



**THE HON ANTHONY ALBANESE MP
LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY
MEMBER FOR GRAYNDLER**

**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
MEMBER FOR CORIO**

**THE HON SHAYNE NEUMANN MP
SHADOW MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE PERSONNEL
MEMBER FOR BLAIR**

**LABOR WELCOMES NEW INDEPENDENT COMMISSIONER FOR DEFENCE
AND VETERAN SUICIDE**

Labor welcomes the Morrison Government's announcement of a new independent Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention.

This follows Labor's announcement last year that it would support a Royal Commission into veteran suicide.

Labor acknowledges the tireless work of Julie-Ann Finney and the other brave mothers and families of veterans who have campaigned for a Royal Commission, and have met with Labor Members of Parliament to discuss this important issue.

Labor would have preferred an open and transparent Royal Commission to shine a light on this problem.

The Government has said that the new Commission will have the powers of a permanent Royal Commission and be able to examine all ADF and veteran suicide issues, including investigating individual cases and making recommendations.

Labor stands ready to work constructively with the Government to ensure the Commission is vested with these powers and that it is appropriately resourced.

It is pleasing that families of veterans will also be engaged in the process and will be able to tell their stories and be heard.

Labor notes that an independent Veteran Family Advocate will be appointed to represent the views of veteran families to the Department of Veterans' Affairs and influence policy to improve mental health outcomes.

The Productivity Commission (PC) report on the veteran support system recommended better engagement with families, and found there was an urgent need for a new Veteran Mental Health Strategy with a focus on suicide prevention.

It is disappointing that the Morrison Government has so far failed to respond to the recommendations of the PC report, and failed to deliver the Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and National Action Plan, despite promising this by the end of last year.

It is hoped the new independent watchdog will help us understand why so many of our veterans are taking their own lives, and what strategies and actions are needed to stop these tragic deaths.

As always, the devil will be in the detail and Labor awaits the release of draft enabling legislation to ensure it delivers what the Government has promised.

It is crucial that the Commissioner has all the powers of a Royal Commission, including the ability to launch own motion investigations, compel evidence and summon witnesses, and conduct public and private hearings.

It is also important that the Commissioner and the Advocate are appropriately resourced to carry out their tasks effectively.

This is an important step forward and Labor will work constructively with the Government, these new offices, and veterans and their families to tackle the scourge of veteran suicide.

THURSDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2020

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra