



DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

A member of the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations

MONTHLY UPDATE #271 – 15 May 2012

‘UPDATE’ is a monthly e-letter produced by the Defence Force Welfare Association containing current items of interest to the Service and ex-Service communities. It is widely distributed to Members of Parliament, media outlets, senior Service and Public Service Officers, DFWA members and supporters.

THE FAIR GO CAMPAIGN ROLLS ON

Operation AWARE

The **Alliance of Defence Service Organisations’** Fair Go Campaign rolled on throughout the reporting period, albeit **Operation AWARE** (the Alliance’s media and public information campaign) was wound down as ANZAC Day approached. ANZAC Day itself, being a day of remembrance, was not used to further lobby parliamentarians. Nor was the day used to generally publicise the issues in the print or other media.

That said, some journalists nonetheless found independent ways to write articles that both incorporated and emphasised the plight of those who had served and, having done so, how they had been ignored and forgotten by Government’s of all persuasions. There were numerous such articles but one of the more profound ones actually appeared on ANZAC Day, not in a main stream newspaper, rather, in the **Port Macquarie News**. It quoted the views of Bill Lord who, at the age of 95, can still recall with pride that he is the only survivor of the three-man team that founded the original Defence Force Welfare Association over 50 years ago. *“I’m so far behind with my pension.....against the cost of living”* said Bill to the reporter *“that it’s just simply not fair”*.

There are now many tens of thousands of ex service men and women that are exactly like Bill. Each can justly claim that, of course, it’s **'Not Fair'** that their entitlements have been so eroded over time that they no longer come close to representing the conditions of service under which they joined. Superannuation payments (pensions) have not been indexed so as to maintain their purchasing power.

Notice of Motion Initiative - Military Superannuation

Perhaps sensing the injustice of it all and almost within days of Macquarie News reporting on Bill Lord the Federal Member for Lyne announced that he had actually tabled a **Notice of Motion** into Parliament on **Military Superannuation**. The Notice had been seconded by the Member for New England, **Tony Windsor**. It asked the House to recognise not only *‘the involvement of Australian service men and women in war and peacekeeping operations but to also recognise the role of family, friends and community networks in supporting those Australians who had served in the military’*.

The Member for Lyne's Motion called on the Government to:

