



## DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

A member of the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations

### MONTHLY UPDATE #274 – 20 August 2012

**'UPDATE' is a monthly e-letter produced by the Defence Force Welfare Association. It is a means by which the Service and ex-Service communities can be informed 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 and their supporters.**

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#### Introduction

Two key events clearly dominated the July/August reporting period. The most recent one was the planning and subsequent launch by the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations (ADSO) of '**Operation AWARE 2**'. The Operation represented the second phase of a public awareness campaign to continue with efforts to explain to the public at large and to targeted politicians in particular how unfair and unjust the Government had been to take no action to neither fairly index Military Superannuation pensions, nor to restore Veterans' Disability Pensions back to parity.

The launch was timed as a lead up to Vietnam Veterans' Day on the 18th August, a day that allowed Australia as a whole to remember the contributions made by their country men and women in the Vietnam War.

The second key event was Prime Minister, Julia Gillard's invitation to pose a question to her on an on-line 'OurSay' forum called "**Hang Out with the PM**". The forum took place at 11.00am on Saturday 21 July 2012. The intent was that the three individuals wishing to submit a question and who received the most number of submitted on-line votes would be invited to put their question to the Prime Minister for answer.

ADSO's nominee to put a question on behalf of all Alliance members was their National Spokesman, **Colonel David Jamison (Retd)**.

Another issue that continued to cause concern and anger during the period among many serving members, including their families, was the abolition in the last budget of travel entitlement to those over 21 wishing to return to their next of kin. Progress on this and other activities are detailed in the following paragraphs of this Monthly Update.

#### Major Activities

##### Operation AWARE 2 – For a Fair Go

Following on from a successful series of protest rallies held on 12 July 2012 to coincide with the paucity of the CPI-based 0.1% increase in superannuation payments to veterans, ADSO launched Operation AWARE 2 with a Media Release on 6 August 2012. The Operation was a follow-on to a previous public awareness campaign to explain how unfair and unjust the Government had been to take no action to either fairly index Military Superannuation pensions to reflect the cost of living increases, or to restore Veterans' Disability Pensions to parity with other forms of general community and disability support. The launch was timed as a lead up to Vietnam Veterans' Day to be held on Saturday 18 August 2012.

**Call for Fairness!** The call was for the Federal Government to remember the Ex Service Men and Women who served in that war and to take immediate action to treat them fairly. Recent speeches by some Government politicians suggested that the Government remains reluctant to restore any fairness to those who have served their country.

This reluctance is reinforced by statements from the same politicians who deemed that military superannuation schemes for retired veterans are not only '*generous*' but '*fair*' as well!! These comments were reported in the media in response to the announcement that military superannuation retirees would receive their cost of living pension increases of just 0.1%. No wonder these retirees became blindingly angry.

Operation AWARE 2 highlighted that no such 'fairness' actually exists. The campaign focused on using Local Action Group Teams in selected Federal electorates. Activities included local community events, and advertising on TV, radio and print media outlets.

**Form of the Rallies!** Veterans assembled at or near a number of marginal electorate offices, potentially including selected Labor, Green and Independent MPs and Senators.

Thereafter, three veterans were deputized to safe-hand a formal letter signed by David Jamison, the Alliance's National spokesperson, to those MPs and Senators, or their representatives who were selected to receive them. The letter highlighted the two major issues of concern to all veterans, namely that military superannuation pensions are not indexed fairly and that veterans' disability payments must be restored to parity.

**Timing of the Rallies!** In essence the general timing for rallies was Friday 17 August between approximately 11.30 am – 1.00 pm subject to conditions.

**Outcomes!** All reports suggest that rallies were successful and the aims of the campaign were met. Those politicians and/or their staff who were handed letters accepted them with grace. The planned 'awareness' activities went off smoothly in all cases. In some electorates more volunteers will be required in the future. Please go to the StandTo web site for more information: [www.standto.org](http://www.standto.org)

### **'Hang Out with the Prime Minister' On-Line Forum**

When the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, invited questions on the on-line 'OurSay' forum '*Hang Out with the PM*' ADSO in good faith nominated its National Spokesman, Colonel David Jamison (Retd), to put one. The forum took place at 11.00am on Saturday 21 July 2012. The intent was that the three individuals submitting a question who received the most number of votes would be invited to put their question to the Prime Minister for answer.

Overwhelmed by receiving the second most votes of all, David Jamison earned the right to pose his question to the Prime Minister. In the event, the Prime Minister's answer appeared so misinformed and inadequate that a formal letter from ADSO was deemed essential as a response to correct serious misconceptions. The letter expressed deep disappointment with the position taken by the PM who seemed, at best, poorly briefed and possibly misinformed about the key features of the various superannuation schemes in operation.

For example, whatever recommendations had been provided to her as to the cost to implement a fair indexation regime appeared at odds with known facts. Also, her answer totally overlooked that which concerned veterans most, namely, that a promised employment contract provision to maintain the buying power of superannuation payments had been unilaterally abrogated by not only her Administration but shamefully by previous governments as well. The opportunity to win the confidence of the wider Defence Force family had been clearly missed.

The letter finally proposed a meeting between the national leadership of ADSO and the Prime Minister as a matter of urgency. No response from her office has yet been received.

**Further Rebuttal Action!** Due to the anger expressed by so many members of the Defence family with the PM's response to David Jamison, a response video was produced in which a spokesman for ADSO, **Air Vice Marshal Peter Criss, AM, AFC (Retd)**, refutes many of her remarks. The video can be viewed on the ADSO StandTo web site here: <http://www.standto.org/view/106-response-to-the-hang-out-with-the-pm>

## **Budget Cuts – Removal of Travel Entitlements**

The Labor Government's abolition of travel entitlement to those over 21 wishing to return to their families will impact approximately 22,000 unmarried military personnel.

The Coalition's Shadow Minister for Defence, Science, Technology and Personnel, Stuart Robert MP, tabled a motion in the last sitting of the House of Representatives to disallow Labor's budget cut. Parliamentary rules demand that if the motion is left for 15 sitting days without it being brought to debate by Parliament then the regulation to implement the removal of the travel entitlement is disallowed. No debate has yet taken place but could be brought on in the next two weeks.

The Coalition's strategy appears to be to force the Government to argue against the interests of ADF members in an open forum. The voting numbers will depend on the positions taken by the Independents and Green MPs.

## **Other Issues of Interest**

### **An Essential Medical Equipment Payment**

This is for the attention of persons holding a Commonwealth concession card, or a Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold or White Card. If you use certain essential medical equipment, or have certain medical conditions that require the use of additional heating and/or cooling in their home, you could be entitled to claim the annual \$140.00 **Essential Medical Equipment Payment**. It is not paid automatically – you must claim. Full details are here: [www.dva.gov.au/householdassistance](http://www.dva.gov.au/householdassistance) Scroll down to Essential Medical Equipment Payment and click on 'Read more' for more details.

### **Camaraderie Magazine**

The July issue of Camaraderie is out. If you haven't received a copy and would like to have it please give me a ring on either (02) 6265 9530 or (0438) 282 284.

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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).