Dear James,

I am writing in response to your letter of 23 April regarding abuse in the Australian Defence Force. You mention the decision by the Australian Government to apologise to members of the Australian Defence Force who had suffered abuse in the course of their service, and the further decision to establish a Defence Abuse Taskforce. You asked whether the UK Government is considering taking similar steps.

Members of the Committee will be aware that I am taking a close interest in this issue, and I had the opportunity to put forward the Government’s position during a debate in Westminster Hall on 31 January this year. You will therefore also know that I do not share the opinion of some members of the Committee that abuse, sexual or otherwise, is somehow endemic in the Armed Forces. I believe occurrences of offences of this nature reflect behaviours in the wider population.

Abuse, whether by bullying, harassment, or of a sexual nature, is not tolerated anywhere in the Ministry of Defence. The standards of behaviour we expect and what happens if those standards are not maintained is communicated to all personnel, civilian and military. A number of measures are in place both to deter potential offenders and encourage victims to speak out. When reported, offences are dealt with by specially trained investigators conversant with modern techniques in identifying offences, evidence-gathering, forensics and crime-scene management.

The decision taken by the Australia Government is a matter solely for them, and it would be inappropriate for me to comment. However, the UK Government has no plans either to make an apology, or to establish a taskforce along similar lines to that in Australia.

Yours,

Mark Francois MP

THE RT HON MARK FRANCOIS MP

The Rt Hon James Arbuthnot MP
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