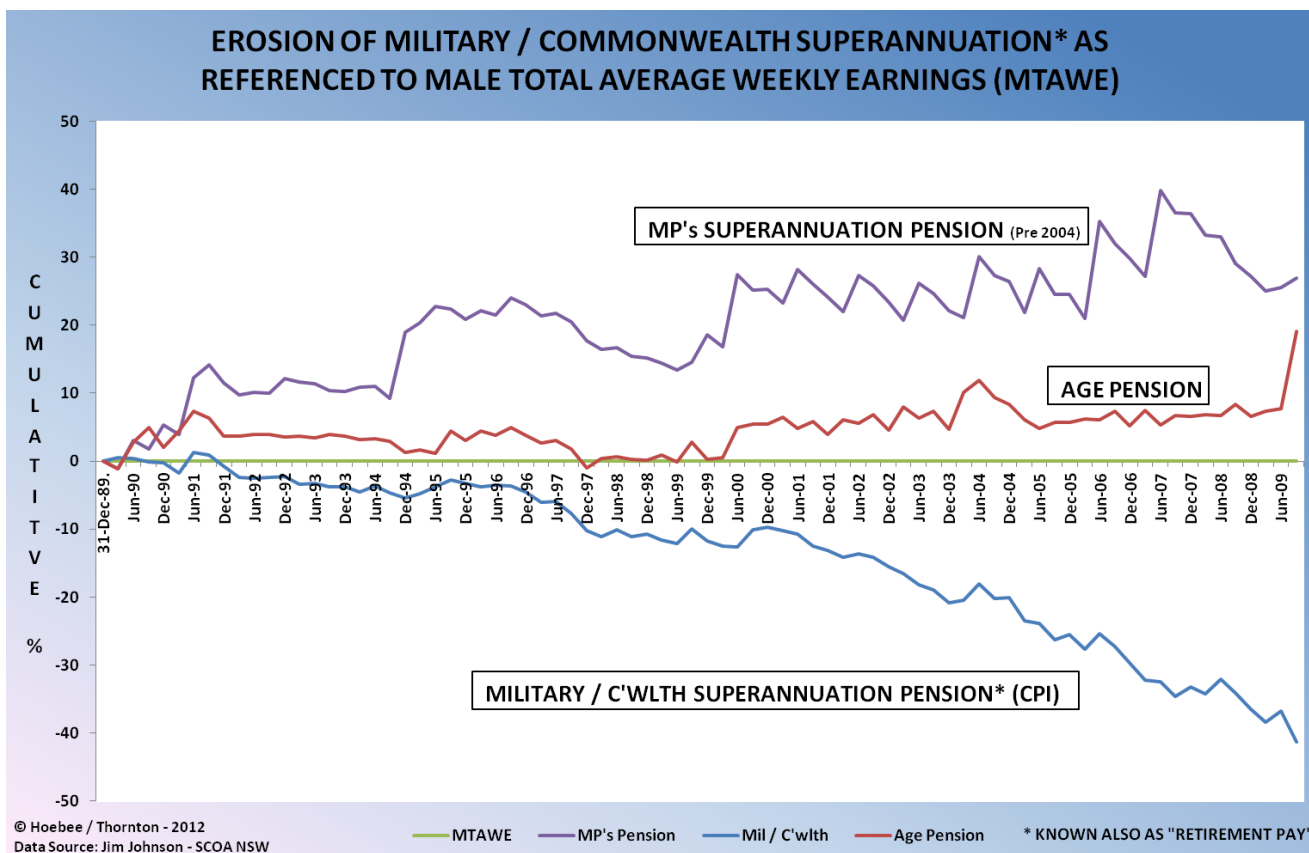
- Consider increasing the Military Superannuation and Benefits Scheme Pension, Defence Force Retirement Benefit Pension and the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Pension twice annually by the greatest of the Consumer Price Index, the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index and the Male Total Average Weekly Earnings; and
- To do this in recognition of the unique circumstances of military service compared to all others within the public service.

'Statement of Support' - Ex Military Chiefs and Corporate Identities

The regional Macquarie News reporting on Bill Lord and then Mr Oakeshott's initiative may have been one thing but entirely another was the nationally circulated newspaper 'The Australian' carrying the headline on Monday 30th April titled '**Rinehart and Downer Join Bid to Boost ADF Pensions**'.

The article that followed the headline had been unquestionably written as a direct result of the Media Release jointly signed by Gina Rinehart herself and Air Vice Marshal Peter Criss (ret) and issued the week before. The Release announced that a sizable number of ex military chiefs and corporate figures had joined forces in a '**Statement of Support**' imploring the leaders of all the major political parties to announce that all forms of military superannuation pensions will receive the same percentage increase twice yearly, as is applied to the age pension, and that the DVA disability pension be fully restored.

The 'Erosion' graph (prepared by Peter Thornton and Bert Hoebee) which is now familiar to many was also printed in the article and starkly showed to the public at large what had actually happened to military superannuation pensions over time when compared to age pensions and those that politicians enjoy. For the ready reference of readers the graph is reproduced below.



Summary – Media Activities

Operation AWARE and the Fair Go campaign enjoyed substantial media coverage during the reporting period. This included appearances by spokesmen on both radio and TV, and articles written by various parties in the print media as well. A summary of the key events were as follows:

