



DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION
A member of the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations

CHRISTMAS UPDATE – December 2015

'UPDATE' is an 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 all members of the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations, and their families and supporters.

INTRODUCTION

As the year fast closes and Christmas looms in a day or so, I must say that I have been warmed like few other years by the many good Christmas wishes that have been flooding into my inbox over the last week or two. Included in many of those wishes was a congratulatory thanks extended not just to DFWA but to the broader team effort represented by the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations (ADSO) for its strong lobbying efforts throughout the year, and for the unified voice it was able to bring to the fore on a range of issues, the majority of which had the sole aim of protecting the conditions of service and/or the wellbeing of both currently serving and former members of the ADF.

Without question, it was a team effort that bore results at the very start of the year when the Government was forced firstly, to considerably improve upon an initial morale-sapping pay offer of 1.5% and secondly, to retract the notion that any pay rise had to somehow come by way of losing some previously hard-won conditions of service.

It was equally a team effort lobbying hard that resulted in the Government deciding not to proceed with the unfair pension indexation changes contained in last year's 2014-15 Budget. Those changes had been totally at odds with why the Government had so strongly heralded how unfair it was to index DFRB and DFRDB pensions using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) only. It was a team effort again that played such a critical and key role in negotiating with the Government to ensure that the unique nature of military service was firmly recognised in the legislation that will introduce a new ADF Super Scheme on the 1st July 2016.

And it was yet another team effort that was able to quickly clarify at the highest levels that Navy working hours would not be increased to 43 hours per week. And it continued still again when news broke that the Department of Finance initiated 'Scoping Study' into Defence Housing Australia recommended that it be privatized. There was little chance that the ADSO team would stand by nor accept such an outcome that had every potential of eventually throwing ADF families onto the commercial rental market. A key condition of service would be lost. A strong ADSO submission to the upcoming Senate inquiry is planned to make sure that that never happens.

Thus the year progressed. In the main, successfully, particularly by way of outcomes affecting the ADF's serving and younger veterans communities. In that regard, the many thousands of DFWA in-service virtual members played a key part in those outcomes. That is because of the feedback many of them provided on the issues that concerned them most. It brought into stark relief that *all ADF members and their families do have a voice* and, when mobilized, decision-makers in Parliament are left with little option but to listen and take notice.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2016

Despite a range of successes that could be logged as achievements in 2015, many issues remain to be resolved. Your ADSO team, now numbering 13 ESO member organisations, is working up a strategy paper to take into 2016 at this very moment. It will be available for wide distribution early in the New Year. A key plank of that paper is that ADSO will continue to foster the wellbeing of serving and former ADF members and their families. While doing so, it will seek to be inclusive and work with other national ESOs; it will remain non-partisan and look to provide an independent and unified voice on behalf of its serving and veterans constituencies.

As for our targeted objectives, in broad terms and not all inclusive at this time, they will be as follows:

Military Superannuation

- **Defence Force Retirement Benefits Legislation Amendment (Fair Indexation) Bill 2014.** Adjust to include superannuants under 55, in particular priority be given to those on DFRDB invalidity superannuation pensions.
- **Indexation.** All military superannuation payments (DFRB/DFRDB/MSBS/ADF Super) to be indexed twice each year by the same percentage adjustment incorporating the CPI, PBLCI with reference to the MATWE. This is the fairest way to maintain purchasing power. Should apply to all components of military superannuation pensions, including preserved funds and the total reversionary pension for partners of deceased military superannuation pensioners.
- **Access to Employer Benefits.** MSBS members no longer serving but with “preserved employer” funds to be given the opportunity to roll over their benefit into an accredited superannuation fund of their choice.
- **DFRDB Commutation.** The Government to adopt up to date life tables in calculating commutation and fortnightly payments for all new DFRDB superannuants. Rectify the injustices with the application of inappropriate life tables over the life of these schemes.

