. Chitham MC OAM (rtd)
ted.chitham@adso.org.au
0418733887

Your responses will be released to our Defence Family and made public prior to the Federal Election.

QUESTIONS

A Veterans Advocacy Peak Body

Question 1: Will you agree to fund the establishment of an independent of government National Veterans Advocacy Peak Body to represent veterans' issues direct to Government within the first year of forming government? YES/NO

Explanation: At the recent [ESO National Forums \(2022-2023\)](#), facilitated by RSL National, it was agreed that a national veterans advocacy peak body, independent of government, was required. The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (RCDVS) Report (9 September 2024) Recommendation 89 said: *'The Australian Government, in consultation with ex-service organisations (ESOs), should establish a national peak body for ESOs following a co-design process. The role, functions, membership, governance and funding model of the peak body should be informed by the outcomes of the business case and agreed between the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the ESO sector'*.

This recommendation does not accord with the RSL National ESO Forum's decision submitted to Royal Commission for a veterans owned national advocacy peak body independent of Government.

Improved Governance of Veterans Matters

Question 2. Will you ensure that the veterans minister is a permanent Cabinet member? YES/NO

Explanation: Decisions to deploy to war/armed conflict and commit veterans to the fighting are made by Prime Minister and Cabinet at the highest level. Caring for veterans and their families after the deployment, should not be relegated to a junior portfolio outside of Cabinet.

Question 3. Will you guarantee that as a senior national ESO advocate to governments, ADSO is represented as a member of any Ministerial or higher consultative body? YES/NO

Explanation: As a senior ESO any advice to government not including ADSO input will be diminished.

Question 4. Will you agree to increase in the Grants-in-Aid presently provided to around 15 invited ESO's from \$10,000 to \$30,000 p.a. and that the grant be indexed annually? YES/NO

Explanation: Government wants key ESO's to provide well consulted high quality advice from veterans to government and wants ESO's to get the governments message out. Resources to allow ESO's to administer their affairs and to communicate with government and veterans have not been increased for 20 years. Properly funding ESO's supports government's communications objectives leaving philanthropy and ESO fundraising for veteran's needs.

Question 5. Will you implement the RCDVS recommendations in respect to veterans and their families as stated in RCDVS Recommendations? YES/NO

- Chapter 12: Role and functions of the Inspector-General of the ADF
- Chapter 17: ADF and DVA suicide prevention programs and initiatives
- Chapter 18: Health care for ex-serving member
- Chapter 23: Transition from military to civilian life
- Chapter 24: Empowering veterans to Thrive **except Recommendation 89**
- Chapter 26: Supporting DVA claimants and clients
- Chapter 27: Importance of families
- Chapter 30: Beyond the Royal Commission

Question 6. Will you ensure that at least one Veterans' Representative (Director) on the Commonwealth Superannuation Commission (CSC) Board with essential skill sets is selected and nominated by the veteran community's Peak Body and not exclusively the CDF? YES/NO

Explanation: The CSC Board comprises an independent Chair and eight other directors. The Minister for Finance chooses four directors in consultation with the Minister for Defence. Of the remaining directors, two are nominated by the President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and two are nominated by the Chief of the Defence Force (CDF) both are retired senior Officers. ADSO wants a change to one being nominated by the CDF and the second one a person suitably qualified to be nominated by the Chairperson of the Veterans Peak Advocacy Body.

Fair And Adequate Military Superannuation

Question 7. Will you agree to establish within one year of assuming office an independent of government review of military superannuation? YES/NO

Explanation: Previous reviews are out of date and a range of concerns need to be aired through a revitalised and open process.

Question 8. Will you agree to include in an independent of government review of military superannuation terms of reference which address the following veteran concerns? YES/NO

- **DFRDB.** To have the provisions of the Defence Force Retirement Benefits Fair Indexation Act extended to include all DFRDB, Military Super and ADF Cover payments, including payments paid to under 55-year-old superannuants, invalidity benefit pension recipients, and reversionary benefit payment recipients.

