



## DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

A member of the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations

### MONTHLY UPDATE #273 – 20 July 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

There can be little doubt as to what issue took almost exclusive centre stage amongst members of the ex-service community in this reporting period. The issue arrived as all bad-news issues sometimes do, silently, unannounced and with little fanfare and, of course, via the mailman. Ex-service members and their families Australia wide stood in their kitchens or elsewhere reading with incredulous disbelief a letter from a Government offering them an increase in their superannuation payments of 0.1%. Further reading of the letter revealed exactly what that meant - in real terms, it meant for most \$0.78c per fortnight.

Therein started a virtual rolling thunder of voices growing ever louder and questioning yet again how it could be that the CPI was used as the basis for increasing their already meagre pensions. More on this issue in later paragraphs of this Update! Suffice to say that no consoling words could be invented that mitigated the sheer disappointment the thousands of ex service men and women who had once served their country so proudly, and with distinction, felt about how unfairly the Government was treating them.

Needless to say, the saddest news for the period was to learn of the death of another Australian soldier, this time that of fallen SAS digger, Sergeant Blaine Diddams, who was killed during a firefight in Afghanistan. Vale to his passing and the sincerest of condolences to his family, friends and fellow colleagues. Moments after news of his death hit the public domain, a media frenzy virtually ensued with TV and radio drive hosts competing for air time to talk about the various aspects of the incident. Our National President found himself in demand for comment on it, particularly in relation to the number of times Australian soldiers should be allowed to volunteer their service in theatres of war – Sergeant Diddams had been on his seventh tour of duty!!

#### Major Activities

##### **CPI – The Unfairness of Using It**

Back to the announcement of the CPI-based 0.1% increase in the superannuation payments of ex-service retirees. What made that announcement seem even more starkly miserly and unfair was what was being announced almost on the same morning in media outlets that Federal MP salaries would yet again be boosted by \$5,550 per year, and that this boost was to be added to the massive \$44,000 yearly increase they all were awarded a mere three months ago.

Can anyone imagine what anger ex service retirees were feeling when holding in one hand a letter that told them of their **\$0.78 per fortnight** increase in superannuation and in the other a newspaper that told them that all Backbenchers would have their salaries increased by **\$106 per week** (or \$212 per fortnight to make a comparison with what retirees had received), thus taking Backbench annual salaries to **\$190,550**. Combined with the pay rise they were awarded earlier in the year, it meant that they would receive almost **\$1000 per week** more than they did last year.

And what happens when many of these Backbenchers either retire or are voted out at the next election? Their incredibly large pensions will be increased not by the CPI, rather, by the cost of living.

## **CPI Protest**

And thus sprang to life frustration and anger among virtually all members of the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations Australia-wide. The measure of the unfairness of using CPI, its inadequacy, and its injustice could not be believed. If proof was needed and it wasn't, yet again there in stark contrast was evidence that CPI is not a fair measure of maintaining purchasing power to keep pace with the cost of living. The CPI is not a measure used by those who have been elected to vote on such issues, and have the power to legislate a mechanism for fair and equitable treatment of ex service retirees. A fair indexation method must be adopted to bring them into line with the way age pensioners and/or retired Parliamentarians receive increases in their pensions.

The anger of members was such that they demanded a tangible protest of at least some kind to highlight the universal feelings of frustration. This frustration was vented by members forming small representative protest teams on Wednesday 11 July to meet at selected marginal seat holders at their Electoral Offices. The intent was to hand a protest letter to either the relevant MP or Senator, or their representative. Personal letters to their respective Parliamentary representatives was also encouraged. All reports suggest that ADSO members were well received and the protests successfully served their purpose.

## **Related CPI Activities Under Fair Go**

The National Office fielded numerous media enquiries on CPI-based issues throughout the reporting period, and took calls from many members seeking advice on what action was intended from DFWA and ADSO. A number of interviews by our spokesmen followed. The main ones on air included:

- 2UE (Sydney) - Peter Criss interviewed by Jason Morrison, listen here – excellent lead-in and comment: <http://media.mytalk.com.au/2ue/audio/040712jasonmorrison.mp3>
- 4BC (Brisbane) - Wayne Swan interviewed by Greg Carey, listen to the podcast here: <http://media.mytalk.com.au/4bc/audio/040712morningswan.mp3> The reaction from members to Mr Swan proffering the CPI methodology as 'fair' was one of disbelief.
- 4BC (Brisbane) – Peter Criss interviewed by Greg Carey in response to Mr Swan. Both interviews must be heard. This one here: <http://www.4bc.com.au/blogs/4bc-blog/military-pensioners-struggle/20120705-21ilb.html>
- 6PR (Perth) - Peter Criss with Howard Sattler – an excellent interview but no podcast posted.
- 3AW (Melbourne) by Neil Mitchell – indexation and CPI issues solicited numerous calls.

