




Speech By
Bart Mellish

MEMBER FOR ASPLEY

Record of Proceedings, 26 May 2022

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENT

Veterans Community

 **Mr MELLISH** (Aspley—ALP) (2.35 pm): On a positive note, as the assistant minister for veterans' affairs, I congratulate the incoming Albanese government. I look forward to working with them in the veterans space. They will get some great outcomes in Queensland for veterans and their families. As the opposition spokesman, Shayne Neumann was able to secure some fantastic veterans commitments, and I very much look forward to seeing them roll out. These ranged from staffing to veterans hubs and increased payments—a really comprehensive package.

They have committed to cutting waiting times and the backlog of compensation claims by funding 500 additional staff at the Department of Veterans' Affairs to speed up claims processing. This is the very issue that the previous minister, Andrew Gee, threatened to quit over on the eve of the last federal budget, so I am really pleased to see this being addressed. They will abolish the departmental staffing cap which has stopped DVA from hiring more well-trained permanent staff to process claims faster. I have often heard from the veterans community of their difficulty dealing with contractors rather than full-time staff when they are waiting for an outcome to their claims, so this is a very positive step.

They will also roll out a network of 10 veterans hubs across Australia in areas with significant defence and veterans communities, including two in Queensland—one in Ipswich and one in the Moreton Bay and north Brisbane region. These hubs will act as one-stop shops for local veterans services, including health and mental health services, wellbeing support, advocacy, employment and housing advice, and social connection. Of course, these are building off the success of the Oasis in Townsville. As the pilot project in Queensland, we provided over \$5 million in funding to set that up in the electorate of the member for Mundingburra. I know every member in Townsville is a regular visitor to that centre.

Mr Harper interjected.

Mr MELLISH: I take that interjection from the member for Thuringowa. The federal Labor government will be boosting home ownership for defence personnel and veterans by expanding the eligibility criteria for the Defence Home Ownership Assistance Scheme. Importantly, they are increasing the totally and permanently incapacitated veterans pension. This is a \$1,000 permanent increase in the annual rate of the TPI payment for eligible disabled veterans. That will go a long way. They also have some other fantastic initiatives, such as expanding the veterans employment program and more emergency housing for veterans experiencing homelessness through their Housing Australia Future Fund. That ties in well with our efforts in this area.

Last but not least, they are providing additional support for the veteran-led disaster response organisation, Disaster Relief Australia, which does a fantastic job. They are almost doubling its ranks of veteran volunteers to more than 13,000. I look forward to working with the incoming Albanese government on these initiatives. We will get them done. I think veterans space is a good area where different state jurisdictions and the federal government work well together. I look forward to seeing these initiatives and more roll out in the coming years.