

**AFGHANISTAN INQUIRY IMPLEMENTATION OVERSIGHT PANEL**

**(O) REPORT NUMBER 12: QUARTERLY REPORT TO THE MINISTER FOR DEFENCE  
August 2023 – October 2023**

**(O) Table of Contents**

- 1. Key Points.....1**
- 2. Background .....2**
- 3. Confidential interviews with SOCOMD external stakeholders.....2**
- 4. Visits to 2 Commando Regiment and Special Air Service Regiment .....2**
- 5. Support to Veterans affected by OSI Investigations, and related matters.....3**
- 6. Meeting with Australian Defence College .....4**
- 7. Meetings with Defence People Group.....4**
- 8. Compensation .....5**
- 9. Engagement with Stakeholders .....5**
- 10. Future Reports.....6**

**1. Key Points**

- **(O:S)** Feedback obtained in the Panel’s second series of confidential interviews on how cultural change across SOCOMD was being experienced by its external partners was generally positive.
- **(O:S)** The Panel visited 2 Commando Regiment and Special Air Service Regiment. s45 [redacted]  
[redacted]  
the Panel retains some reservations about this relationship. s33(a)(ii) [redacted]  
[redacted]
- **(O)** Engagement with Department of Veterans’ Affairs officials confirmed that they are giving ongoing and active considerations to the needs of persons affected by the Afghanistan Inquiry, and their families, and are in regular contact with Defence to understand when attention to particular cohorts or individuals may be needed.
- **(O:S)** The Panel believes opportunity remains for s47C [redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]
- **(O)** The Panel is satisfied with Defence’s progress in the following initiatives:
  - Mitigation Strategies for Exceptionalism
  - Research into Operational Incentives
  - Defence Culture Blueprint.
- **(O:S)** The Panel supports the approach to compensation as currently proposed by Defence.

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## 2. Background

(O) Dr Vivienne Thom AM, Mr Robert Cornall AO and Professor Rufus Black were appointed as members of the Afghanistan Inquiry Implementation Oversight Panel in November 2020 shortly before the release of the IGADF Afghanistan Inquiry Report. The Panel provides independent oversight and assurance relating to Defence's response to the Afghanistan Inquiry and reports directly to the Minister for Defence. The Panel is required to report quarterly. This is the twelfth report and covers the period 1 August 2023 to 31 October 2023.

## 3. Confidential interviews with SOCOMD external stakeholders

(O) In our Eighth Quarterly Report to you, covering the period August to October 2022, we reported that we had conducted a series of confidential interviews seeking information on how cultural change across the Command was being experienced by its external partners. The Panel particularly sought to assess whether the reported culture of exceptionalism (called out in the 2018 and 2020 Irvine Reviews) had been adequately addressed by a renewed focus within the Command on 'humility' as a counter-balancing central value. Our perception in 2022 was that SOCOMD's external relationships appeared to s45

(O:S) The Panel conducted a second series of interviews this year, aimed at seeking feedback on relationships from those at lower rank levels within organisations. That is, from those who regularly interact with the Command's patrol and troop leaders, Sergeants, Warrant Officers and officers up to the rank of Major (or other ADF and APS equivalents).

(O:S) Seventeen confidential interviews were conducted with stakeholders including from: Headquarters Joint Operations Command; individuals who had deployed with SOCOMD members in ADF Taskforces over the past two years; the Defence School of Infantry, Defence School of Intelligence, 2/30 Training Group, 1st Intelligence Battalion, and 13th Brigade; s33(a)(ii) . Interviewees were selected who had regular and routine relationships with SOCOMD at tactical and working levels; reflecting that, with the passage of time, culture change should ideally have been established throughout SOCOMD's entire chain of command by now.

(O:S) A summary of our impressions from the interviews is at Enclosure 1. Overall, the Panel considers that SOCOMD's external relationships currently appear to be in good shape.

(O) The Panel notes that although this was the fifth SOCOMD stakeholder feedback process completed since 2016 (with earlier interviews undertaken by Dr Samantha Cromptvoets and by Mr David Irvine AO with people in senior leadership positions in stakeholder agencies); the process continues to provide valuable information. Army has committed to continuing with a similar, regular, process going forward.

