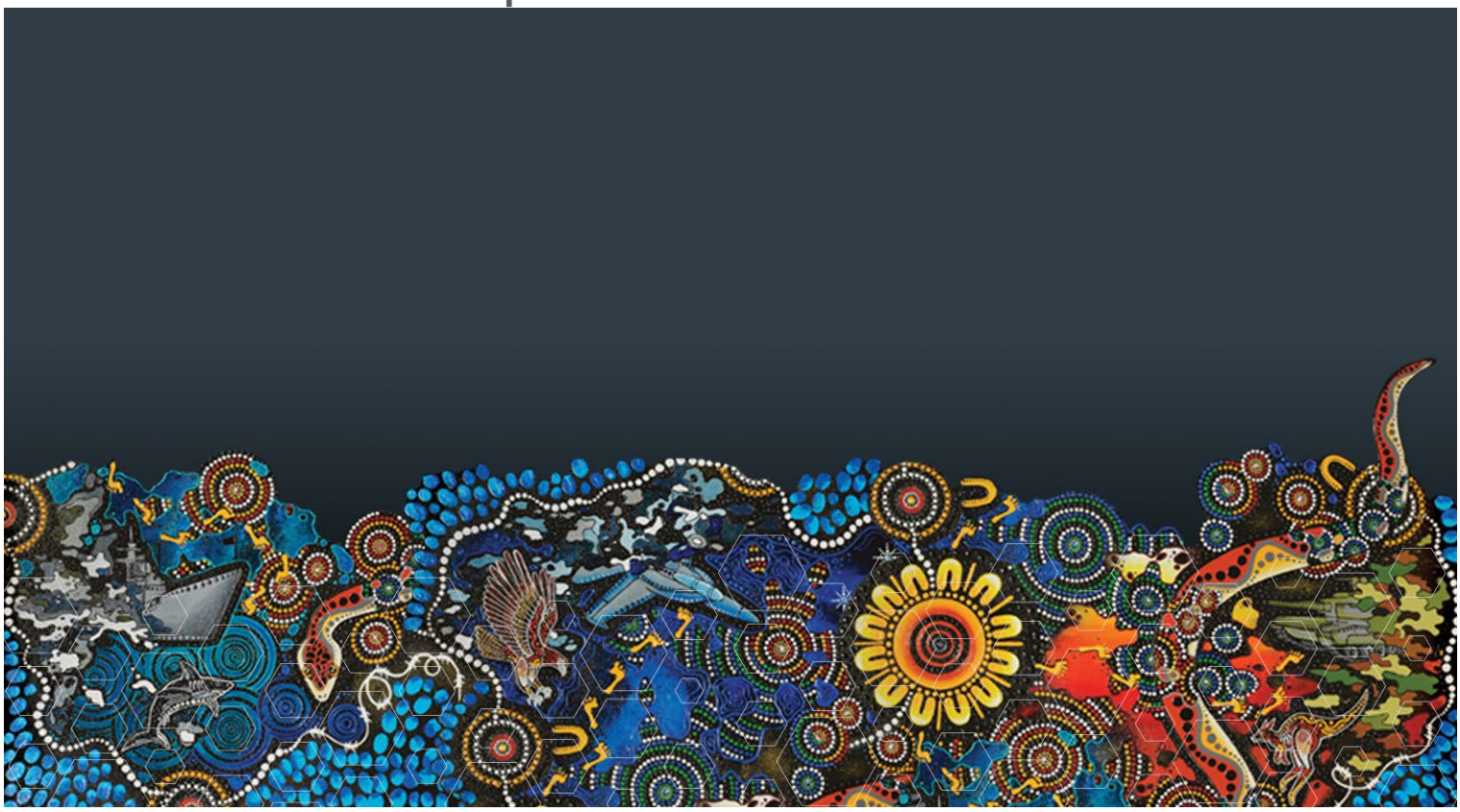
Australian Government
Defence

Recognising their Sacrifice

Discussion Paper



Directorate of Honours and Awards
November 2026

To defend Australia and its national interests in order to advance Australia's security and prosperity
www.defence.gov.au

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Requests and inquiries should be addressed to:

Director Honours and Awards
Defence People Group
Department of Defence
PO Box 7952
CANBERRA ACT 2610.

Support Services

This document includes information that readers may find distressing. If you need to talk to someone, the following organisations can help:

Open Arms
Open Arms is the leading provider of free mental health assessment and counselling for Defence members, veterans and families. They offer both individual and relationship counselling to help build strong and healthy relationships at all stages of family life.
1800 011 046
openarms.gov.au

Defence Member and Family Helpline
The Helpline is available 24/7 to assist Defence members and families. The Helpline provides assessment, advice, assistance or referral depending on the needs of the Defence member and their family.
1800 624 608
defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/crisis-support/helplines/defence-member-family-helpline

ADF Chaplains
Chaplains provide pastoral, spiritual, religious and welfare support.
1300 333 362
defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/crisis-support/helplines/chaplaincy-services

ADF Mental Health All Hours Support Line Mental health and wellbeing advice for Defence members and families.
1800 628 036
defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/crisis-support/helplines/all-hours-support-line

13 YARN
13YARN is the national crisis support line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping.
13 92 76
13yarn.org.au

1800 IMSICK
1800 IMSICK is a national 24/7 nurse triage and health support line for Defence members if they become ill or injured after hours or are not near a Defence health facility.
1800 467 425
defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/health-well-being/services-support-fighting-fit/1800-imsick

1800 VETERAN
1800 VETERAN is Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA's) general phone number. It is available between 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. It's a way of finding out about the wealth of support offered by DVA.
1800 838 372
dva.gov.au

1800 RESPECT
1800 RESPECT is the national Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling Service for anyone living in Australia. The service provides telephone and online crisis and trauma counselling.
1800 737 732
1800respect.org.au

