

Media Release

Closure of reports to the Defence abuse reparation scheme – 30 June 2023

The Commonwealth Ombudsman is also the Defence Force Ombudsman (DFO). Since 1 December 2016, the DFO has performed an independent function receiving reports of abuse within the Australian Defence Force (Defence). This function was given to the DFO after the Defence Abuse Response Taskforce ended on 31 August 2016.

The DFO can receive reports of serious abuse within Defence and take appropriate action to respond, including by facilitating referrals to counselling and participation in our Restorative Engagement Program. This provides an independent and confidential mechanism to report abuse for those who feel unwilling or unable to access internal Defence mechanisms.

For a limited period from 16 December 2017, under the Defence abuse reparation scheme (the Scheme), the DFO was also able to recommend that Defence make a reparation payment of up to \$50,000 in relation to reports of the most serious forms of abuse which occurred before 30 June 2014. A reparation payment represents an acknowledgement by Defence that the abuse suffered by the complainant was wrong, that it can have a lasting and serious impact and also that, in the past, Defence was not positioned appropriately to respond to abuse in many cases.

The Scheme closed to reports on 30 June 2023. For the 5 and a half years the Scheme was open to reports, the DFO received over 4500 reports of abuse, not all of which have been assessed by the DFO. To be considered for a reparation payment a report must have been:

- submitted to the DFO on or before 30 June 2022, or
- submitted to the DFO on or before 30 June 2023, but only if the person gave the DFO a written intent to report on or before 30 June 2022.

Reports of abuse received after Friday 30 June 2023, or that relate to abuse that occurred after 30 June 2014, are not eligible to be considered for a reparation payment under the Scheme.

We acknowledge the courage of reportees who made the significant and difficult step to come forward and tell us about their experience of abuse while serving in Defence. DFO staff have worked with reportees to assist them to engage safely with our Office recognising the trauma they have experienced. Our work is informed by trauma-informed practice and principles of safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment.

The DFO will assess all reports of abuse received on or before midnight on 30 June 2023 under the Scheme to determine whether to recommend that Defence make a reparation payment. The DFO will issue an interim report on the Scheme later this year, and a final report after all reports of abuse have been assessed.

While the Scheme is now closed, the DFO can still receive reports of serious abuse within Defence, including to facilitate a referral to counselling and/or participation in our Restorative Engagement Program.

Further information about the role of the DFO and the ongoing assistance we can provide is available on the [Commonwealth Ombudsman website](#)