



## DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

*Patron-in-Chief: His Excellency General The Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd)*

*NATIONAL OFFICE*

**7 March 2017**

# **MEDIA STATEMENT**

## **PROTECTING VETERANS PRIVACY**

The Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment (Digital Readiness and Other Measures) Bill 2016 moved through the House of Representatives on Thursday 2 March 2017. The Bill seeks to overcome long-recognised deficiencies in the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) antiquated IT systems and improve its business processes. The Bill is designed to help reform DVA's processes to simplify them, reduce claims processing times and improve the services provided by the Department to veterans and their families and we support this aim.

It has come to our attention however that the privacy issues concerning what is the "public interest" to enable the Secretary of DVA to release a veteran's record has not undergone an independent Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA).

Instead, there appears only to have been an assessment undertaken by the Attorney Generals Department. As it has not been released thus far we urge its public release particularly to the veterans' community. Notwithstanding, given that the term "public interest" in the proposed legislation is modelled from social security law, we still believe that the Government should order an independent PIA that is consistent with the Guidelines set by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner. This would help engender confidence among veterans generally.

Once this achieved, the veterans community and lawmakers will be able to review the independent PIA report with respect to veterans' privacy and adjust the Bill as necessary to address any outstanding concerns. This should be done before the Bill is considered by the Senate.

We as a society owe our Veterans a duty of care in relation to their privacy. An independent PIA will go a long way to achieving trust within the Veterans community on this matter by addressing any short-comings in protecting privacy.

### *Contacts*

**Executive Director:**

**Alf Jaugietis** (0438) 282 284

[www.dfw.org.au](http://www.dfw.org.au)

**National President:**

**David Jamison** (0416) 107 557

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