Kids Helpline
Kids Helpline is a free, and anonymous 24/7 telephone and online counselling service specifically for young people 5–25 years old.
1800 551 800
kidshelpline.com.au

Lifeline
Lifeline is a national 24-hour support line, which provides crisis support and mental health services.
131 114
lifeline.org.au

Mensline Australia
Mensline Australia is a national 24/7 service for men, providing support, information, or referral by telephone or online.
1300 789 978
mensline.org.au

Relationships Australia
Relationships Australia offers counselling, family dispute resolution, mediation, and a range of family and community support and education programs.
1300 364 277
relationships.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service
Suicide Call Back Service offers free professional 24/7 telephone counselling support to people at risk of suicide, concerned about someone at risk, bereaved by suicide and people experiencing emotional or mental health issues.
1300 659 467
suicidecallbackservice.org.au

The Family Relationship Advice Line
The Family Relationship Advice Line helps families affected by relationship or separation issues, including information on parenting arrangements after separation. It can also refer callers to local services that provide assistance.
1800 050 321
familyrelationships.gov.au/talk-someone/advice-line

Purpose of this paper

The death of any Defence Force member is a tragedy and the Government's priority is to keep our personnel safe. Where they are killed or injured in service, they, and their families deserve appropriate recognition.

The discussion paper seeks feedback on proposed reforms to how Australia recognises the service-related death, injury and enduring harm experienced by Australian Defence Force (ADF) members and veterans and their families.

The purpose of this paper and consultation is to better understand where common ground may exist and how meaningful and appropriate change could be introduced in a way that commands confidence, respect and legitimacy across the Defence and veteran communities.

Its purpose is to support informed consideration of how recognition might best honour service and sacrifice, while balancing compassion for individuals and families with the need for clear, consistent and sustainable policy settings that can be applied fairly over time.

The paper has been developed in response to the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal's (the Tribunal) 2021 report, 'Recognising their Sacrifice', and subsequent consideration of the Tribunal's recommendations through Parliamentary and departmental processes.

For the purpose of the Discussion Paper:

"Members" refers to serving and former members and includes also:
- Permanent members;
- Reservists;
- ADF members assigned to serve with a foreign force;
- Defence or other government civilians who are force assigned; and
- Other civilians who may be eligible for existing awards within the Defence honours and awards system.

The "Australian Defence Force" comprises:
- the Royal Australian Navy;
- the Australian Army;
- the Royal Australian Air Force; and
- the Reserve of those Services.

Background

The question of how Australia recognises the service-related death, injury or disability experienced by ADF members, and the loss borne by their families, goes to the heart of the nation's values and its obligation to those who serve. These matters are deeply personal, shaped by grief, trauma and long-lasting consequences, and evoke strong and sincerely held views. At the same time, recognition through the honours and awards system carries significant symbolic weight and must be approached with care and fairness to ensure it remains meaningful and proportionate over time.

This topic has previously been examined by the Tribunal and more recently by the Senate inquiry into the Defence honours and awards system. Those processes highlighted both the compelling case for improved recognition and the inherent complexity of designing arrangements that are clear in purpose, consistent in application and aligned with the broader honours and awards framework.

Building on that body of work, this discussion paper seeks feedback on new and refined proposals. Its purpose is to support informed consideration of how recognition might best honour service and sacrifice, while balancing compassion for individuals and families with the need for clear, consistent and sustainable policy settings that can be applied fairly over time.

Policy Context and Defence Approach

Defence recognises the depth of consultation undertaken by the Tribunal, the strength of feeling expressed in evidence and submissions, and the compelling case made for improved recognition of service-related death, injury and loss experienced by ADF members and their families.

At the same time, Defence has approached these issues with an awareness that recognition delivered through the honours and awards system carries enduring symbolic, legal and institutional significance. New forms of recognition must therefore be designed not only to respond to individual and family experiences of loss and harm, but also to operate coherently within Australia's honours and awards framework, remain administratively sound, and capable of consistent application, and retain their meaning and integrity over time.

Accordingly, this paper should be read not as an open exploration of all possible models of recognition, but as a considered Defence response to the Tribunal's recommendations. In developing the proposals and issues set out in this paper, Defence has adopted a more constrained and system-focused approach than that recommended by the Tribunal, reflecting compassion, clarity, consistency and sustainability. Where Defence's position departs from the Tribunal's recommendations, this is not a reflection of diminished regard for service or sacrifice, but rather of the practical and policy obligations associated with stewarding the national honours system.

In particular, Defence has been mindful of several overarching considerations that shape its approach. These include the need to establish eligibility thresholds that are clear, objective and capable of consistent application; to avoid reliance on, and complications of, post-service compensation or liability frameworks that sit outside Defence's remit, and to ensure that recognition arrangements can be administered fairly across different cohorts, service types and time periods.

The paper also reflects Defence's view that not all recognition needs to sit within the formal Australian honours and awards system to be genuine, meaningful or legitimate.

In some cases, particularly in relation to families of deceased members, recognition delivered outside the formal system may provide greater flexibility, sensitivity and inclusivity, without undermining the integrity of medallic awards. This represents a deliberate policy option that differs from the Tribunal's preference for formal honours-based recognition across all cohorts.

Similarly, while the Tribunal recommended broad retrospective application of new forms of recognition, Defence considers that retrospective measures raise heightened issues of equity, evidence, precedent and system integrity. As such, any consideration of retrospective recognition must be more tightly bounded, taking account of historical variations in recognition practices, constraints associated with Imperial honours prior to the introduction of the Australian honours system in 1975, and the need to balance historical cases against contemporary recognition and resourcing.

Throughout the paper, "Matters for Consideration" are framed to test the appropriateness, boundaries and consequences of Defence's preferred approaches, rather than to invite unconstrained alternatives. Stakeholder feedback is sought on whether the proposed positions strike an appropriate balance between recognition, fairness and practicality, and on whether the limitations identified by Defence are best dealt with in light of the broader objectives of the honours and awards framework.

