

## STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER

Further to the Government's announcement of 4 February 2020 about the establishment of a National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention, this statement provides further information about the role, activities and powers of the National Commissioner and their office.

The National Commissioner and their office will be established and empowered by stand-alone legislation. That legislation, subject to the concurrence of the Parliament, will specify:

- **The inquisitorial powers of the National Commissioner and their office.** The National Commissioner and their office will be given relevant powers equivalent to a Royal Commission. This will include the ability of the National Commissioner to:
  - undertake broad ranging inquiries relevant to their role and hear from any relevant party (including veterans and their families);
  - conduct public and private hearings; and
  - compel the production of evidence and summons witnesses.
- **The powers of the National Commission and their office equivalent to a contemporary coronial office.** This will include overseeing the investigation of all individual veteran and defence suicides and report their findings and make recommendations.
- **The role, functions and independence of the National Commissioner and their office.** This will include, but not be limited to:
  - conducting an independent inquiry into past veteran and defence suicides since 2001, with the ability to consider older deaths if necessary, in accordance with a terms of reference to be provided by the Prime Minister to the Commissioner, including a formal interim and final reporting date for the publication of findings and recommendations. This inquiry will draw on any preparatory work overseen by an interim Commissioner and, once formally established, will have the ability to hold public and private hearings and receive submissions as independently determined by the Commissioner;
  - inquiring into all future suspected and confirmed veteran and defence suicides;
  - identifying systemic issues, trends and risk factors arising from its inquiries, reviews, research or investigations;
  - the ability to undertake own motion investigations of thematic and/or systemic factors relevant to veteran and defence suicide prevention; including those arising from the review of past suicides;
  - making recommendations to the Government and the Parliament on the root causes and risk factors associated with veteran and defence suicide and actions to help prevent suicide and improve the mental health and wellbeing of defence personnel and veterans;
  - making findings in relation to individual veteran and defence suicides (including those subject to the review and analysis of past suicides); and
  - monitoring the implementation of any recommendations made.

- **Requirement to report to the Parliament.** The National Commissioner will be required to report to the Parliament through an annual Defence and Veteran Suicide Report. The Government will also be required to provide an annual response to Parliament to the Commissioner's Report.

The Government will consult widely on the proposed legislation and will facilitate full Parliamentary scrutiny.