



DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

A member of the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations

MONTHLY UPDATE #282 – February 2014

'UPDATE' is a e-letter produced by the Defence Force Welfare Association to inform 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

This Update is intended to inform you of a number of activities that have been on-going over the Christmas/New Year period and throughout January 2014. Needless to say, while the lead up to last year's election was unquestionably frenetic, this year portends to be a busy one too. Certainly all eyes will be on any sign of an emerging draft of the legislation that looks to deliver the Coalition's now long-standing pledge to index, as of 1 July 2014, DFRB/DFRDB superannuation pensions for those 55 and over in the same way as age and service pensions are indexed.

Although no draft has yet been sighted, publically and in private correspondence the key Ministers involved, including even the Prime Minister, have as recently as last week re-affirmed their Government's commitment to fair indexation as previously promised. More about that in the following paragraphs!

Other issues discussed in the following paragraphs include the unwarranted, biased and inaccurate assertions cast by some in the media on our Navy; the future challenges facing the Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal and, among several other matters of interest, our on-going lobbying efforts on behalf of MSBS recipients, Reversionary Pensioners and DVA Disability Pensioners.

MEDIA ATTACKS ON RAN PERSONNEL

But firstly, the issue that captured our attention most in January and, in part, the public's too. It was the extraordinary spectacle by some in the media who were seemingly hell-bent on discrediting the conduct of those members of the Royal Australian Navy involved in Border Protection Operations. The reporting of one particular incident involving Navy personnel was so biased and inaccurate that the Chief of Navy himself would not simply have any of it, nor would the Prime Minister and several other Ministers included. To his credit, the Leader of the Opposition voiced his concern as well. Rightfully, all expressed their strong support of what our men and women in uniform were doing to protect Australia's borders.

As an Association, we couldn't stand back either without voicing our deep concern that members of the ADF were being scurrilously maligned by media elements claiming that they had been involved in something as improbable as 'torture'. At the very least, an incredulous allegation like that, if not dismissed outright, should have been treated with the highest of suspicion and the greatest of care to make sure that every detail was verified before such an allegation went to print. Rather, brazen headline seeking with no care or responsibility for being accurate seemed the order of the day.

The Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral Ray Griggs, was right in saying that *“This generation of men and women who wear the uniform are worthy of more respect than has been shown to them in the past few weeks”*. There can be no doubt as to whom he specifically directed his comments.

Our own National President, David Jamison, was also right when he publically noted that *“The difficult challenges faced by members of the RAN in Operation Resolute are unique and cannot be underestimated.....and the impact (of the allegations) on the morale of individual members can only be guessed, and it behoves the Australian community as a whole to stand behind members of the RAN at this difficult time, and to give them our full support and total confidence”*. No confidence and support was on display or evident from the media organisation involved in besmirching the ADF.

Corollary – The Need for an Australian Military Covenant

There is no doubt that the RAN, including those involved in border protection operations, have and continue to conduct themselves in a way that all Australians should be proud. They should be proud of the honourable service the men and women of the ADF as a whole provide to the Australian Nation by way of contributing to its prosperity and, in a major way, to its security.

Given the majority of the Nation is unquestionably proud and does indeed support the work of the ADF, it is high time that such support should be expressed more formally by way of an **Australian Military Covenant** or **Charter**.

Such an **Australian Military Covenant** or **Charter** has been in draft form for several years. It expresses the reality that ADF members are Australian citizens who, while serving, must forego some basic Human Rights, rights that are enjoyed by other citizens. In essence, they must forgo some of the freedoms that the rest of the nation enjoys.

Furthermore, they must comply with the disciplines inherent in military service; and that Australia expects that when they are ordered within the bounds of normal legal frameworks to undertake assignments, they will perform their tasks in a lawful and honourable way.

What an **Australian Military Covenant** or **Charter** seeks to do is to articulate the thus far largely unwritten mutual obligations between the Nation and the members of the Australian Defence Force. Its concept is to develop not only an understanding of the ‘unique nature’ of military service but also to define what mutual obligations are owed between the Nation and its service personnel that flow from this service. This more than matches the principles of the ANZAC tradition

FAIR GO CAMPAIGN – THE WAY AHEAD

Yes.....the injustice for which DFWA and its partners in the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations (ADSO) have fought for many years will soon, at least in part, see remedy. The superannuation pensions of DFRB/DFRDB recipients over 55 will, with effect 1 July 2014, be indexed in the same way as age and service pensions. The hard work of a dedicated band of unified ex brothers and sisters-in-arms over 20 years will finally accrue a small dividend.

Outstanding Issues

DFWA commends the current Government for its pre-election commitment to restore fair indexation for all DFRB/DFRDB pensioners who are or who will eventually reach age 55 years. However, while the outcome will unquestionably be attractive to some, it will have little meaning to those currently under 55, at least at the moment. Nor will it mean much to either those retirees that fall under the MSBS scheme, or those DVA Disability Pensioners who feel particularly aggrieved that the parity they once enjoyed with the age pension was arbitrarily taken away from them in 2009.

Concomitant with the support of all parties and each of the Independents, remedy for them must be a priority of the Government.