Defence welcomes informed and constructive feedback on these matters. In doing so, Defence seeks to identify areas of shared principle and potential refinement that could support recognition arrangements which are compassionate and respectful to individuals and families, while also being coherent, meaningful and capable of enduring public confidence over time.

The Tribunal's Recognising their Sacrifice Report and Defence Consideration

In December 2021, the Tribunal submitted 'Recognising their Sacrifice', the *Report of the Inquiry into recognition for members and families of members of the Australian Defence Force who are injured, wounded or killed in or as a result of service*. The inquiry received 260 submissions and held over 70 public hearings.

The Tribunal made three recommendations:

Recommendation 1

The institution of the following new forms of medallic and emblematic recognition:

a) A Memorial Clasp – to be posthumously awarded to a member of the ADF or a veteran who dies in or as a result of service. The Clasp is to be attached to the Australian campaign or service medal most relevant to the circumstances in which the death occurred and bearing, at the discretion of the veteran's family:
   - the date of death; or
   - the date of the incident leading to death; or
   - no date.

b) A Gratitude Clasp – to be awarded to a member of the ADF or veteran who is seriously wounded, seriously injured or suffers a serious injury in or as a result of service. The Clasp is to be attached to the Australian campaign or service medal most relevant to the circumstances in which wounding or injury occurred and bearing, at the discretion of the veteran (or family where posthumous recognition is sought):
   - the date of wounding or injury; or
   - where multiple dates of wounds or injuries have been recognised, the number of such events recognised; or
   - no date.

c) A Memorial Star – A full size brooch-like emblem of a uniquely Australian design that recognises the sacrifice of the family of a member of the ADF or veteran who dies in service or whose death is service related.

d) A Gratitude Star – A full size brooch-like emblem of uniquely Australian design to recognise the sacrifice of the family of the member or veteran who has suffered a serious wound, serious injury or serious disease in or as a result of service.

e) For veterans awarded the Gratitude Clasp, a lapel pin of separate and appropriate design for everyday wear at the discretion of the veteran.

Recommendation 2

That the Memorial Clasp, the Gratitude Clasp, the Memorial Star and the Gratitude Star be accompanied by a scroll, issued under the authority of the Governor General, to commemorate the sacrifice of the member, veteran or the family, as applicable.

Recommendation 3

That the proposed new forms of recognition be available retrospectively, to recognise death, serious wounding, serious injury or serious disease that is or was brought about in or as a result of service after 2 September 1945.

While Defence acknowledges the Tribunal's recommendations and the evidence underpinning them, Defence has not sought to replicate those proposals in full. In developing this discussion paper, Defence has adopted a more practical approach than that recommended by the Tribunal, whilst ensuring compassion and meaningful recognition, which provides consistency and long-term system integrity.

Consultation

Feedback to date, including through the Tribunal and a recent Senate inquiry, indicates strong support for recognising service-related death, injury and loss, but no clear consensus on how such recognition should be designed, who it should apply to, or how it should align with existing frameworks. These differing views reflect the diversity of lived experience, the deeply personal nature of loss and injury, and the complexity of translating those experiences into clear, consistent and enduring policy settings.

This discussion paper supports further consultation at a point where proposals have been refined and greater clarity is now available on the policy and practical considerations involved.
The purpose of this paper and consultation is to better understand where common ground may exist and how meaningful and appropriate change could be introduced in a way that commands confidence, respect and legitimacy across the Defence and veteran communities.

Structure of the discussion paper

To support informed and constructive feedback, this paper is structured around the key areas of recognition identified in the Tribunal's recommendations. Consistent with Recommendations 1 to 3, sections address recognition of ADF members who die or sustain serious service-related injury, recognition of their families, and supporting instruments and scope considerations, including memorial scrolls and retrospective application. Each section provides relevant background, outlines possible approaches, and identifies key complexities and trade-offs. Sections conclude with clearly framed Matters for Consideration to focus feedback on questions of purpose, fairness, impact and practicality, without presupposing particular outcomes.

Stakeholders are invited to consider these matters in light of their own experiences and perspectives, and to identify areas of agreement, concern or potential refinement. Defence is particularly interested in understanding where shared principles or points of convergence may exist, as these provide a strong foundation for recognition arrangements that are compassionate, meaningful and capable of enduring over time.

Defence welcomes a range of ideas from key stakeholders on how best to recognise ADF members whose service has resulted in death, injury or enduring harm, and how to appropriately acknowledge and value the experiences and loss of their families. Defence recognises that views on recognition are shaped by diverse lived experiences and that these matters carry deep personal significance, making broad and respectful consultation essential.

In considering feedback, Defence also notes that any form of recognition must be developed within the broader Australian honours and awards framework and the wider Australian Government policy environment, to ensure arrangements are coherent, meaningful and capable of consistent and sustainable administration.

Feedback

Defence welcomes feedback on the issues and questions raised in this Discussion Paper. Feedback received through this consultation will be carefully considered to identify areas of agreement, differing perspectives, and the principles that stakeholders consider most important.

Submissions will inform further examination of the issues raised, including consideration of potential approaches and options for advice to Government. Defence will also seek to identify areas of common ground that may assist in shaping recognition arrangements that are respectful of individuals and families, coherent with the broader honours and awards framework, and appropriate for consideration over time

Information on submitting feedback is provided at the end of this paper.

1. Recognising ADF members who die while in service

Defence Proposal

A central policy question in considering recognition for death while in service is whether eligibility should be based on the timing of death or a demonstrable causal connection to service. Existing frameworks variously distinguish between death occurring during service, death resulting from service, and death occurring after service from conditions attributable to service.

Defence's proposal is that recognition for death while in service must be clearly bounded and framed within existing honours and awards principles, noting that death occurring during service does not of itself establish a causal relationship to service in the way contemplated by the Tribunal's broader recommendations.