Explanation: This ensures the purchasing power of the veteran's superannuation payments is maintained which was the intent of the original enabling legislation. CPI is a measure of inflation, not purchasing power, and as such, is not an appropriate index to achieve fair indexation

- **MSBS.** The costs, risks and opportunities of having all MSBS members under preservation age and no longer serving but with 'preserved benefits' given the same opportunity provided to all Australians i.e., access to employee superannuation contributions to roll over their full benefit into a compliant superannuation fund of their choice.

Explanation: MSBS preserved benefits' (employer contributions are a 'notional' amount) are indexed to CPI and cannot be accessed until the preservation age (earliest age 55). Fairness demands both fair indexation and that portability be a right for veterans in the same way as normal super funds. Given that CPI is about half the average long-term return of Australian superannuation funds this objective will deliver a significant financial benefit to a member's superannuation amount over time.

- **Life Tables.** Regarding **DFRDB commutation**, the costs, risks and opportunities involved in immediately applying the up-to-date life tables for calculating commutation and fortnightly payments for current and new DFRDB superannuants; and to rectify the financial injustices caused by the application of out-dated life tables to superannuants.

Explanation: The use of 50+ year old life tables is unconscionable and effectively robs DFRDB superannuants of their entitled level of super payments. In addition, there must be rectification of the financial injustices caused by the application of out-dated life tables to superannuants.

- **Indexation.** Regarding **Reversionary Benefits** (for widows, widowers, and dependent children) the costs, risks and opportunities involved in redressing the reduction of all their benefits, i.e., retirement pay, invalidity pay and reversionary pensions for widows, widowers, and dependent children, resulting from the way those benefits were indexed before 1 July 2014, and continue to be indexed for those aged under 55.

The Military Justice System and Legislative Protection for Veterans

Question 9. Will you ensure that Australian Law recognises the perilous exigencies of armed conflict and protects veterans from being unfairly or unreasonably subjected to international law? YES/NO

Explanation: Australian veterans should be dealt with by Australian Courts.

Question 10. Will you require the Office of the Special Investigator (OSI) investigating war crime allegations arising from the war in Afghanistan to complete its work and lay charges within two years of election day or be defunded and wound up? YES/NO

Explanation: At some point the OSI must be required to either lay charges or be wound up. It is not in the national interest for this expensive and damaging process to go on indefinitely without results and closure. For veterans and their families facing investigation, justice delayed is justice denied. Savings can be returned to the budget. Should new evidence arise, the Australian Federal Police can take over matters presently being dealt with by the OSI.

Question 11. Will you consider withdrawing Australia from the International Criminal Court and “The Rome Statute 2002”? YES/NO

Explanation: The Court is not recognised by our key allies and has been discredited by its own decisions. Ministers of the Howard Government who signed Australia up to it have acknowledged it was a mistake.

Question 12. Will you within 1 year of being elected, establish and fund a Judicial Review into improved protocols and processes across government for the handling of future war crime allegations? YES/NO

Explanation: War crime allegations are a regular tool misused by adversaries against opponents in modern war. Australia needs a better protocol for handling such allegations.

Question 13. Will you in government ensure war crime allegations are handled by Ministers and Defence in a way which prioritises due process, the presumption of innocence and which minimises the damage

to veterans and their families arising from, false, untested, misleading, ill-informed, vexatious and/or spurious allegations and which avoids 'trial by media'? YES/NO

Explanation: Trial by accusation in the media circumvents due process and destroys veterans' reputations, lives while denying natural justice

Question 14. Will you within one year of being elected, commission a review into the role and functions of the ADF Inspector-General (IGADF) and approve the RCDVS's 'Chapter 12'? YES/NO

Explanation: The IGADF cannot be a standing Inquisition. Due process and the rules of natural justice should apply to all acts of the IGADF.

Veteran and Families Compensation and Rehabilitation

Question 15. Will you agree to fund within one year of assuming office an independent of government review of veteran compensation, rehabilitation and entitlements? YES/NO

Explanation: A new open process is needed to address veterans' concerns.