On-Going Dialogue with the Government

While the Government has not pledged an early ‘fix’ to the outstanding issues, their pledge is to keep those issues under review, and to discuss them at regular informal ‘**Round Table**’ meetings with the ADSO leadership group. Indeed, such a ‘**Round Table**’ was first inaugurated before the Federal election last year when this Government was in Opposition. The key Shadows attending at the time are Ministers in the new Government.

Discussions are now in train to hold the next ‘**Round Table**’ during the period when both Houses of Parliament next sits (commenced 11 February 2014). The ADSO leadership group looks forward to the sharing of ideas and the airing of key veterans related policy issues, including discussion on when and how the outstanding issues discussed in the forgoing paragraphs can be progressed. ADSO much appreciates the Government’s commitment to on-going informal dialogue on matters effecting veterans. It is an important initiative that is very welcome.

Other Lobbying Activities

Post the election low-key work has been on-going on a broad front to continue to interact with key MPs and Senators, including their advisers, with the aim of shoring up their already expressed support for remedying the remaining injustices. A working relationship with relevant Government Ministers is being fostered, as is one with their Opposition counterparts, including the Greens and minor party individuals.

For example, in early December during a visit to Canberra by our National President, David Jamison, meetings were arranged in their Parliamentary offices with the Greens Senator Penny Wright, Labor’s Shadow Defence Minister Stephen Conroy, and Labor’s Member for Canberra Gai Brodtmann. Each expressed support for fair indexation and were receptive to listen to and discuss veterans related policy issues. Although acknowledging that he had much to learn about his Defence portfolio, the Shadow Defence Minister very much welcomed the discussion he was having on matters relating to veterans. He expressed a wish to discuss these issues further at another time.

Efforts are underway to meet with the Leader of the Opposition, the Greens MP Adam Bandt, and with the Labor Member for Fraser (ACT), Dr Andrew Leigh MP.

Meeting with the Member for Eden-Monaro, Peter Hendy

Following media coverage and the resultant concern by some that the member Eden-Monaro, Peter Hendy, is anti veterans, a meeting with him was sought to discuss the rumours being put about him. Dr Hendy welcomed the meeting to clear the air. This meeting was held on Thursday 16th January.

The rumours relate to his tenure in 2005 as the CEO of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI). The Chamber at the time commissioned a study that examined tax saving/spending cut options to be put to Government. Part of the ensuing report purportedly talked about disbanding DVA and combining its functions with those of other Departments dealing with Social Service issues. As a result, some accuse Dr Hendy for advocating not only a reduction in service pensions but wishing to also abolish DVA.

Many issues were discussed during the lengthy meeting but on what some refer to as the ‘Hendy Affair’, Dr Hendy categorically rejected what he sees a little more than a political smear. He or the ACCI Board never endorsed the study report and its recommendations, nor were they ever forwarded to Government for consideration as an ACCI position statement. Dr Hendy stressed that the truth of

the matter is that he supports Coalition Government policies and Liberal Party ideals. Nothing in those policies or ideals suggests anything but strong support for the veterans community and DVA.

Logic dictates that indeed Dr Hendy is not anti veteran nor has any surreptitious secretive wish to abolish DVA. The conclusion reached is that we should not help give attempted smear campaigns further political legs in the veterans community. Our energies would be far better served by looking to potentially help with the upcoming draft legislation on indexation and, among other things, lobbying to have pension parity reinstated for DVA disability pensions as soon as possible.

OTHER MAJOR ISSUES

Future Challenges for Defence Remuneration - Allowances

The Government's decision to review allowances payable to ADF members serving overseas is not surprising. Indeed, it is common practice that when there are downturns in the tempo of operational activity, selective reductions and/or adjustments in allowances are often made, where appropriate. Such reductions should raise little objection when the purpose for which the original payments change. Nevertheless, the Association expresses some caution that the decision for any reduction must be clearly explained, so they are not seen to be aimed for the sake of cost cutting, rather, they are the result of a logical, objective analysis of whether the allowances are appropriate.

2014 Tribunal Considerations

In 2014 the Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal (DFRT) will consider a number of matters that will affect remuneration payable to ADF members. These include Special Forces and Special Operations Allowance, Field Allowance and most importantly later in the year, the umbrella Workplace Remuneration Arrangement (WRA) for the ADF for the three years following the expiration of the current WRA in November 2014.

As an independent intervener in the DFRT process, DFWA will lobby hard on behalf of ADF members, in particular for the WRA case. The Association will seek advice from ADF members on their views as the case progresses.

DVA's National Consultative Forums

Our National President, David Jamison, recently announced that **Lieutenant Fiona Simmonds, RAN** had been nominated to represent DFWA on the DVA sponsored 'Younger Veterans – Contemporary Needs Forum'.

Fiona is a current serving Naval officer having graduated with Honours from the Australian Defence Force Academy in 2006 with a Bachelor of Science Degree majoring in Oceanography and Geography. She only recently concluded a 30-month tour of duty as an Executive Officer and Navigator on an Armidale Class Patrol Boat on border protection activities.

DFWA warmly welcome Fiona to our National team as our representative on the new Forum.

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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 (RARC) and the Australian Special Air Service Association (ASASA); and the RAAF Association (RAAFA) with the Australian Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Veterans Association (APPVA) and the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (VVAA) as partners.