While the Tribunal recommended recognition extending to death "in or as a result of service", Defence considers that recognition based solely on death in service requires careful consideration to avoid unintended expansion and inconsistency across the honours system.

Overview

Name:
Death in service

Suggested Recognition:
Antique Brass wattle insignia affixed to the Australian Defence Medal

Eligibility Criteria:
Awarded to ADF members who die as a result of service, where:

- the death occurred while the member was engaged in Defence service (including operations, training, exercises or other authorised duties); and
- the death is determined by Defence to have a clear and direct causal connection to that service.

Evidence basis:
Eligibility is to be determined based on contemporaneous Defence records and investigations, including service, medical and administrative findings.

Purpose and Context of Recognition

The death of an ADF member while in service represents the most profound consequence of service to the nation. Recognition in these circumstances seeks to formally acknowledge the member's sacrifice and the enduring loss experienced by their family, colleagues and the Defence community. Such recognition necessarily raises sensitive issues of fairness, eligibility and consistency, particularly given the wide range of circumstances in which deaths may occur during service.

Any approach must therefore balance the intent to honour service and sacrifice with the need for recognition arrangements that are clear and applied consistently across comparable circumstances.

The introduction of new forms of medallic recognition in this context is inherently complex and often deeply sensitive. This is reflected in the range of matters raised in the Tribunal's report and the diverse views presented during the Inquiry. Care is required to ensure clarity of purpose, consistency in application and eligibility criteria that are well understood and capable of enduring scrutiny.

While death may occur while a member is in service, it is not always, as a result of or in undertaking of such service. Any associated recognition must therefore be carefully framed to ensure it is meaningful and proportionate, and to minimise the risk of unintended consequences or additional distress for ADF members and their families.

Defence has considered approaches to recognition over many years, with close regard to the potential impacts on individuals and families, particularly during periods of grief or ongoing adjustment. This has informed a cautious and measured approach to how recognition might best be provided.

Existing frameworks variously distinguish between death occurring during service, death resulting from service, and death occurring after service from conditions attributable to service. These distinctions reflect differing approaches to causation, evidence and timing, and highlight the importance of clear principles and thresholds that can be applied consistently across the honours and awards system.

One possible approach for consideration is recognition within the existing Australian honours and awards system, such as a clasp or device affixed to the Australian Defence Medal. This approach may be viewed as a respectful and proportionate means of acknowledging death in service, while operating within a familiar and established framework that supports consistency with current honours and awards practices.



*Note: Image is indicative only and does not represent a proposed final design

Considerations for Additional Recognition

Existing recognition mechanisms include:

a. Award of the Australian Defence Medal to acknowledge service where a member dies in service or is medically transitioned before they would otherwise be eligible due to length of service.
b. Award of operational service and campaign medals where a member cannot complete a qualifying period on operations due to illness, injury, wounding, or death.

There is currently no provision for recognition in cases involving non-life-changing injuries or wounds sustained in service.

Should additional recognition for death while in service be supported, the Australian Defence Medal may be an appropriate foundational award to which a clasp, device or emblem could be attached. The Australian Defence Medal provides a well-understood and established basis for recognition, which may assist in maintaining consistency and proportionality within the honours and awards system, without necessitating amendment to a range of different awards.

Implementing such an approach would require amendments to the Australian Defence Medal Regulations, which do not currently provide for attachments.

More broadly, any proposal to introduce additional recognition for death while in service would need to be carefully considered in terms of clarity, consistency and sensitivity. Approaches that build on existing honours and awards frameworks are one option that may be considered, noting potential benefits in terms of coherence, administrative feasibility and system integrity.

Matters for Consideration

The following matters are intended to test Defence's proposed approach, including its appropriateness, boundaries and limitations. In providing feedback on arrangements for recognising the death of ADF members while in service, stakeholders may wish to consider the following matters:

Purpose and Appropriateness of Recognition

Is the proposed approach to recognising death in service appropriate and proportionate, and is the intent of any additional recognition clear and sufficiently distinguished from other forms of service recognition?

Should recognition extend to cases of suicide that occur while a member is serving or where the death is attributable to service?

Should recognition also be provided where an individual dies from a service-related injury within a specified period after leaving service (for example, within two years of separation)?

Impact on ADF Members and Families
Are the proposed recognition arrangements likely to be meaningful and respectful to ADF members and their families, and do they avoid causing further harm, distress, or unintended consequences?

Practical and Governance Considerations
Are the proposed options practical to implement and consistent with existing honours and awards frameworks, including any legislative, regulatory, policy, or precedent considerations?

What assessment methodology would best balance appropriate recognition without introducing complexities that adversely affect the member or their families?

Consistency and Attribution of Service
Should recognition be guided primarily by a clear causal connection between death and service, rather than by the timing or manner of death, including in cases involving delayed death from a service-related injury or illness, or deaths linked to service-related mental health conditions?

2. Recognition of families of members who die while in service

Defence Proposal

To allow greater flexibility and to better reflect that loss is experienced across multiple family members, Defence's view is that recognition of families is most appropriately delivered outside the formal Australian honours and awards system, which differs from the Tribunal's medal-based approach.

Beyond recognition of the member, consideration has been given to how the service-related death of an ADF member affects their family, and whether, and how, such loss might be appropriately acknowledged.

The death of an ADF member while in service has a profound and enduring impact on their family. Consideration of recognition in this context seeks to acknowledge not only the member's service, but also the loss borne by those closest to them. Any approach must be handled with care and sensitivity, recognising the diversity of family experiences and the deeply personal nature of grief. This invites thoughtful consideration of how recognition might appropriately honour service and sacrifice, while supporting families in a way that is respectful, meaningful and consistent with the broader honours and awards framework.

Overview

Name:
Death in Service (Family members)

Suggested Recognition:
Lapel pin (non-medallic recognition, administered outside the Australian honours and awards system)

Eligibility Criteria:
Recognition may be provided to the immediate family members of an Australian Defence Force member whose death is recognised by a killed in service clasp.

