



DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

A member of the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations

MONTHLY UPDATE #278 – 20 February 2013

‘UPDATE’ is a monthly e-letter produced by the Defence Force Welfare Association. It informs the Service and ex-Service communities of those current issues that are of most concern to them. Distribution is intended to a wide audience that includes Members of Parliament, media outlets, Senior Service and Public Service Officers, and the members of DFWA, their families and supporters.

INTRODUCTION

Political New Year Starts at a Gallop

According to the Chinese Zodiac, the year 2013 is the ‘Year of the Snake’. Apparently it is a good omen because *‘it means that your family will not starve’*. Recipients of CPI indexed military superannuation and Commonwealth pensions are encouraged to think positively as a result. The flip side to the omen, for those who may not have read it, is that *‘delusion and deception are common’*.

How coincidental, therefore, that this year is a Federal election year, long awaited by many, I know. In the Australian context, no surprises there if Chinese symbolisms are to be believed! The surprise to probably trump all surprises had to arguably be our Prime Minister’s recent unprecedented announcement so early in the year that the scheduled election would be held far off at a distance time eight months away on Saturday 14 September 2013. The longest election campaign in the history of elections was immediately conjured up by probably every voter in the land.

Make or Break Year Looms Large

What, a long election campaign!! *‘Not so’*, vainly claimed the Government, despite a sudden re-emergence of leadership debates and almost irrefutable evidence that some of its very own members had started to even door knock in readiness to be judged by voters on what they had purportedly achieved during their Parliamentary tenures.

Media reports also abounded with stories about how not only the major, but equally the minor parties had commenced positioning themselves in the eyes of the overall Australian electorate; witness here the Greens last week announcing the end to their formal alliance with the Labor Government. The same reports revealed that marginal seat holders appeared particularly nervous, given that many of them undoubtedly realised that all too many broken promises and unfulfilled expectations will weigh heavily against their own re-election.

There is little doubt that many politicians of all persuasions are beginning to quickly focus on the fact that this is a make or break year for many of them.

Is it ‘Make or Break’ for us too?

‘Possibly a make or break year’ for DFWA, you ask? Not quite!! Certainly, there is one issue that could be deemed ‘make or break’, that being the one which not only the Association has fought for many years but equally each of the partners that make up the Alliance of Defence Service

Organisations (ADSO). This is the year that an end needs to be in sight. The callousness of Governments to so unfairly treat those who once served their Nation in uniform must be finally redressed. This is the year that the abysmal unfairness surrounding the erosion of the purchasing power of military superannuation and veterans' disability pension payments over time is remedied.

Other issues on which the Association worked last year will continue to hold priority again this year, no matter what the likely outcome of the election. These issues include but are not limited to the proposal for a Military Covenant; the new scheme to outsource the ADF's medical services to Medibank Health Solutions; the preservation of the privacy of former ADF members under the new National Archives arrangements for the release of records; widening the scope of the 'Jet Fuel Exposure' study; and better support for Reservists returning from operational deployments.

Work to resolving each of these and other issues will remain an on-going priority for DFWA.

FAIR GO CAMPAIGN – THE WAY FORWARD

Present State of Play

This year will be a defining year, given that it is an election year and the election date is now known. Two important developments eventuated in Parliament in 2012, the first of which was the **Notice of Motion** tabled in the Australian Parliament for 'Fair Indexation' by the Member for Lyne, Rob Oakeshott. When finally put to a vote in the House, it received the unanimous support of all 150 MPs. It will be interesting to listen to those MPs who, during their electioneering forays, now try to recant upon that for which they voted and record and so decisively.

And then there was the tabling in October by the Member for Kennedy, Bob Katter, of a Private Member's Bill titled '**Fair Indexation of Military Superannuation Entitlements Bill 2012**'. In essence, the Bill specified that the relevant Minister must, not later than six months after the day on which this Act commences, take legislative action that has the effect that military entitlements are, as soon as practicable and with ongoing effect, to be indexed using the same percentage increase and at the same frequency that is applied to the Age Pension under the Social Security Act 1991. Any means and asset testing under the Social Security Act 1991 is not applicable under this Bill.

The Bill was forecast to be debated in the House sometime during the first sittings of Parliament in 2013. However, it has been referred to the Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services for "*due process*". There now appears little prospect that it will again be heard before mid-year.

What Do the Parties Say?

The Government

The parlous state of the Government's attempts to bring the budget to surplus probably speaks volumes for what it otherwise doesn't say on the fair indexation issue. A saving grace is its support (on voices) of the **Notice of Motion** by the Member for Lyne, Rob Oakeshott. Thereafter, it appears to have remained, at best, silent. On each account, the Government's record must speak for itself: Ministers claim that the current CPI method of indexing military superannuation pension payments is 'fair' and 'generous' (not!); the Coalition's Fair Indexation Bill - opposed; and all pleas for a pledge to remedy an almost unforgivable wrong visited upon military retirees and their families is declined.

