



DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION
Patron-in-Chief: His Excellency Mr Michael Bryce AM AE

NATIONAL OFFICE

PO Box 4166
KINGSTON ACT 2604
T: 02 6265 9530 F: 02 6265 9776
E: national@dfwa.org.au W: www.dfwa.org.au

The National Commission - Anzac Centenary
Department of Veterans' Affairs
GPO Box 9998
CANBERRA ACT 2601

SUBMISSION RE ANZAC CENTENARY

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission in relation to the ANZAC Centenary. It is much appreciated. The need to “get this right” cannot be emphasised enough as a poorly conceived and executed centenary celebration will severely undermine the ANZAC tradition.

General Themes

It is the strong view of the DFWA (the Association) that commemorative activities associated with the Centenary must emphasise community based “grass roots” activities and not be used as an opportunity for political grandstanding.

The Association, its members and, may we submit, the population as a whole, view with some cynicism the continual presence of politicians at commemorative activities as so often their rhetoric does not translate into action in Parliament to support the ADF, veterans, widows and families. Sadly, this includes politicians attending events such as funerals to the recently fallen.

That said, it is acknowledged that there is need for our senior politicians, in the capacity as being our elected representatives, to represent Australia and its people at major / international commemorative activities. These however should be limited to major activities only, and be free from political grandstanding and generalisations such as “.. *our Government has done much to support the ADF and veterans this past year*” and so on. Such comments are found to be inappropriate or disingenuous and the thought of four years of such political opportunism, would not be accepted by the Association, its members and the population as a whole. Members of the Defence Force Family especially have become inured to the self praise the political representatives give themselves in the public arena when the reality and the practice is often found to be wanting.

So how to encourage “grass roots” commemorations? Some ideas include:

- financially supporting regional historical societies' activities and research programs that focus on WWI and local connections and identities;
- financially supporting school activities that focus on encouraging schoolchildren to learn about Australia's military history and the debt owed by the nation;
- ensuring that the national education curriculum includes a proper emphasis on the ANZAC tradition;
- a national publicity campaign encouraging local activities; and

- provision of funds for the refurbishment of local WW1 monuments and the like, in concert with local commemorative activities. There ought to be no new grand edifices..... we have enough.

The Centenary also provides an opportunity for the nation to formally reaffirm its commitment and promises made by successive governments to provide for the on-going care and support of servicemen and women and their families. This could be done by way of a national Defence Force [Affirmation?] Day at which the nations commitment and thanks is reaffirmed. This should be supported by a Parliamentary motion which will acknowledge the nation's debt to those who have served and are serving in defence of Australia. There must be public acknowledgement of the role that defence force families have played and are playing in support of those who serve.

- 25 April 2015 may be an appropriate date for the Defence Force [Affirmation?] Day.
- This should be the day to reaffirm the nation's acceptance of the *Unique Nature of Military Service*, and its support for and acceptance of the need military service and sacrifice in the defence of our way of life.

Other Comments

Centenary of Service

There is a danger of "overload" in spreading too many activities over the years 2014 to 2019, especially if coverage of all wars is then made. The emphasis should therefore centre only on WW1 events, using them as a vehicle to support the more general theme of honouring all Australian sacrifices made in war and in the defence of the nation and the unique nature of military service.

Community Engagement / Education, Public Awareness and Community Access

Community engagement will be enhanced if a link can be made by indentifying WW1 soldiers from the local community, and then tracking their progress between 1914 – 1919.

In particular schools could be "fed" information over the five years following the progress of the selected soldiers: some will survive, others will not..... and when their demise is reported, then the local community could hold a commemorative service. Over the five years the selected servicemen will become well known to the local community: their safe arrival home will be celebrated, conversely their demise will be honoured.

Infrastructure and Capital Works

The Centenary should include budgeted outlays to upgrade Shrines and memorials that need expansion or redevelopment; or new facilities such as Groves of Trees should be funded.

Yours sincerely

signed

Les Bienkiewicz
Executive Director

16 September 2010