Eligible recipients are limited to the member's immediate family, defined as:

- spouse or partner (including former spouse or partner);
- children;
- parents; and
- siblings.

Grandparents and grandchildren may be included only where no closer immediate family members are living.

Evidence basis:
Eligibility for recognition is to be determined based on verification of next-of-kin details.

Approaches to Recognition

Defence considers that recognition for families delivered outside the Australian honours and awards system offers greater flexibility, avoids regulatory complexity, and better accommodates the reality that loss is experienced by multiple family members rather than a single recipient.

In considering recognition for families following the death of an ADF member while in service, approaches that sit outside the Australian honours and awards system may offer greater flexibility and sensitivity, noting that views differ on whether recognition inside or outside the formal system is preferable.

Recognition delivered outside the formal framework may better accommodate the needs of families by allowing acknowledgement to be extended to more than one family member, addressing limitations within the honours system, which generally provides for a single award.

Such an approach may also allow Defence to respond over time to feedback from serving members, veterans and families, supporting recognition that remains contemporary, meaningful and appropriately valued. The ability to adapt recognition arrangements may help ensure they continue to reflect the experiences and expectations of families.

A discreet, wearable form of recognition for family members may provide a respectful means of acknowledging loss, while signalling that the wearer has experienced the death of a loved one in service and should be approached with appropriate sensitivity. Recognition of this kind may also assist families to feel acknowledged and connected to others with similar experiences.

A small, discreet lapel pin featuring a stylised golden wattle, Australia's national floral emblem, is one potential form of recognition. The use of the wattle symbol reflects themes of remembrance, resilience and national identity. The design would be intentionally simple and non-medallic in form to distinguish it from formal honours and awards.



* Note: Image is indicative only and does not represent a proposed final design.

This could be provided to immediate family members, as defined by Defence Honours and Awards policy, and would operate outside the formal Australian honours and awards system, removing the need to establish new medal Regulations.

It is also acknowledged that engagement with bereaved families involves significant sensitivities, including the identification of next of kin and the diversity of family circumstances that may exist.

Additional complexities may arise where death occurs after service, including in cases of suicide or deaths linked to service-related exposures. These matters require careful and compassionate consideration in the design and implementation of any recognition arrangement.

Defence Honours and Awards currently defines immediate family members as including:

a) a spouse or a former spouse of the person;
b) a de facto partner or former de facto partner of the person;
c) a parent of the person;
d) a child of the person;
e) a sibling of the person;
f) a grandparent of the person;
g) a grandchild of the person.

For these purposes, consideration may be given primarily to immediate family members listed at (a) to (e), with grandparents and grandchildren (f) and (g) included where no closer immediate family members are living.

Matters for Consideration

The following matters are intended to test Defence's proposed approach, including its appropriateness, boundaries and limitations. In providing feedback on arrangements to recognise families of members whose death occurs while in service, stakeholders may wish to consider the following matters:

Appropriateness and Scope of Recognition
Is it appropriate to provide recognition to family members outside the Australian Honours and Awards system, and does this approach provide sufficient flexibility to recognise multiple immediate family members in an equitable and consistent manner?

Meaningfulness and Impact for Families
Would a visible, wearable form of recognition be viewed by families as meaningful and respectful, including as a means of acknowledging loss, promoting sensitivity, and fostering a sense of connection among those affected by a death in service?

Practicality and Sustainability
Is an insignia-based approach to recognition practical, sustainable, and capable of remaining contemporary over time, including through adaptation in response to feedback from ADF members, veterans, and families?

3. Memorial Scroll

Defence Proposal

Defence considers that a Memorial Scroll represents an appropriate primary form of formal national acknowledgement for death in service across all contexts, not limited to wartime service.

Defence sees a Memorial Scroll as an appropriate primary national acknowledgement of death in service, reflecting historical precedent and constitutional convention, but not as a substitute for other, more personal forms of family recognition. Defence considers that a Memorial Scroll is not limited to major conflict or wartime service, but may be applied consistently to recognise death in service across all contexts.

In addition to medallic and emblematic recognition, consideration has been given to the role of memorial and gratitude scrolls as a non-wearable and historically grounded form of acknowledgement. As a single, non-wearable form of recognition, a Memorial Scroll may offer a proportionate and scalable approach compared to more complex or multi-recipient recognition models.

Overview

Name:
Memorial scroll – Death in Service (Family members)

Suggested Recognition:
Memorial Scroll signed by the Governor-General (non-wearable recognition)

Eligibility Criteria:
Awarded in respect of an Australian Defence Force member whose death is eligible for the killed in Service Clasp.

The Memorial Scroll is issued as a single formal instrument of national recognition to the member's next of kin.

Evidence basis:
Eligibility for recognition is to be determined based on verification of next-of-kin details.

Role and Purpose of Scrolls

Memorial Scrolls have long been used to recognise death in service. During the First World War, they were issued to next of kin as a personal gift from the Sovereign, acknowledging both the individual's service and the family's loss, and serving as a formal, enduring symbol of national recognition distinct from wearable awards.

Today, several defence forces, including those of the United Kingdom and Canada, continue to use similar scrolls or certificates. These provide a solemn and dignified form of recognition that can complement existing honours and awards systems.

Contemporary Application and Considerations

In this context, it may be appropriate to introduce a Memorial Scroll following the death of an ADF member while in service. Under such an approach, a single scroll signed by the Governor-General, as the representative of the Sovereign and Commander-in-Chief, could be presented to the member's next of kin.

The scroll would provide formal national recognition of the member's service and death, while acknowledging the family's loss in a manner consistent with constitutional and honours traditions.

Where additional forms of family recognition are provided, such as a lapel pin or other insignia, copies of the Memorial Scroll could be made available to accompany those items. This would allow multiple family members to receive a tangible acknowledgment, while preserving the principle of a single official scroll as the primary instrument of recognition.

