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Senator Payman Exposes Another Government Shortcoming

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Independent Senator Fatima Payman has raised serious concerns over the Australian Defence Force's (ADF) recruitment efforts, pointing to the Labor government's failure to significantly increase military personnel numbers. A recruitment policy allowing citizens from allied countries—New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States—to enlist has yielded minimal results, with only three New Zealanders joining and no recruits from other nations.

In June 2024, the Labor government introduced this initiative to help address the ADF's ongoing recruitment challenges. However, Senator Payman's March 2025 parliamentary Question on Notice revealed the scheme's poor performance. She criticised the program, describing it as "announced with great fanfare, but it's been a consummate disaster."

Defence Minister Richard Marles had promoted the policy as essential for national security, yet the ADF remains approximately 4,400 personnel short of its 62,000 target.

This personnel shortfall poses significant risks to Australia's \$50 billion defence sector, which is integral to economic stability and maintaining regional influence. A weakened ADF could undermine Australia's participation in global trade and key security partnerships such as AUKUS (Australia-United Kingdom-United States), potentially discouraging foreign investment.

Senator Payman, echoing views from Senator Jacqui Lambie, emphasised that the core issue is retention, not recruitment. Factors including low pay, insufficient veteran support, and workplace concerns contribute to personnel attrition, resulting in substantial costs related to ongoing training and recruitment efforts. Opposition figures argue that Labor's focus on overseas recruitment and expensive international projects, including the \$368 billion AUKUS submarine program, detracts from addressing the domestic workforce's needs, thereby increasing pressure on taxpayers.

Shadow Defence Minister Andrew Hastie called for improvements in pay and conditions, asserting that "our soldiers deserve respect, not empty policies." With the 2025 federal election approaching, the government's inability to resolve recruitment and retention challenges raises questions about its capacity to protect Australia's economic and strategic interests, leaving the ADF understaffed and the nation vulnerable.