



DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

MONTHLY UPDATE #239 – 1 May 2009

UPDATE is a monthly newsheet produced by the Defence Force Welfare Association.
It contains 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.

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR HEALTH ... OH REALLY ?

The Association welcomes the announcement (DEFENCE magazine issue # 2 2009) that “ *...the health and well being of all Army personnel is in good hands with the formation of the new Directorate of Army Health (DAH) within Director General Personnel - Army*”... but is not so sure there is anything new about this! There was an Army Health Directorate located within Army Personnel Division a decade or so ago, as there were in the other two Services. They were all disbanded as a result of (yet another) internal Efficiency Review, which resulted in positions being disestablished and a single Directorate established, supposedly able to take over all functions for the three Services.

Both Navy and Air Force in recent years have re-established Health Directorates within their Personnel Divisions as their Chiefs discovered that the integrated and sometimes understaffed single Directorate failed to provide them with advice and support for them to exercise their responsibilities for the health and well being of their members under their command, and now Army has followed.

The further advice that “ *filling out compensation claims for injuries can also be a very stressful and confusing time for members but the team at DAH is looking at ways to support injured members. We want to provide our injured people with the best possible advice on compensation and to do this we are setting up regional teams of reservists to provide compensation advice. These teams will provide Commanding Officers and members with information on how to lodge compensation claims with Department of Veterans Affairs and also to help people through the appeals process if required*” is noted with interest as it raises a number of issues - training for these teams, accessibility, accountability (particularly when dealing with an appeal) and what about Navy and RAAF members? And what of the role of Ex Service Organisations whose advocates (trained by DVA) are already in place to provide this service ?

MILITARY SUPERANNUANTS – LET DOWN AGAIN ! OH, AND ALSO ANOTHER INQUIRY

The Association has been advised that the CPI figure for the March 2009 Quarter is less than the September 2008 Quarter, so there will be no increase to pension payments for Military pensioners in July 2009, so military superannuants will see their standard of living drop further behind that of other Australians. For example the Age pension will remain at 25% of MTAW, so whatever increase has occurred in MTAW will flow through to them (plus whatever the Budget may provide).

Readers should be aware that since about 1990 the CPI has attempted to measure “inflation” instead of the cost of living – see DFWA’s statement of 23 April 2009 on our website for a more detailed explanation of the problem.

On a related matter, the Association notes that the Government is proposing yet another Inquiry into Superannuation. The Government’s statement that “ *... It is critical that any outcomes of such an examination be the subject of appropriate transitional arrangements, are prospective with appropriate grandfathering and include transition periods relevant to prevailing market conditions.....*” .. is telling. For example, the words “ *...with appropriate grandfathering ...*” suggests that the Association will need to look closely for any unintended consequences for the military retirement schemes.

PARTNER SERVICE PENSION

The Association has recently provided comments to DVA on the draft *Veterans' Entitlements (Partner Service Pension – Retention of Eligibility for Non-illness Separated Spouse) Determination 2009*. Whilst we agree with the thrust of the proposed changes, ie that a partner who has had to separate from the veteran because of veterans' war-related unsafe or abusive behaviour should be entitled to continue to receive the Partner Service Pension, the Association does have a concern about a partner who has had to separate on those grounds before the partner's behaviour can be determined to be war-related.

We appreciate that DVA is unable to compel such a veteran to submit a claim or to present for assessment, but wonder whether it might be possible for DVA to address such circumstances with ex gratia mechanisms, once the partner's circumstances had been determined by DVA to a reasonable standard of proof? Such a process would presumably require little more than an administrative note, rather than a formal determination of entitlement by legislative instrument.

THE ASSOCIATION'S AGM AND 50TH ANNIVERSARY

The Association's National Council meeting in May 2009 marks the 50th Anniversary of the formation of the Association in 1959. The Association will host a dinner on the evening of 19 May at RMC Duntroon with a number of VIPs in attendance including the Minister for Veteran's Affairs, the Hon Alan Griffin, MP.

NATIONAL ARTILLERY MUSEUM: WHY MOVE ?

The Association has been approached by some members expressing concern about the proposed move of the Museum from North Head (Sydney) to Puckapunyal. Objections to the proposed move include that students at the School of Artillery could visit the Museum whenever in Sydney; there is an established pool of dedicated guides in place in Sydney; Puckapunyal is far from Melbourne and will be difficult for many to reach whereas North Head is situated in a large populated area; and there are many features of the current Museum that cannot be moved (including the Memorial Walk, the 9.2'' Coast Artillery gun pits and underground tunnels). The current location has a unique setting with established facilities that attracts reunions and thousands of visitors a year. The decision to move must not be made lightly.

NEW VETERANS' MATES WEBSITE

The Veterans' Medicine and Therapeutic Education Services (MATES) program has been providing veterans and their health care team with useful health resources since 2004. Veterans' MATES now has a dedicated website offering quick and easily accessible information modules on medicine management: <https://www.veteransmates.net.au/>

RECLASSIFICATION OF DEFENCE CO-OPERATION PROGRAM SERVICE IN EAST TIMOR

As a follow on from the advice in the last edition of UPDATE (#238 April 2009), the Association has been advised that those East Timor veterans who have now become entitled to the medals mentioned in UPDATE #238 should be aware that they are also entitled to the issue of the Army Combat Badge.

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