In cases where recognition is considered retrospectively, it may be appropriate to identify the recognised holder of the medal or equivalent recognition as the person entitled to receive the Memorial Scroll. This would provide a clear and administratively practical basis for determining entitlement, while maintaining consistency with associated medallic arrangements.

Overall, a Memorial Scroll could provide a dignified, historically grounded and non-wearable form of recognition that complements other approaches to acknowledging death in service. Such recognition would allow Defence to formally acknowledge loss in a manner that is respectful, enduring and sensitive to the needs and experiences of families.

Matters for consideration

The following matters are intended to test Defence's proposed approach, including the appropriateness its boundaries and limitations. In providing feedback on the introduction of a Memorial Scroll to be presented to the next of kin of a member who has died in service, stakeholders may wish to consider the following matters:

Relevance of Historical Forms of Recognition
Does the Memorial Scroll, as a historically grounded and non-wearable form of recognition, remain appropriate and meaningful in a contemporary context, or should greater emphasis be placed on modern or wearable forms of recognition?

Contemporary Fit and Purpose
Does the current approach of providing a single official Memorial Scroll to the next of kin remain an appropriate form of national recognition, or would providing copies or complementary items (such as lapel pins) to multiple immediate family members better reflect contemporary family structures, while balancing considerations of symbolism, equity and administrative consistency?

Insights from International Practice

In light of international practice, should the principle of issuing a single official Memorial Scroll to the next of kin be maintained, or would providing copies to multiple immediate family members better reflect contemporary family circumstances, taking into account implications for consistency, symbolism and administration?

4. Recognition for ADF members who sustain a serious service-related injury, illness or disability whilst on Defence operational service, exercise or activity

Defence Proposal

In addition to recognition for death in service, Defence has considered how serious and life-altering service-related injury or illness might be appropriately acknowledged. Defence recognises the profound and often lifelong impacts of such harm on members, their families and broader support networks, representing a significant personal loss arising directly from service.

In this context, Defence considers that any approach to recognition should be underpinned by compassion, providing clear, consistent and meaningful recognition, while remaining practical to administer and aligned with the integrity of the honours and awards system.

Accordingly, Defence's position is that eligibility for recognition of serious service-related injury or illness should be framed by clearly defined, contemporaneous service thresholds. This approach is intended to support fair and consistent decision-making, while ensuring that recognition remains credible and appropriately targeted.

Defence proposes that eligibility be limited to cases involving serious and life-altering harm with a clear causal connection to service, based on Defence thresholds that are visible, verifiable and capable of consistent application.

Under this approach, eligibility may include ADF members who:

- were medically evacuated due to a serious service-related injury, illness or disability while undertaking Defence operational service, exercises or other authorised Defence activities; or
- are medically separated or discharged through Defence medical and employment classification processes as a result of a service-related condition.

These thresholds provide an administratively clear, fair and evidence-based basis for recognition. While they may not capture all circumstances of harm, they represent a practical means of balancing fairness, clarity and system integrity, while still providing meaningful recognition.

Overview

Name:
Serious injury, illness or disability whilst on Defence operational service, exercise or activity

Suggested Recognition:
Silver wattle insignia affixed to the Australian Defence Medal

Eligibility Criteria:
The member must have rendered eligible Defence service, being:

- operational service;
- or approved Defence activities, including exercises, training or other authorised duties.

The member must have sustained a serious injury, illness or disability that:

- occurred during, or arose from, the member's Defence service; and
- is assessed by Defence as in its impact on the member's ongoing health, employability or deployability.

Eligibility is established where one or more of the following Defence-determined thresholds are met:

a. Medical Evacuation

- The member was medically evacuated (MEDEVAC) due to a serious service related injury, illness or disability.

b. Medical Separation

- The member was medically separated or discharged from the ADF; and the separation was determined by Defence to be wholly or primarily due to a service related condition.

The injury, illness or disability must have a clear and demonstrable causal connection to Defence service, as determined by:

- Defence medical authorities; and/or
- Defence administrative or command processes.

The following do not qualify:

- Conditions determined by Defence to not be directly related to Defence service
- Medical separation for conditions unrelated to service
- Minor or temporary injuries or illnesses not assessed as serious or life altering
- Cases relying solely on non-Defence determinations (e.g. DVA decisions), without supporting non-contemporaneous Defence evidence.

Eligibility must be supported by contemporaneous Defence records, including:

- medical documentation
- Medical Employment Classification Review Board outcomes
- separation documentation
- operational or incident reporting (where relevant).

In exceptional circumstances, the Chief of the Defence Force (or delegate) may determine eligibility where the intent of the criteria is clearly met, but the prescribed evidentiary thresholds are not strictly satisfied.

Purpose and Context of Recognition

Serious service-related injury or illness can have enduring consequences for members, their families and their broader support networks, reflecting a significant and ongoing impact arising from service.

Appropriate forms of visible and comparable recognition can assist in acknowledging this impact, affirming service-related sacrifice, and promoting broader understanding of the challenges faced by those living with serious injury or illness. Such recognition also contributes to acknowledging the enduring effects of service within Defence and the wider community.

Eligibility Considerations

Service-related injuries and illnesses encompass a broad range of physical and psychological conditions that vary significantly in severity, impact and timing. These conditions may become apparent during service, after separation, or involve the aggravation of pre-existing conditions attributable to service. This diversity presents inherent challenges in defining eligibility for any form of recognition regarding 'service related' injuries.

Defining the nature, seriousness and impact of injury or illness is particularly complex, as individual experiences are often subjective and circumstances vary widely. This can make it difficult to establish eligibility criteria that are simultaneously clear, consistent and equitable.

Defence's preliminary view is that eligibility thresholds based on contemporaneous Defence decisions, such as medical evacuation or medical separation, offer the most administratively credible and policy-appropriate basis for recognition, despite known limitations.