The print media was also active. Letters to the editor appeared in many newspapers. Two articles stood out: The Canberra Times on Friday 6 July titled '**Veterans fuming Over Pension Hit**', and the

other by Ross Eastgate in the Townsville Bulletin on Saturday 7 July titled '**Pay Increase Illogical**'. See here: [http://www.townsvillebulletin.com.au/article/2012/07/07/344661\\_defence.html](http://www.townsvillebulletin.com.au/article/2012/07/07/344661_defence.html)

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

Stuart Robert MP has tabled a motion in the House of Representatives to disallow the Labor Government's abolition of travel entitlement to those over 21 wishing to return to their families. The Member's strategy is to bring on debate that could see the Government arguing against the interests of ADF members. The voting numbers will depend on the Independents and Green MPs. 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. An interesting manoeuvre by the Coalition!!

## **The Prime Minister says: Post and vote on OurSay!**

Most will now know that the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, invited questions to be put to her 'on a Google hangout'. This was to take place at 11.00am on 21 July 2012. The three individuals submitting a question receiving the most number of votes on OurSay would be invited to put those questions to the Prime Minister for answer.

The National President, DFWA put this question:

*"Prime Minister, you discriminate against Defence Force men and women when you say the country can afford fair indexation that protects pension purchasing power for over 3 million age pensioners but cannot afford to protect the purchasing power for 65,000 military superannuation pensioners (around \$20M in the first year). You compound your discrimination when you add that the country can also afford the latest indexation increase for superannuated MPs, a massive 30 times greater than that for military superannuation pensioners. Given that fair indexation was an employment condition upon enlistment and given that it is clearly affordable, why won't you index military superannuation pensions fairly?"*

And thus started a quick three-day campaign to encourage ADSO members to vote. And vote member did, with outstanding success.

The final result - we came in with the second most votes to get a seat at the PM's 'round' table. The results were:

First Question - total 12,749 with 511 voter comments;

Second Question (us) - total 10,933 with 598 voter comments; and

Third Question - total 10,756 with 562 voter comments.

See this link for the first article on the result: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/love-religion-overtake-tax-for-hangout-with-pm-20120719-22bjc.html>

The ADSO team is proud of those who voted, who mustered family and friends, and who passed our plea to vote further, to others. Thanks and congratulations to all for a team-spirited effort, well done.

Here is the site to watch live: <http://www.youtube.com/user/deakinuniversity?feature=inp-tv-jul>

## Research Study – Anger Management

**Volunteers Sought for Interview** Many will understand that anger is a common emotional response to trauma. It is well recognised that veterans', particularly those who have been on combat and peacekeeping missions, have had difficulties managing anger.

This is known to have had a devastating effect on an individual's personal relationships, their capacity to fulfill roles at work, and may lead to other emotional difficulties such as depression and anxiety. It can also affect a person's physical health. Research thus far has found that experiencing high levels of anger may actually interfere with a person's recovery from a traumatic experience.

**Ms Carmen Germain**, a Psychologist and a Doctor of Clinical Psychology candidate, at the Centre for Emotional Health, Macquarie University, has initiated a study into these matters. Carmen hopes her study will provide a better understanding of how current approaches to anger treatment may be enhanced to achieve better outcomes.

To advance her study and research work, Carmen seeks to interview both current-serving and retired members of the Australian Defence Force residing in the **Sydney Metropolitan Area**. The form of the interview is in two parts as follows:

- A face-to-face session (approximately one hour) during which participants will complete a series of questionnaires about their emotional well-being and coping styles, and then participate in a memory recall task about a recent anger-provoking event and complete an attention exercise; and
- On the following day, participate in a 10-minute follow-up phone interview to conclude involvement.

Participation is completely **anonymous and confidential**. Participants will not be asked to talk about their traumatic experiences from their military service. Interested persons who would like to participate in the study and/or would like further information about all this, please contact Carmen direct. **Email:** [carmen.germain@students.mq.edu.au](mailto:carmen.germain@students.mq.edu.au), or **Mobile:** (0432) 020 66

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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 (RARCC) and the Australian Special Air Service Association (ASASA).