The Coalition

To its credit and to perhaps right what was a wrong when they did nothing to fix indexation when they were in Government, the Coalition has now promised that should they be elected to Government

this time, they would in their first budget legislate for fair indexation but only on DFRB/DFRDB retirees over 55. Excluded were invalidity, disabled veterans and reversionary pensioners (widows) under aged 55. They reserved any promise to change MSBS indexation until, if in Government, the nation's financial position can be properly assessed.

The Greens

The Greens have acknowledged the unfairness of the current indexation methodology. However, it should be noted that they opposed the Coalition's Fair Indexation Bill in 2011.

The Independents

Each of the Independents, except Senator Xenophon, has been positive in their actions to support fair indexation. The Rob Oakeshott **Notice of Motion** (seconded by Tony Windsor) and the **Katter Bill** (seconded by Andrew Wilkie) bear witness.

A 'Call to Arms' for Fairness

Long years of campaign history for fair indexation is a clear indicator that the 'redress' sought by every military retiree and his/her family will not be handed to anyone on a platter - certainly not by any politician. Unquestionably, there is growing support for fairness within the confines of both the House and the Senate. But to guarantee such continued support much more must now be done in this, an election year. That means by every stakeholder on every front. We must simply now ensure that every Member and Senator, all political parties themselves, and all aspiring electoral candidates, including the Australian public as a whole, do not forget that an almost unforgivable wrong visited upon military retirees must be corrected and the time for doing so is now.

Now is the time for a '**Call to Arms**'. Such a call was effectively made by ADSO in its most recent UPDATE #27 released in early February. Readers of this Newsletter can access it here:

<http://www.standto.org/cms/resources/documents/all-files-library/tag/Update.html>

That '**Call to Arms**' implored everyone in the wider Defence community, including retirees, their families, possibly even those still serving, and supporters of the military family, to lend weight to the voices calling for justice.

If you have not done so already, you are invited now to at least subscribe to receive all ADSO UPDATE newsletters and other information direct. It costs nothing except a few moments of your time. You can subscribe by going here: <http://www.standto.org/cms/>

Furthermore, you are encouraged to go one further in support of a worthy cause by volunteering to join one of our ADSO Local Electorate Action Groups near you. Just type/copy this link in your browser to do so: <http://www.standto.org/volunteer/form/2-volunteer>.

Major Other Issues

Outsourcing ADF Medical Care

Deep concern remain throughout the specialist medical fraternity that the new system will not be able to provide the best medical care for the ADF, nor maintain the level of service previously enjoyed by serving men and women. This is because large numbers of specialist doctors, arguably the most experienced and best qualified in the country, have simply withdrawn their services and continue to refuse to sign up.

One reason given for this is that the rates offered to them by Medibank Health Solutions are well below DVA rates. The claim is that costs of running a medical practice are thus barely covered. While many doctors had accepted DVA and ADF rates before, even though they were lower than what they would have charged their private patients, they felt that they had a community responsibility towards those who are either serving or have served in the past. The same sense of duty to a private company in business to make a profit is simply not there.

The situation is being monitored. DFWA objectives are to ensure that:

- All arrangements have the support of the relevant medical professional associations;
- The quality of services to ADF members will not be diminished; and
- There are mechanisms in place to monitor the effectiveness of the arrangements in relation to the quality and timeliness of service provision.

Next National Executive Meeting

The next National Executive Meeting will be held on **Monday/Tuesday 6/7 May 2013** at Ringwood RSL Club, Ringwood VIC.

Defence Widows Support Group (DWSG)

Another reminder that you can support the work of the **Defence Widows Support Group** by placing an order for the wonderfully written book of stories titled:

‘Here, There & Away’; Voices of the Families of Those Who Served’



The book represents a unique collection of heart-warming and entertaining stories from the families of ex-servicemen across the three branches of the Australian Defence Force.

The stories cover the period from World War I to more recent times, and celebrate the love, care and support given by and to members of the wider defence family as well as the resilience these families required in diverse locations and situations.

Here, There & Away paints a vivid picture of the ups and downs of everyday life for military families, but the stories also reflect many aspects of life that we can all relate to. A literary first, this collection is also an important contribution to Australian social and military history.

The book promises a most entertaining read and would even make a perfect gift at this time of year.

The cost is \$19.99. Place your orders at the publisher’s Website: **www.bigskypublishing.com.au**

Alternatively, call the National Office for assistance.

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).