Other Key Objectives

- **Veterans’ Disability Payments.** The economic loss component of Veterans’ Disability compensation payment for TPI/SRDP and Intermediate Rate is inadequate - the economic loss component to be tied to the minimum wage (100% TPI/SRDP and 50% Intermediate Rate).
- A single **compensation** regime for all serving and former members of the ADF that recognizes the unique nature of military service.
- Additional Government funding and DVA support for appropriate community **accommodation** to meet the needs of veterans with mental health issues as well as younger veterans in need of care.
- **Military Covenant/Accord** that records on public record the Nation’s enduring obligations to its service personnel and in turn the latter’s obligations to the Nation.
- Government provide support to the care and accommodation needs of **homeless veterans** as identified by the combined ESOs Homeless Program
- The Government **accredit ESO’s active mental health support programs** that are evidenced based or at least evidenced aware and where appropriate fund their programs.
- **ADF Pay.** To be indexed to a suitable measure that maintains equality with changes to the cost of living (as opposed to the rate of inflation), plus any additional increases that an independent Tribunal considers warranted.
- **Defence Housing.** A key issue for 2016 – not to privatize DHA and to protect an important condition of service that provides quality housing to Defence families.

THANKS TO ALL MEMBERS

Having received thanks from many quarters I would like to proffer a big thanks in return. First to the many full time members of all our ADSO member organisations that, by way of your membership subscriptions, have shown overt support for the work we have been able to do on your behalf. Without that support, none of our associations could properly function. DFWA and certainly not ADSO would exist as entities or provide a collective voice that even the most senior of decision makers within Government concede is not only loud and powerful but is reasoned at the same time

A big thanks as well to the thousands of DFWA virtual members who did make a difference by way of your voices. We made sure that you were heard at the highest levels of Government. Your feedback was all-important. Into next year, please encourage others of your colleagues not yet members to join as well. It costs nothing, albeit in time we will encourage you to become full members either before you leave your uniformed service or soon thereafter.

A big thanks also to our corporate sponsors. **InvoCare**, Australia's largest provider of funeral services and well known for its commitment to family care and community engagement, has been our valued supporter for a number of years now. Not only has the company given us considerable financial stability when, as a Not-For-Profit Organisation, we needed it most but their offered discounts has benefited DFWA and Alliance members directly.

Now added to our corporate sponsorship stable to better allow us to deliver tangible outcomes to our constituency members are two other companies, namely the **Bradford Exchange** and **Storage King**. In the case of the Bradford Exchange, they are producers and marketers of high quality collectable memorabilia, particularly ones that are relevant to this the ANZAC Centenary Year. Storage King is Australia's largest self-storage company. It already is a Defence contractor but is even better known for its ability to provide serving men and women with either temporary or more permanent storage solution to meet posting needs.

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Christmas now truly looms in sight. Our respective families have already gathered together or will soon do so. Their shared love is all-important, as is the friendship of our old colleagues and friends. A special Christmas wish – may this coming festive season to be a merry one to all. If traveling, please return safely from your journeys; if merely staying at home, may it be restful.

And save a little thought for those who are serving our country in operations overseas. And who can't be with their families. A very special Christmas wish is extended to them as well.

Special Note: *Veterans and Veterans Families Counseling Service (VVCS) can be reached 24 hours a day across Australia for crisis support and free and confidential counseling. Phone 1800 011 046 (international: +61 8 8241 4546)*

Contacts

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ADSO comprises:

The Defence Force Welfare Association (DFWA), Naval Association of Australia (NAA), RAAF Association (RAAFA), Royal Australian Regiment Corporation (RAROC), Australian Special Air Service Association (ASASA), Australian Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Veterans Association (APPVA), Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (VVAA), Australian Federation of Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Ex-Service Men and Women, Royal Australian Armoured Corp Corporation (RAAC), National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association Australia (NMBVAA), Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia (FAAAA), Defence Reserves Association (DRS), the Partners of Veterans Association of Australia, and the Australian Gulf War Veterans Association.