



DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

MONTHLY UPDATE #245 – 17 November 2009

UPDATE is a monthly newssheet produced by the Defence Force Welfare Association containing current items of interest to the Service and ex-Service community. It is widely distributed to politicians, media outlets, senior Service and Public Service officers and DFWA members.

THE MILITARY REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION COMMISSION

Despite the Government's outward display of consultation on the matter, our initial concerns regarding the composition of steering committee overseeing the review of the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act (MRCA) have not been allayed.

The committee will be chaired by Mr Ian Campbell, with members Major General Craig Orme (Defence); Ms Peta Furnell (Treasury); Ms Joan Ross (Finance and Deregulation); Ms Michelle Baxter (Education, Employment and Workplace Relations); and Mr Peter Sutherland, an independent expert in military rehabilitation and compensation law and a Visiting Fellow at the Australian National University College of Law. Having ESO "observers" is not the answer: the Committee must include those who will be affected by the recipients of MRCA: the review is not about finance, but about doing the right thing to those affected by the Act.

MILITARY SUPERANNUATION INDEXATION: MEETING WITH MINISTER TANNER

The Association, along with representatives of the Superannuated Commonwealth Officers' Association (SCOA) has been successful in seeking a meeting with the Minister for Deregulation and Finance, The Hon Lindsay Tanner MP, to discuss the Government's resistance to improving military superannuation. The meeting, expected in late November, follows a recent public meeting in Canberra where over 500 superannuants expressed their strong disquiet over the issue. The meeting:

- noted the strong expectations Labor created prior to the election that on winning office it would provide fairer wage-based indexation of Commonwealth superannuants' pensions;
- deplored the Government's betrayal of Commonwealth superannuant pensioners by unreservedly accepting the Trevor Matthews report recommendations that deny Commonwealth civilian and Defence superannuation pensioners fair pension indexation as enjoyed by most other senior Australians; and
- committed to continuing the campaign for the achievement of fairer pension indexation in line with percentage movements in the married rate of Age Pension

DFWA MAKES ITS SUBMISSION ON THE REVIEW OF ADVOCACY SERVICES

The DVA Review into the Building Excellence in Support and Training (BEST) program, Training and Information Program (TIP) and Veteran and Community Grants Program aims to help inform improvements to advocacy and welfare support to the ex-service community.

The DFWA has presented its submission to the DVA. The Association notes that the essential responsibility of the DVA is to "...support those who serve or have served in defence of our nation..." The ESO community provides a viable, essentially volunteer based structure through which the DVA can effectively and efficiently go a long way towards meeting its obligations.

It follows that the ESOs deserve financial and administrative support from the DVA: essentially, a “win - win” situation for both. Whatever the schemes are in place to provide this support, they need to be based on individual ESOs ability (and past performance) to meet DVA outcomes. Measurement of these outcomes however should not just be based on simplistic measures such as “cases supported” but also on the lobbying, social support, welfare work and the intellectual and independent advice the ESO is able to offer the Government of the day.

THE UNIQUE NATURE OF MILITARY SERVICE

A recent Forum held by the Association reiterated the unique nature of military service. The Forum heard that in recent years there has been a shift in assumptions and attitudes underpinning the way military service is viewed. Those in government who shape policy are increasingly attracted to the idea that the soldier (sailor or airman) is adequately provided for by salary and allowances that compensate for his / her service both while it is being given and after it has ceased. Military service is seen by some as comparable to other forms of service that involve risk and danger, and therefore can no longer be seen as unique.

This is simply not the case !

In volunteering for military service, the individual accepts the surrender of his /her basic rights under Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These rights are, among others, life, liberty and the security of the person. Australia is a signatory of the Declaration, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948.

The soldier, sailor or airman places his or her life, liberty and security of person in the hands of the state. This surrender is not unconditional, though *in extremis*, it is absolute. The state, for its part, accepts the obligation to preserve, as far as is consistent with the achievement of the military mission, the physical and spiritual wellbeing of the individual who places him / her self at its disposal..

In no other calling, occupation or profession has the state the power to accept or demand the surrender of these rights. Military service in this fundamental respect is unique, and the obligation this places on the state is inescapable, as it is enduring.

Policy makers, the Government and society as a whole must realise this: and Government must accept it has a continuing responsibility to take care of its servicemen and women. **This obligation extends beyond the period of service itself, to the physical and psychological consequences of that service.**

Government and policy makers must keep this in mind when framing changes to Military Superannuation, Military Compensation and Conditions of Service. This does not seem to the case when we examine the Government’s track record: for example the finance-focused steering committee examining defence rehabilitation and compensation; and the offhanded manner that our superannuants are treated with the broken promise of their superannuation pensions keeping pace with the cost of living.

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