

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Overwatch Battle Group

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (6.49 p.m.)—I acknowledge that the Overwatch Battle Group, together with the Australian Army's training team in Iraq, ceased operations at their base at Talil in Dhi Qar province yesterday, and I rise to honour their service. Overwatch Battle Group West 2 carried out more than 300 patrols across the 72,000 square kilometre area of operations. These patrols included providing security for reconstruction projects, meeting local leaders and providing convoy escorts, as well as the training and mentoring of the Iraqi security forces in Dhi Qar and the neighbouring Al Muthanna province. I join the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Tony Rawlings, in praising the efforts of all members of the battle group.

About 300 Australian combat personnel will remain in Iraq, serving with the ADF's task force headquarters in Baghdad and with the security detachment guarding the Australian embassy in the green zone. Another 600-odd personnel will also remain deployed in the region at coalition and support headquarters and with our Navy elements that have been deployed in the gulf since the first Gulf War. The Australian Army, especially the Overwatch Battle Group West 2, has operated in the great traditions of the ANZACs and of our forefathers. They have fought well and hard. They have not been found wanting, and I join all those in parliament who stand today to support the great work they have done.