Question 16. Will you agree to broad terms of reference for an independent of government review of veteran and veterans' family's compensation, rehabilitation and entitlements which include:

- **The inequitable taxation treatment of Veterans Superannuation Invalidity Benefit Payments?**
- **Inadequacies of Veterans Disability Compensation Payments including the inequitable treatment of offsetting Veterans compensation payments?**
- **Totally and Permanently Incapacitated/Special Rate (TPI/SR) the costs, risks and opportunities linked to having the 'economic loss' component of the Disability Payment benchmarked in perpetuity to the tax adjusted minimum wage?**

Explanation: The disability compensation arrangements for Australia's Totally and Permanently Incapacitated (TPI/SR) veterans have declined significantly in relative terms to that of Average Weekly Earnings. The 'Economic Loss' component of the eroded payment is now at less than 60% of Australia's gross minimum wage.

- **The costs, risks and opportunities of extending entitlement to the Veteran White Card to all Reservists (not just those with one day of full-time service)? YES/NO**

Explanation: The Veteran white card is available to all ADF Reservists who have completed one day of full-time service but not to Reservists who have not undertaken any period of full-time service. This discriminatory policy applied by DVA denies many Reservists, some with years of part time service, access to the provisions of non-liability health care and specifically mental health care and treatment available with a White Card.

Recognition of Service

Question 17. Will you within 1 year of being elected, fund an Independent of government Inquiry with agreed terms of reference (costs, risks and opportunities etc) for recognition of operational deployment for medallic and 'Qualifying Service' to Veterans Deployed on Counter Terrorism and Special Recovery (CT/SR) Operations, Rifle Company Butterworth (RCB) operations (1970-1989) during Malaysia's Counter Insurgency War 1968-1989, and Peace keeping/making operational service? YES/NO

Explanation.

It is time to recognise that the nature of conflict and the demands placed upon veterans by government has changed. Entitlements to Repatriation Benefits (service pensions and health benefits, etc) should not be restricted to operational deployments outside of Australia. A significant number of lives have been lost and injuries inflicted facing identified threats, enemies and dangers on CT/ST, RCB Butterworth and Peacekeeping operations.

Individual veterans and any veteran organisation of the Defence Family have the legislative right to challenge an authority's decision against their claim with the assurance of a fair process and natural justice in accordance with the principles of Administrative Law associated with, [Ministerial Standards](#) and APS Codes of Conduct and Values.

Question 18. Will you within eighteen months of being elected and after receiving the Independent Inquiries findings, consider granting 'Qualifying Service' status to veterans who served in prescribed hazardous operational deployments CT/SR, RCB Butterworth and Peacekeeping operations? YES/NO

Explanation. As above. A review leading to action and decisions is needed, not just another report.

Question 19. Within 1 year of being elected will you, fund an independent of government review of the Defence Honours and Awards System and make changes to fix a broken system? YES/NO

Explanation. The Senate has inquired into this matter. The case for reform is overwhelming.

Question 20. Within six months of being elected will you direct Defence to compile an Afghanistan 'End of War' list of veterans who were eligible for or were recommended for an award or who had their award downgraded, so that their awards can be reconsidered? YES/NO

Explanation. Many veterans who fought in action with comrades in the Afghanistan war are aggrieved that valour has gone unrecognised while the nation has absorbed itself in self-flagellation over yet to be tested war crime allegations.

Question 21. Will you reverse or suspend the current Government's decision in late 2024 to remove awards for Distinguished Service from then junior Special Forces Officers until yet to be tested war crime allegations arising from the Afghanistan war have been dealt with and the truth established, in accordance with due process? YES/NO

Explanation. Punishments should always follow, not precede court findings and should be based on proven facts not untested accusations.

Financial Support to Enable ADSO's Interactions with Government

Question 22. Will you in Government acknowledge the benefits from ADSO's national advocacy of the Defence Family's issues and enable ADSO to consult with veterans, provide high quality policy advice to government and communicate the governments message to veterans by financially supporting its communications operations with a grant of \$300k pa? YES/NO

Explanation: ADSO is a self-funded voluntary organisations of Defence Family member associations which advocates to government for their well-being and protection. ADSO is reliant on the good will and gratuitous support from its volunteer staff and advisors. Advocacy operating costs are increasingly expensive. What resources we can raise through philanthropy we direct to veteran's needs. We believe governments benefit from our on-call non-partisan advocacy relationship and that there are advantages for government in funding ADSO to fulfill its policy advice and communications functions.
