



DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

A member of the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations

CHRISTMAS UPDATE – December 2016

'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

Christmas yet again is almost upon us. The best wishes for a safe and festive season is extended by not only our National President, David Jamison, but also by his team of mostly volunteers to all members of the Australian Defence Force and their families, and to the veterans' community as a whole.

That team is conscious that, although its work of fostering the best interests and welfare of each and every member appears a never-ending one, some satisfying glimmers of success have nonetheless come in the relative recent past. A major one was the overturning last year of an initial morale-sapping pay offer of 1.5% to ADF members and retraction of the notion that any pay rise had to somehow come by way of losing some previously hard-won conditions of service. Action is in train to avoid a disastrously similar first round offer at the looming Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal (DFRT) hearings scheduled towards the end of 2017 – a update on DFRT is contained in the paragraphs below.

ELECTION YEAR POLICY OUTCOMES

This year was of course heavily focussed on a Federal election that not only resulted in the incumbent Coalition Government barely scraping in by the skin of its teeth to once again sit on the Treasury benches but bore witness to yet more churn within the ranks of Ministers holding a Defence Personnel or Veterans Affairs portfolio. What chance could there have been of some firm and consistent policy outcomes under those circumstances?

In reality, few if any policies saw the light of day. Those that did were arguably meagre in substance, albeit important nonetheless. Perhaps a First Principles Review of Veterans' Affairs was an exception. The review was long overdue. Too many administrative, governance and process failings over time demanded it. Critically important too was a program involving the States to tackle homelessness among veterans, including suicides. The latter being the subject of a Senate Inquiry that is on-going.

Another exception was the Government's initiative to extend non-liability health care to all current and former members of the ADF. They are now eligible to have treated such conditions as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and alcohol/substance abuse. Disappointing was the exclusion of readily treatable potential causes of anxiety/depression, namely hearing devices other than basic level ones free to clients. If a diagnosed clinical need exists, higher performance devices should be provided.

Thereafter, there was little or no positive movement during the election campaign on advancing the unique nature of military service to a proposed Australian Military Covenant that articulates the Nation's obligations to its service personnel and their families; there was no advance on a policy that gave hope to the most disabled veterans in the land by restoring their loss of value in their disability payments, nor an advance in a policy that provided our most disabled veterans with an income level enabling them to live with dignity. As to the well-documented discriminatory provisions of DFRDB/MSBS military superannuation schemes, there was no sight of any policy shifts there either.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2017

Despite some successes that could be logged as achievements in 2016, many issues remain to be tackled and hopefully well on the road to being redressed in 2017. The key issues are as follows:

SERVING COMMUNITY ISSUE

Current ADF Workplace Remuneration Arrangement (WRA)

Perhaps as a reminder to serving ADF members, the current WRA is still in force with the last pay rise of three coming into effect under the original Arrangement on 3 November 2016. That increase was as a result of two factors, the first of which related to the terms of the original WRA in October 2014 awarding 4.5% over three years (2014-2017). The second related to the post outcome of our pro-active campaign throughout Nov and Dec 2014 to battle the paucity of the original 1.5% per annum offer that amended the original WRA decision by increasing that award by 0.5%: that is, a 2% increase in November 2015 and a 2% increase in November 2016.

As an Association we are beginning to gear up to make submissions next year when the 2017 to 2020 WRA will be negotiated and put before the Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal (DFRT) for decision. While the DFRT will consider positions put by the Commonwealth and the ADF, it will also listen to the position put by DFWA. As an independent third party in the DFRT process, working outside of the Defence bureaucracy, the Association can directly represent the views of serving members to the Tribunal.

When the 2011 - 2014 WRA was decided in 2011, the DFRT accepted the position of the ADF and the Commonwealth and approved the new salary arrangements. At that time, the DFWA informed the DFRT of both the feedback it had received from ADF members indicating the offer was strongly opposed by a majority of ADF members and of the implications of imposing an unsatisfactory outcome.

ADF members may recall their disappointment when in late 2014 the DFRT endorsed the Commonwealth/ADF agreed position to award the ADF an annual 1.5% pay increase during 2014-2017. Following widespread public dissatisfaction and strong lobbying by the DFWA, the Prime Minister announced that 2% per annum ought to be awarded to ADF members. The upshot was that the DFRT reconvened in April 2015, and in June 2015 announced its decision to agree to the increase.

This was a significant victory for all serving ADF members and their families.

ADF members are encouraged to keep monitoring the DFWA website (www.dfwa.org.au) for updates as the WRA case progresses in 2017.

EX SERVING COMMUNITY ISSUES

DFWA, together with its partner organisation that make up the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations (ADSO), will continue throughout 2017 to lobby and fight for those policy objectives articulated to all sides of politics during the lead up to this year's Federal election.

The Alliance, now numbering 17 ex service Associations, 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.

ADSO's 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) 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.
- **Veterans’ Mental Health.** 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.
- **Use of Anti-Malarial Drug Mefloquine in the ADF.** There is a need to formally recognise that many ADF personnel who took Mefloquine and Tafenoquine may have suffered physical and mental harm. Urgent assistance to those in need must be provided.
- **Military Covenant/Accord** that places 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.
- **Defence Housing.** A key issue in 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 for the work that DFWA performs, a big thanks in return is proffered to the many full time members of all our ADSO member organisations for your support in this a busy election year. Your membership subscriptions have been incredibly important for that work to be continued into the future. 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

Thanks also to the thousands of DFWA virtual members who did make a difference by way of your voices when it mattered. The Association makes sure that your voices are heard at the highest levels of

Government. Your feedback was all-important in that context. 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.

CORPORATE SPONSORS

To our corporate sponsors, a big thanks too. The key ones are:

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.

The Bradford Exchange

The Bradford Exchange are producers and marketers of high quality collectable memorabilia, particularly ones that are relevant to this the ANZAC Centenary Year.

Storage King;

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 do so very soon. 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.

<i>Contacts</i>		
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ADSO comprises:

The Defence Force Welfare Association (DFWA), Naval Association of Australia (NAA), RAAF Association (RAAFA), Royal Australian Regiment Corporation (RARC), Australian Special Air Service Association (ASASA), Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (VVAA), the Australian Federation of Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Ex-Service Men and Women, the Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia, Partners of Veterans Association of Australia, Royal Australian Armoured Corps Corporation (RAACC), the National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association Australia (NMBVAA), Defence Reserves Association (DRA), Australian Gulf War Veterans Association, Australian Commando Association, the War Widows Guild of Australia, Military Police Association Australia (MPAA), and the Australian Army Apprentices Association.

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)*