



DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

MONTHLY UPDATE #242 – 1 August 2009

UPDATE is a monthly newsheet produced by the Defence Force Welfare Association containing 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 Branches.

DEFENCE BUDGET BLOWOUT – LETS MAKE SURE THAT PROPOSED SOLUTIONS DONT IMPACT NEGATIVELY ON DEFENCE FAMILIES !

Recent media reports that Defence is planning to dispose of irreplaceable Army Land and Facilities in Melbourne – Watsonia Barracks – are disturbing, as Defence has a record of overlooking the impact of locating facilities to the detriment of families: HQJOC being the most recent example.

Watsonia Barracks is the last major posting locality for Army families to have a “Melbourne city” tour of duty, with all that such a location offers: better choice of schools, child care, health facilities, entertainment, housing, work opportunities for the non-Army partner, etc. These amenities are limited in the Seymour (Puckapunyal) area, and many members currently posted there reside in Melbourne’s northern suburbs due to a lack of Defence housing, with the resultant demanding 130-160 km drive daily to and from work (without reimbursement), and the subsequent need for two family cars. Members posted to the poorly located HQJOC at Bungendore face similar problems.

The Hamilton Study in 1986 put Defence families on a par with the wider communities’ expectations and did away with the “camp follower” tradition for families forever.

***DEFENCE’S RESPONSE.** Defence has advised the Association that future disposition of the Defence estate will be guided by the strategic basing principles outlined in the White Paper. One of these principles is that Defence should consolidate units into fewer, larger and sustainable multi-user bases aimed at increasing the alignment of functions at joint and service level and their capacity to support operations. Defence has also advised us that:*

- *No bases have been identified for closure at this time. However, as is appropriate, the Department of Defence will be looking to ensure that the bases they do have are running as efficiently and effectively as possible.*
- *If the Department recommends any bases for closure due to the lack of strategic requirements, the Government will consider a number of factors before any decision is made, including the economic impact such closures this would have on the local community.*
- *The Government has agreed five key strategic basing principles that will guide ongoing management of the Defence estate over time. These are:*
 - *basing locations should be aligned with national and Defence strategic requirements;*
 - *Defence should consider consolidating units into fewer, larger and more sustainable multi-user bases;*
 - *where possible, bases should be clustered near strategic infrastructure and with industry to promote knowledge sharing and innovation;*
 - *where possible, bases should be located in family friendly areas; and*
 - *base locations should enable the continued provision of Reserve capability into the future.*

Whatever Defence decides, the Association hopes that it doesn’t run counter to the policies implemented following the Hamilton report and the major work undertaken by the Study Team to ensure that Defence families were on equal terms with the lifestyle choices available to their fellow Australians.

THE MILITARY REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION COMMISSION: WHERE'S THE BALANCE ?

The composition of the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission's Review's Steering Committee has given rise to serious concerns to the Association. Whilst the Association in no way object to the individuals themselves, we are extremely disappointed that the committee is so heavily biased towards the finance and "employer" aspects, has no representation from those who are subject to the outcome of the review, i.e. serving and former ADF personnel, and lacks the balance that would give us confidence that the outcomes produced will be of benefit to serving and former ADF personnel.

There is a wealth of expertise that has been developed among those who have worked and represented the interests of those who have had cause to call on the support provided under the various military rehabilitation and compensation acts, yet no one with that type of experience and expertise has been appointed. There is a range of highly suitable people in a number of ex-service organisations who would make a valuable contribution to the process, provide a demonstrable balance to the review and more importantly whose inclusion would provide confidence to the serving and ex-service communities that their views and needs were being taken seriously.

We believe the committee as constituted has neither the balance nor the level of understanding of military compensation from an effected individual's point of view that is required to gain the confidence of serving and former ADF members or veterans.

We have asked that urgent and serious consideration be given to appointing an experienced individual who has demonstrable expertise in military compensation and rehabilitation issues covered by the VEA, SRCA and MRCA as well as experience in assisting ADF serving and ex-serving members in rehabilitation and compensation matters.

The Association has now been advised that the Minister is looking at our concerns and will ensure greater involvement by veteran representatives in the process.

VIP VISITS TO OPERATIONAL AREAS

The Association notes the recent plethora of VIP visits to the operational areas, and offers some concern that such visits often little to enhance morale or operational capability. Though they may be well intentioned, they impose an administrative (and operational) burden on already stretched deployed members of the ADF who in many cases see the visits as having more to do as a photo opportunity for the visitors (particularly for politicians), rather than having anything to do with improving morale or enhancing operational capability.

The Association asks that first, VIPs really consider whether their visit will benefit our service men and women on the ground, or help their own understanding of the nature of operations they are sending the ADF into and secondly, be prepared to put real effort into improving the lot of the ADF and their families by improving members' conditions of service, both in service and post discharge!

THE UNIQUE NATURE OF MILITARY SERVICE

Readers are reminded that to mark the 50th Anniversary of the formation of the Association, a forum will be held on 22 October 2009 in Canberra. The theme of the Forum is *The Unique Nature of Military Service* and presentations from interested parties are welcome. Further advice on the Forum is available from the Association (website and National Office).

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