



DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

MONTHLY UPDATE #256 – 15 December 2010

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

THE ALLIANCE OF DEFENCE SERVICE ORGANISATIONS

The National Presidents of the Defence Force Welfare Association; the Naval Association of Australia; the Royal Australian Regiment Corporation; the Australian Special Air Services Association; and the RAAF Association have signed a Memorandum of Understanding establishing the *Alliance of Defence Service Organisations*.

The objective of the Alliance is to provide a stronger voice on issues impacting the conditions and wellbeing of currently serving and former members of the Australian Defence Force. Its major functions are to:

- improve communication, cooperation and collaboration between member organisations;
- gain mutual advantage from the differing of expertise of each member organisation;
- ensure for each issue being pursued, the appropriate organisation is identified as the “lead organisation” for coordination of the actions undertaken by the Alliance; and
- help spread the workload and ensure the resources of the Alliance members are used to produce the most effective result.

SENATE PUT ON NOTICE

On 18 November 2010 the Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson, tabled a Bill in the Senate to index military pensions in line with the Coalition's pre election commitment.

If passed, the *Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Amendment (Fair Indexation) Bill 2010* will enable DFRDB superannuants aged 55 and over from 1 July 2011 to have their pensions indexed at the higher rate of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE) or the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index (PBLCI). The Opposition has also advised us that they will move to include DFRB recipients as well.

The Association is pleased with this important initiative as it marks the first time legislation has been placed before the Parliament on the matter and therefore the first time our Parliament has been given an opportunity to indicate its support for our well expressed position. However we note that this is only a first step ... proper indexation must be provided to all, especially those under 55 on disability provisions.

We now call upon all elected Senators and Members of Parliament to show their support for the military and veteran community by supporting the legislation, and following up with further legislation to ensure all military superannuants are included. In particular, we call on those independent members who have previously voiced their support for the provisions contained within the legislation, to show their support by voting accordingly.

DEFENCE COMPENSATION WOES CONTINUE

The Association is still awaiting the findings of the Government's review into the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation system. We realize this is a complex area but it is now eighteen months since the Government announced with much fanfare that a Review of Military Compensation Arrangements' Steering Committee was appointed and had commenced its consideration of almost 50 submissions from the service and ex-service communities on military Compensation. The Government's laudable aim of “ ... examining the adequacy and suitability of military rehabilitation and compensation arrangements including perceived

disparities and inequities between legislative scheme ...” is potentially beneficial to those serving and former ADF members who need the support provided by the existing schemes, but a constructive Government response is needed sooner rather than later.

In the meantime, serving members and veterans continue to suffer. The recent media reports have highlighted the fact that soldiers who suffer repeated wounds or injury on frontline service are being denied compensation under assessment arrangements used by the Department of Veterans Affairs, because compensation provided for a previous wound or injury can cancel out entitlements for a later one.

This is but one anomaly and injustice that needs to be resolved. Is it any wonder that many serving members and the veteran community are becoming more cynical when on one hand Governments trumpet their support of the ADF, yet on the other hand don't follow up with **action** on the things that really matter.

Minister, we need Government action to fix the inherent problems in the existing schemes to improve support available to our servicemen and women!

DEFENCE RESERVES - EFFICIENCY

Defence Reservists require 20 days efficient service in a financial year to be declared “efficient” and thereby qualify for **long service medals, health support and Defence housing loans**, however what happens if through no fault of their own, they are not allocated those days? The answer, at the moment, appears to be that they miss out!

The rationale is that when there are financial constraints, the Services correctly state that all positions are capability driven, however the rules relating to the three retention drivers above were made in earlier, more plentiful times and now need to be urgently reviewed.

RANR – the Naval Reserve Whole of Capability Workforce Review reduced Reserve Funded Commitment Positions (FCP) by one third and also their respective number of allocated days by 25%. Was this capability driven or a financial imperative? Irrespective of that if the Reservist was not allocated a minimum of 20 days he could not be declared “efficient”, or in other parlance, “stiff”. This basically affected their officer ranks.

Army – have always acknowledged a need for a minimum of twenty days of training to be basically efficient; so it is a happy coincidence that general Reservists will qualify. Again some officer and senior NCO positions will be affected.

RAAFR – have integrated their workforce, but like Navy have cut deeply into reserve positions. Their Reservists are placed into four bands of allocated days; Band 1 – 50 days, Band 2 – 32 days, Band 3 – 20 days and Band 4 – a minimum of one day! The latter band being the problem in that it raises expectations and Reservists in that band may be available, but cannot find a position.

DFWA and the Defence Reserves Association accept that all positions must be capability driven, but Reservists have a right to be treated equitably if they are available to serve and their “efficiency” should be considered on a case by case basis. Two key points:

- Specialists, e.g. medical, should be declared efficient, based on their speciality, not days.
- Qualification for long service medals is based on continuous efficient service, but under the above circumstances needs to allow for broken service.

The Services need to revise their qualifying rules for these retention incentives to overcome a rising howl of indignation. This is another case of giving willing personnel a “Fair Go”.

***THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION
WISH YOU ALL THE VERY BEST FOR CHRISTMAS AND THE NEW YEAR.***

Media Contacts

Executive Director:

Les Bienkiewicz 0411 444248

www.dfwa.org.au

National President:

David Jamison 0416 107557