## 4. Visits to 2 Commando Regiment and Special Air Service Regiment

(O) Noting that the feedback from external partners described above was positive overall, the Panel used their visits to 2 Cdo Regt and SASR in September and October 2023 to test perceptions of the relationships between individuals in the regiments that may not be visible to outsiders. During the period when the regiments were deploying members to Afghanistan, these relationships were often described as unhealthy at best or toxic at worst.

(O:S) s45  
the Panel retains some reservations. s45

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(O:S) s33(a)(ii)

we are concerned that the recent lessons learned about the overuse of SASR are remembered.

## 5. Support to Veterans affected by OSI Investigations, and related matters

(O) Following from the Panel's meeting with the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA's) First Assistant Secretary, Mental Health and Well Being Service on 14 July 2023 (reported in our previous quarterly report), the Panel engaged in more depth with staff across DVA in relation to paragraph 15(c) of the Panel's Terms of Reference on:

*Whether appropriate welfare ... support is being provided to persons affected by the Inquiry; including consideration of the support and services provided by the ex-service organisations and how these are complementary to, and integrated with, the services provided by both Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.*

(O) The Panel subsequently met with:

- The National Manager, Open Arms on 3 August 2023
- A/Assistant Secretary Benefits Policy on 4 August 2023, and
- DVA Deputy Commissioner Western Australia and team members from the Perth area on 28 September 2023.

(O) These meetings reinforced that DVA is giving ongoing and active considerations to the needs of persons affected by Inquiry, and their families, and are in regular contact with Defence to understand when attention to particular cohorts or individuals may be needed.

(O) While in Perth, Dr Thom had the opportunity to spend time with DVA staff on the ground who interact with members and ex-members of SASR most often, including members of:

- Open Arms client support and lived experience officers
- the veterans support officer team who attend Campbell Barracks, and
- the coordinator client support team.

(O) They confirmed local arrangements that are in place for DVA participation in Campbell Barracks welfare boards, when invited, and how they engage with ADF members in WA who are medically or administratively discharged to assist their transition from service. The Coordinator Client Support team also confirmed arrangements to assist with issues such as use of crisis accommodation program, financial counselling, application for a DVA white card, and addressing problems particular to each member that relate to their geographic location (noting this is particularly relevant to remote WA regions if members move there after separation from service).

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(O) The Panel appreciated these comprehensive and helpful briefings.

## 6. Meeting with Australian Defence College

(O) During this quarter, the Australian Defence College provided the Panel with a final draft of ADF Command Doctrine, and met with the Panel to brief on the full range of social mastery reform initiatives being implemented under their leadership, including:

- ‘Train the trainer’ activities to assist training schools to best deliver content from the Ethics Doctrine
- Delivering a quarterly Military Philosophy Roundtable, in collaboration with the Cranlana Centre for Ethical Leadership, as Defence’s flagship ethics education program
- Developing accessible ethics content and educational resources for individual and unit-led learning including an online ‘Introduction to Military Ethics’ program
- Publishing ADF-P-0 Military Character and establishing a Community of Practice
- Recording and on-line publishing of Character Vignettes
- Finalising the draft ‘Character’ training and education continuum
- Progress towards publishing the social mastery vignettes series (to fulfil a recommendation in the IGADF Afghanistan Inquiry Report)
- Development of a principles-based framework to guide the selection of all Command appointments
- s47C [REDACTED]
- Progress at the Centre for Defence Leadership and Ethics (CDLE) to implement a quality assurance framework that provides ongoing measurement, evaluation and sustainment of Defence social mastery.

(O) The Panel considers that CDLE has led a full program of work across the last three years to ensure the ADF’s doctrine, practices and teaching of ethics, leadership, command and culture represent best practice. It is our view that this work should collectively protect the ADF against the risk that events such as those described in the IGADF Afghanistan Inquiry Report may recur; and individually protect ADF members against the risk of moral injury. However, we note the need for properly resourced ongoing assurance that training across all services is aligned to ADF doctrine.