- **‘Townsville Bulletin** – Saturday 14 April an article written by Ross Eastgate (a graduate of Duntroon) and titled **‘Vets Battle for Equity’** appeared in the Townsville Bulletin. A link to it is here: http://www.townsvillebulletin.com.au/article/2012/04/14/322401_defence.html
- **AVM Peter Criss** – Monday 16 April Channel 10 Breakfast program interviewed Peter. For those who may have missed it and still want to catch up to a hard-hitting performance, here is the link: http://tenbreakfast.com.au/video.htm?movideo_m=178361
- **AVM Peter Criss** – Wednesday 18 April radio 2UE interviewed Peter again on air. Here is the link: <http://www.2ue.com.au/blogs/2ue-blog/veterans-deserve-better-pension-rise/20120417-1x4ae.html>
- **Media Release – ‘Fair Indexation – Just Not for Australian Ex Service Men and Women’**. Thursday 19 April a media statement released in response to Labor Foreign Minister Carr expressing admirable concern during the week regarding the welfare of UK pensioners living in Australia. He called for their pensions to be **indexed** in the same way as they are indexed in other parts of the world. He felt that it was ‘unfair’. That being the case, why can’t he and his Labor Government show similar concern and compassion for the welfare of Australian service men and women, including their families, living on military superannuation pensions?
- **Sydney Morning Herald** – Thursday 19 April an opinion article by Bert Hoebee appeared in the SMH titled **‘Time to fix fiasco of veterans’ pensions’**. It potently highlights breeches of trust between the nation and its defenders, and the conditions under which they served. <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/politics/time-to-fix-fiasco-of-veterans-pensions-20120418-1x7im.html>
- **AVM Peter Criss** – Friday 20 April radio 4BC with Greg Cary interviewed Peter on air. Here is the link: <http://www.4bc.com.au/blogs/4bc-blog/veteran-pensions/20120420-1xbda.html>
- **MAJ GEN Jim Molan** - Sunday 22 April Channel 9 interviewed Jim on the Today Show. He was able to use the erosion graph with potent effect while emphasising that the Government was reneging on its promises to honour a compact with Defence servicemen and women. A link to the interview is unfortunately not yet available. It will be on-forwarded when received.
- **AVM Peter Criss** – Monday 23 April Channel 10 Breakfast program again interviewed Peter. For those who may have missed it and still want to catch up to another great performance, here is the link: http://tenbreakfast.com.au/video.htm?movideo_m=181455
- **AVM Peter Criss** – Monday 23 April Peter was again interviewed on 6PR radio with Howard Sattler. The interview includes a link up with the Minister for State, Gary Grey. The discussion focused on the military superannuation indexation matter in some detail. Listening to the interview is a must if only to hear the Government’s ‘rationale’ (logic!!!!) for not accepting that it has been unfair to ex service men and women. Here is the link: <http://www.6pr.com.au/blogs/6pr-perth-blog/defence-fight-for-fair-go/20120423-1xh7q.html>

- **Geelong Advertiser** – Tuesday 24 April an article appeared in the Advertiser titled ‘**Government Can’t Forget Our Vets**’. It was interesting to the extent that the article talked about Salvos finding *‘an inordinate number of defence force veterans approaching them in need of assistance as they struggle to meet the same ever-rising bills and cost of living charges the rest of us have to contend with’*. The link to the article is here: http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/article/2012/04/24/321911_opinion.html
- **Greg Carey Radio 4BC Brisbane** – Monday 30 April Greg, who had previously interviewed Peter Criss a week or so before, made strong comments in support on his morning show of both the ADSO Fair Go campaign and the fact that ‘high powered’ ex military chiefs and captains of industry had been voicing support for fair indexation of military superannuation pensions.
- **The Australian** – Wednesday 2 May former Howard Government era Minister Nick Minchin caused a flurry of public comment when The Australia printed his letter in which he proffered an opinion that *‘.the government should continue to reject this demand’ (of ex military service me and women for fait indexation)*. Rebuttal of the Minchin letter was prepared and sent to a variety of media outlets, including Greg Carey 4 BC, Jason Morrison 2UE and to 6PR.
- **Independent Australian Article** – Saturday 5 May a relevant and most informative article by Tess Lawrence titled ‘**At the going down of the sun we will forget them**’ appeared in the Independent Australian. The article contains personal stories of the ‘torrid circumstances in which some returned servicemen and women live, and their dismal superannuation payouts and death benefits’. Here is a link: <http://www.independentaustralia.net/2012/australian-identity/at-the-going-down-of-the-sun-we-will-forget-them/>
- **Geelong Advertiser Special Report** – Saturday 5 May a feature article titled ‘**Vets’ Daily Struggle – Trapped in Darkness**’ appeared in the Geelong Advertiser which highlighted the poor circumstances under which veterans live. It reported that in the greater Geelong area there were 4002 residents in the DVA system, the number topping the State for those who depend on military superannuation benefits. No link to the article available.
- **Numerous Letters to Editors** – Numerous letters to the editor appeared in a variety of newspapers either supporting the article (**‘Rinehart and Downer Join Bid to Boost ADF Pensions’**) or rebutting Nick Minchin letter to the editor. A link to two representative comments can be found here for those interested: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/nick-minchin-is-off-the-mark/story-fn558imw-1226345193179>

Two other specific events occurred during the reporting period as follows:

- **ADSO Press Release** – Thursday 10 May a Press Release was issued today titled ‘**Some Good Outcomes (but) Much More (is) Needed**’. It commented on the Minister for Veteran Affairs’ own Press Release in which he stated: *“Our priority is to make sure we look after those who have sacrificed so much for this country”*. The aspirations of the words were applauded but mean little if they deliver little.
- **Letter to Special Minister of State Garry Gray** – The National President responded in a letter to the Minister following his ill-considered comments in a radio interview during which he stated: *“The Government will continue to index pensions at CPI as we always said we will and we will treat our serving forces and retired military people with the respect they deserve and ensure the benefits and pensions they receive is what they signed up for.”* The letter pointed out to the Minister that, inter alia, his thinking did not accord with the facts. And that DFWA saw the issue as one of fairness and equity as well as the meeting of a commitment made to every service man and woman when they sign up; that in receiving a military superannuation pension, its relative value would be preserved not eroded over time forcing them deep into the social welfare safety net.

DFWA Position - DECA/WRA

The DFWA Vice President Pay & Conditions of Service (Phil Morrall) continued his work by attending the Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal on 2 May 12. He sought leave on behalf of DFWA (granted) to intervene in the case – **SALARY RELATED ALLOWANCE REVIEW**. As a reminder, the case involves a lengthy process to review Salary Related Allowances, such as Service Allowance, Special Forces Allowance, Field Allowance and the like – over 90 allowances are involved.

The case was in its very early stage but DFWA was able to put and/or highlight the following:

- It generally supports the ADF intended methodology and structure of the case;
- Regarding WRA and DECA outcomes, it did not agree that there were no material differences between the WRA and DECA and thus no further action needed to be taken;
- DFWA was yet to receive figures from ADF that supported its position. CDF was to make some announcement soon, at which time the figures could be made available;
- In the context of the Tribunal's reasons for decision on WRA in November 2011 (in which the tribunal highlighted the incongruity of ADF members being required to operate inside 'A Government Bargaining Framework when they had no capacity to bargain') assurances were sought that DFWA would be involved in deliberations to resolve the issues before it;
- DFWA support was predicated on its ability to seek the Tribunal's agreement to re-open the WRA case should DFWA and The Parties' differences not be resolved.
- DFWA strongly recommended that the ADF Member's communication be a specific Tribunal direction in the Salary related Allowance case.

The next hearing of the Tribunal is scheduled for June 2012. More information from Phil for those interested.

National Executive Meeting

The next meeting of the National Executive (NATEX) is scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday 22/23 May 2012.

For the information of readers the Executive consists of the National President, Deputy National President, National Treasurer, all National Vice-Presidents, the Presidents of each State Branch, and the Executive Director (non-voting member). Invited observers may also attend.

This year NATEX will be held at the Australian Defence Force Academy.

Summary

A high level of positive activity on the Fair Go and Operation AWARE campaigns continued throughout the reporting period. Some excellent exposure throughout all media outlets was achieved. The highlights included a number of TV and radio interviews of Alliance spokesmen, particularly **Air Vice Marshal Peter Criss (Ret)** and **MAJ GEN Jim Molan (Ret)** both of whom appeared on numerous occasions delivering the strong case for 'fairness'. Readers are encouraged to see for themselves what was said by clicking on the given links in this Update.

Media Contacts

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*ADSO comprises the Defence Force Welfare Association (DFWA), the Naval Association of Australia (NAA), the RAAF Association (RAAFA), the Royal Australian Regiment Corporation (RARAC) and the Australian Special Air Service Association (ASASA).