One option for consideration is limiting recognition to ADF members who were evacuated due to a serious service-related injury, illness or disability while undertaking Defence operational service, exercises or activities, reflecting a visible and administratively clear threshold. Eligibility could also extend to members who are discharged or separated as medically unfit through the Medical Employment Classification Review Board process. However, separation on medical grounds may also occur due to conditions that are unrelated to service.

Recognition based on evacuation presents its own challenges. Evacuation does not always reflect the severity or long-term impact of harm, as some members sustain serious injuries that do not require or permit evacuation, while others may be evacuated for conditions arising in less definitive circumstances. The threshold for 'medical evacuation' is not always based on an actual medical event, but sometimes the *potential* for the requirement for medical care that cannot be supported in the area of operations (for example, a diagnosis that is considered high risk, without the occurrence of any incident per se, may result in a technical 'medical evacuation'). Further, exercises and activities may conclude 'locally', without a formal concept of evacuation, leading to inconsistent treatment of members who have experienced comparable levels of harm.

Eligibility for injuries and illnesses arising during or beyond cessation of service (even for a limited period beyond separation) is also challenging to implement equitably, particularly in the area of mental health. Australian data reflects that approximately 22% of Australians between the ages of 16-85 report having experienced a mental health disorder in the previous twelve months, and 43% of the population experience a mental health condition during their life. Establishing the extent to which Defence service or specific service-related events contribute to common mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety, can be difficult, as these conditions typically arise from a combination of factors. Genetics, life stressors, and individual personality traits that may be unrelated to military service play a large role in development of mental health conditions.

Additional complexity arises in distinguishing between operational and non-operational service. Serious injuries and illnesses can occur across a wide range of activities, including operations, training, exercises and other Defence-related duties; including sanctioned sport. Limiting eligibility to particular service type's risks creating arbitrary distinctions that may be difficult to justify. Even with broadened criteria, it is unlikely that any single model would satisfy all stakeholders, highlighting the tension between clarity, fairness and the perceived integrity of recognition.

Eligibility criteria would be best focussed on establishing a clear and evidence-based causal connection between service and the qualifying circumstance, without introducing assessment mechanisms that sit outside Defence's policy remit. Reliance on the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) and Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation determinations is not appropriate, as these agencies apply different statutory tests, evidentiary standards and post-service considerations under its compensation framework.

DVA determinations are made for the purpose of assessing compensation liability under beneficial legislative frameworks, and may rely on post-service evidence and the progressive development of conditions over time. These features do not align with the purpose, evidentiary basis or administrative requirements of Defence honours and awards, which must rely on clear, contemporaneous and service-based assessments.

Eligibility for Defence recognition needs to instead be grounded in contemporaneous service records and Defence medical and command assessments, with review mechanisms available through Defence's own processes. Careful calibration is required to avoid the opposite risk that overly broad eligibility settings, particularly where service connection is loosely defined, could result in near-universal eligibility or create a strong perception of entitlement, thereby diluting the intent and meaning of the recognition.

Design Considerations

Design considerations should be addressed separately from eligibility and focus on how recognition is conferred, rather than determining entitlement. This includes decisions about the form of recognition, retrospective application, evidentiary requirements at the point of award, and mechanisms for review or appeal.

These matters are inherently policy-based and need to be informed by consistency with existing Defence honours and awards principles, rather than external compensation or rehabilitation schemes. Maintaining a clear separation between eligibility criteria and design features will support transparency and help ensure the recognition achieves its intended purpose without unintended policy expansion or misalignment with Defence's honours framework.

The introduction of a distinct clasp or device affixed to the Australian Defence Medal is one approach that could provide a tangible and enduring form of recognition. A corresponding lapel pin for wear when not in uniform could allow affected current and former ADF members to be publicly recognised for the sacrifices they have made and the ongoing challenges they continue to face. Such forms of recognition may assist in affirming service-related sacrifice and promoting broader understanding of serious service-related injury or illness.

Notwithstanding these challenges, formal recognition provides a tangible expression of respect and gratitude for members whose service has resulted in significant, life-altering harm, and reinforces the principle that such sacrifice should not go unacknowledged, even where eligibility boundaries are necessarily imperfect.

Recognition also serves a broader institutional and cultural function. It signals to serving ADF members, veterans and families that Defence values service and accepts responsibility for its consequences. While no eligibility framework can capture every circumstance or achieve universal agreement, the absence of recognition would risk a greater inequity by failing to acknowledge serious harm altogether. The challenge therefore lies not in whether recognition should occur, but in how arrangements can be designed to balance fairness, clarity and integrity while preserving the underlying purpose of honouring service and sacrifice.

Recognition is currently provided through existing mechanisms, including:

- Award of the Australian Defence Medal where a member is medically transitioned before otherwise becoming eligible; and
- Award of operational service and campaign medals where a member is unable to complete a prescribed period of qualifying service on operations due to illness, injury, wounding, or death.

Matters for Consideration

The following matters are intended to test Defence's proposed approach, including the appropriateness, its boundaries and limitations. In providing feedback on eligibility arrangements for recognition of serious service-related injury, illness, or disability, stakeholders may wish to consider the following matters:

Clarity and Fairness of Eligibility Criteria

Do the proposed eligibility thresholds provide a clear, fair and consistent basis for recognition, noting that comparable harm may occur in circumstances that fall outside the defined criteria?

Should contemporaneous or subsequent mental illness be included as a factor in determining eligibility for recognition, and if so, under what circumstances?

Scope of Service Covered
Should eligibility be limited to operational service, or should it also extend to serious injuries and illnesses sustained during exercises, training, or other Defence activities?

Practicality and Perceived Integrity
Is the proposed eligibility model practical to administer, sustainable over time, and likely to be perceived as credible, equitable and consistent by ADF members, veterans and their families?

5. Retrospective Application of Recognition

Defence Proposal

A further consideration is whether any recognition arrangements should apply retrospectively, and, if so, how commencement dates and scope might be defined.

While the Tribunal recommended retrospective recognition to 2 September 1945, Defence considers that any retrospective application must be more tightly bounded, noting variations in historic recognition practices, the continued presence of Imperial honours prior to 1975, and the need to preserve the integrity and sustainability of the contemporary honours framework.

Overview

Eligibility Criteria:
Recognition may be applied retrospectively in respect of Australian Defence Force members who meet the eligibility requirements for the relevant recognition category (Killed in Service or Serious Service-Related Injury or Illness), and where:

- the qualifying event occurred on or after 14 February 1975 (commencement of the Australian honours and awards system); and
- eligibility can be established based on contemporaneous Defence records and evidence sufficient to support a determination under current criteria.

Limitations:

- Retrospective recognition does not apply to service recognised under Imperial honours and awards arrangements prior to 1975.
- Eligibility is subject to the availability and quality of historical records.
- Determinations must be capable of consistent and equitable application across all cases.

Evidence basis:
Eligibility is determined based on Defence records, investigations and administrative findings available for the relevant period of service.

Purpose and Scope of Retrospective Recognition

The question of whether recognition should be available retrospectively for ADF members who were killed in, or who sustained a serious service-related injury, illness or disability while on Defence operations, exercises or activities raise complex policy and practical considerations.

Retrospective recognition may have merit in acknowledging individuals and families whose circumstances pre-date current or proposed recognition arrangements, particularly in light of the introduction of the Australian honours and awards system in 1975.

Policy and Practical Considerations

Applying recognition retrospectively presents a range of practical challenges, including limitations in the availability and consistency of historical evidence, changes in record-keeping practices over time, and the difficulty of applying contemporary eligibility criteria equitably across different periods of service. These considerations are particularly relevant given that Defence Honours and Awards work frequently involves the resolution of historical matters extending back many decades.

The potential scope of any retrospective approach also requires careful consideration. Extending eligibility across multiple decades of service could significantly increase the number of eligible individuals and families, with associated administrative, financial and governance implications. Defence also notes that recognition arrangements have varied over time, including the provision of mourning or memorial pins through to 1973, and that for service prior to the introduction of the Australian honours and awards system in 1975, recognition may be constrained by the continued use of Imperial honours, to which Australian clasps or devices cannot be affixed.

Defence is mindful that adopting an early commencement date, such as 3 September 1945, may raise challenges in relation to resourcing, prioritisation and the balance between historical and contemporary cases.

Any consideration of retrospective recognition must also take into account the precedent such an approach may establish, including expectations for future recognition initiatives and alignment with the broader honours and awards framework.

To preserve the integrity of the system, any retrospective measures would need to be clearly defined, limited in scope, and supported by transparent and clearly-defined eligibility criteria that can be applied consistently.

Matters for Consideration

The following matters are intended to test Defence's proposed approach, including its appropriateness, boundaries and limitations. In providing feedback on retrospective recognition for those killed in service or who sustain a serious service-related injury, illness or disability whilst on Defence operational service, exercise or activity from the introduction of the Australian Honours and Awards system in 1975, stakeholders may wish to consider the following matters:

Temporal Scope of Retrospective Recognition
Should recognition be available retrospectively, and if so, what commencement date or eligibility period should apply, taking into account advice that recognition for service prior to 1975 may overlap with Imperial honours and awards?

Equity and Administrative Practicality
Can retrospective eligibility be applied fairly and consistently across different periods of service, given potential evidentiary limitations, variability in historical records, and the associated administrative and resource implications?

Impact on Contemporary Recognition and System Integrity
Would the introduction of retrospective recognition affect the prioritisation of contemporary cases, and could it establish precedents that influence future recognition initiatives or the perceived integrity of the honours and awards framework?

Evaluation

Defence has given detailed and considered attention to the complexities associated with the recommendations arising from the Recognising their Sacrifice Inquiry report. In doing so, Defence acknowledges the breadth and sensitivity of the issues raised.

Through this consultation process, Defence is seeking to ensure that a broad range of perspectives informs its ongoing analysis, and you are invited to provide input on the matters outlined in this discussion paper.

The feedback received will play an important role in shaping Government's consideration of the recommendations to support the development of well-informed, balanced and sustainable policy on recognition for members and families of members of the Australian Defence Force who are injured, wounded or killed in or as a result of service.

Summary of Recommendations

Defence proposes retrospective recognition (from 14 February 1975 onward) for ADF personnel affected by death or serious service-related injury, illness, or disability during operational service, exercises, or activities.

Recommendation 1 – Recognition of Death in Service

Antique Brass Wattle Insignia (attached to the Australian Defence Medal) - Awarded posthumously to ADF members whose death resulted from service.

AND

Family Recognition Lapel Pin - Provided to immediate family members of personnel recognised as killed in service.

Recommendation 2 – Recognition of Serious Service-Related Harm

Silver Wattle Insignia (attached to the Australian Defence Medal) - Awarded to ADF members who sustain a serious service-related injury, illness, or disability whilst on Defence operational service, exercise or activity.

AND

Veteran Lapel Pin - A separate, appropriately designed pin for daily wear, issued to recipients at their discretion.

Recommendation 3 – Memorial Scroll

A commemorative scroll**,** issued under the authority of the Governor-General**,** to accompany the Antique Brass Wattle Insignia, to recognise the sacrifice of the member and, where applicable, their family.

How to Provide Feedback

ADF members, veterans and members of the community are invited to provide feedback on the discussion paper. A response template is available to assist in providing feedback to the Discussion Paper, visit https://www.defence.gov.au/about/reviews-inquiries/recognising-their-sacrifice

Please email your submission to **recognising.sacrifice@defence.gov.au** with the subject line **“Feedback to the RTS Discussion Paper”** by **29 January 2027**.