(O) The Panel believes opportunity remains for s47C [REDACTED]

## 7. Meetings with Defence People Group

(O) On 11 August 2023, the Panel met with Head People Capability (now Head of Military Personnel) to be briefed on two reform initiatives: *Mitigation Strategies for Exceptionalism* and *Research into Operational Incentives*.

(O) The Panel is satisfied that the complex interactions between the benefits and risks of incentives to deploy (embedded in ADF salary, allowances, honours and awards and policy structures) are now being

suitably explored. This initiative will be concluded after the Panel's tenure has ended, so we will be unable to comment on its final outcomes; however, we consider that the endorsed project plan is a strong indication of Defence seeking to better align its incentive structures with the life-time wellbeing of members in mind.

(O) Similarly, although the work on mitigation strategies for exceptionalism will not be completed while the Panel is in place, we are satisfied that progress to date indicates Defence has targeted the right areas on which to focus its efforts and embed lessons learnt to prevent recurrence.

(O) On 22 September 2023, the Panel was also briefed on progress in the Defence Culture Blueprint program over the past year, and its intended program approach going forward. The Panel was impressed by the comprehensive nature of this initiative but questioned how Defence will ensure that it will endure given likely changes in personnel in the future.

## 8. Compensation

(O:S) The Panel had visibility of the advice provided to you in June 2023 through s47C (classified above the level of this report).

(O:S) s47C

This was one of the matters raised with the Secretary and Associate Secretary in our meeting on 22 August 2023. s47C

(O) The Panel supports the approach proposed by Defence it understands is currently being progressed.

## 9. Engagement with Stakeholders

(O) The Panel continues to meet with as many current and former Defence personnel, external government agencies and non-government stakeholders as practicable.

(O) In the period from August to October 2023 the Panel engaged with:

- National Manager Open Arms, DVA (3 August 2023)
- A/Assistant Secretary Benefits Policy, DVA (4 August 2023)
- Head People Capability (11 August 2023)
- Secretary and Associate Secretary (22 August 2023)
- Australian Defence College (25 August 2023)
- Deputy Secretary Strategy, Policy and Industry (25 August 2023)
- 2 Commando Regiment (29 August 2023)
- 17 Confidential Interviews with SOCOMD External Stakeholders (4 September to 6 October 2023)
- Assistant Secretary, Culture and People Development (22 September 2023)
- DVA Deputy Commissioner Western Australia (28 September 2023)
- Special Air Service Regiment (28-29 September 2023)
- Chief of the Defence Force, Secretary and Chief of Army (5 October 2023)
- Special Operations Commander, Australia (9 October 2023), and
- Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence (30 October 2023). *(Note to FOI 388 23-24: This meeting was re-scheduled to 6 Nov 23)*

## 10. Future Reports

(O) This report is the Panel's last Quarterly Report.

(O) A Final Report covering observations over our full three years of oversight activity has been prepared and will be provided to you on 8 November 2023.

- A draft of that report was provided to the CDF, Secretary, Chief of Army and Special Operations Commander, Australia on 20 September 2023; seeking their feedback on factual accuracy, clarity, sensitivity and classification
- The Panel also met with those officials in early October (see previous point) to discuss the draft, and
- Defence has confirmed that there is no information within the report which requires a security classification. It will therefore be open to you to table that report in the Parliament, at your discretion, as anticipated in paragraph 22 of the Panel's Terms of Reference.

Dr Vivienne Thom AM  
Lead, Afghanistan Inquiry Implementation Oversight Panel  
31 October 2023

Enclosure:

1. (O) Summary of Panel Impressions from Confidential Interviews with SOCOMD External Stakeholders

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ENCLOSURE 1  
AIIOP 12<sup>th</sup> QUARTERLY REPORT

**(O) Summary of Panel Impressions from Confidential Interviews with SOCOMD External Stakeholders**

Overall impressions

**(O:S)** The feedback provided was positive overall. Stakeholders observed many people had worked hard over many years to change the Command's reputation and that is now seeing results.

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- [Redacted]

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Areas of strength

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[Redacted]

s45 [Redacted]

- | [Redacted]
- | [Redacted]
- | [Redacted]
- | [Redacted]
- | [Redacted]

45 [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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Humility

s45 [Redacted]

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Other observations

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

[Redacted]

