



DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

A member of the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations

MONTHLY UPDATE #279 – March 2013

‘UPDATE’ is a monthly e-letter produced by the Defence Force Welfare Association. It informs 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

A sincere apology to readers for the delayed issue of the March Monthly Update! The Prime Minister’s **‘time for governing’** took its toll on the limited resources of the National Office when that time actually turned into a frenzy of whirlwind, non-stop electioneering!!

It was not lost on anyone in the last period that announcements of one sort or other seem to flow daily, each revealing either new Government policy initiatives or shoring up failed ones that had been hit for six by public opinion, tuwit the announcement in the last day or so on changes to superannuation arrangements. Such announcements were even the order of the day when the Prime Minister was recently encamped in the western suburbs of Sydney. **‘Rooty Hill’** may not have had a ‘light on the hill’ but peculiarly it nonetheless became an opportunity not to be missed for the ADSO Fair Go campaign. Most readers will have now heard that, at the very minimum, it allowed us to expose very publicly the extent to which veterans had been denied a ‘Fair Go’ for a very long time.

Not to be outdone by enthusiastic ADSO campaigners in the eastern States, the westerners were soon given an equal golden opportunity to rally for a ‘Fair Go’ too when the Prime Minister (and other Ministers) visited Thornlie Senior High School on Wednesday 27 March 2013 to attend a community cabinet meeting. Unity in purpose was on display, not to mention teamwork, when three Disabled Veterans also joined in the rally.

For the importance of all that, a visit to the **‘Top End’** by our National President, David Jamison, was almost lost in the noise!! But visit he did and, at the behest of the North Queenslanders themselves (probably feeling ignored!), Cairns was included in his itinerary. I accompanied David throughout. More about that, ‘Rooty Hill’, and other relevant happenings in the following paragraphs!

Other issues on which the Association worked over the period included the proposal for a Military Covenant and the new scheme that outsources the ADF’s medical services to Medibank Health Solutions.

FAIR GO CAMPAIGN GOES AUSTRALIA-WIDE

The Turning Point that Becomes Rooty Hill

A small band of campaigners gathered outside the ‘Rooty Hill’ Novotel Hotel on Tuesday 5 March 2013 - it was the hotel at which the Prime Minister was staying. The purpose was to mount a picket

with placards during her comings and goings. It represented a ‘golden’ opportunity to publically further our cause, and to challenge the Prime Minister about her Government’s stance to persist with the use of CPI as an index, knowing full well that military retirees suffer a continual reduction in the value of their paid for retirement superannuation pensions. “**That’s just not fair**”, is what we endeavoured to highlight.

The small band of campaigners belied their determination when one of them managed to call out in the Prime Minister’s presence ‘*Why won't you talk to us.....we're here, talk to us please*’.

Not only had a TV camera captured that those words at that moment but so had both the by- standing public and the milling thereabout print and other media. A ‘butterfly effect’ had been created; a mountain out of a molehill was growing faster than anyone could have foreseen. By days end most, if not every, TV station, print journalist and radio presenter on location at Rooty Hill were looking to dig deeper to see what these aging veterans were complaining about.

By morning an article in the Daily Telegraph said it all – the link is here for your reading pleasure:

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/prime-minister-julia-gillard-targets-labor-supporters-during-western-sydney-visit/story-e6freuy9-1226590291268>

Congratulations and well done to the small inaugural team that took ‘**Rooty Hill**’, by storm some could argue! They '**dared and they won**'. Team that followed in their footsteps and took up point duty for the rest of the week reaped the real dividend when their efforts, combined with inaugural team ones, resulted in the Prime Minister inviting the rally folk to privately meet with her to discuss their concerns. During that meeting she offered to meet with the ADSO Leadership at some other time in Canberra.

Radio interviews (by 2GB, 6PR and 2UE) and news articles on indexation flowed in a domino effect thereafter. A Miranda Devine article appeared in both the Sunday Telegraph, Sunday Courier Mail and the Melbourne Herald Sun on 10 March – see one of the articles here:

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/blogger-dinner-in-bad-taste/story-e6frezz0-1226593814590>

Another related article (by Simon Black) appeared in The Daily Telegraph on 18 March – see here:

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/diggers-take-shots-at-prime-minister-julia-gillard-over-superannuation-scheme/story-e6freuy9-1226599356586>

The timing for the proposed meeting with Prime Minister is being discussed with her staff now. It will take place well before the budget decisions are made. ADSO position is as follows:

- Parliament’s intent, as defined by the two military superannuation Acts, was that the purchasing power of military superannuation pensions would be maintained through appropriate indexation arrangements. By using the CPI (changed in the late 1980s from a cost of living to an inflationary measure) military retirees have suffered a continual reduction in the value of their retirement superannuation pensions. **That’s just not fair!**
- For years the Alliance has been lobbying Government to provide an indexation arrangement for military superannuation pensions that will ensure superannuation pensions keep pace with the cost of living.
- The solution is simple and affordable – index military pensions by the same percentage increase and payment frequency as is granted to age pensioners. **NOTHING ELSE WILL BE ACCEPTABLE!**

- Rumour has it that the Government is considering a means testing regime, so that only a portion of a superannuation pension is fairly indexed. **THAT ALSO IS NOT FAIR OR ACCEPTABLE!**

Thornlie Senior High School Rally

ADSO in Western Australia organised a rally outside Thornlie Senior High School on Wednesday 27 March 2013 to coincide with the arrival of the Prime Minister and other ministers to attend a community cabinet meeting. The rally was highly successful with strong numbers attending from the veterans' community, including three disabled servicemen joining the team.

Media exposure was limited and did not match Rooty Hill proportions but it did not distract from the public impact on rally overall. Geoff Hutchinson, ABC Morning Show, had stated that he had had many people ringing in about military superannuation, and thought that a program on that subject was possible.

The Government's Position on Indexation

Most will be aware of the Government's attempts to bring the budget back to surplus failed. To its credit, it supported the Notice of Motion for fair indexation by the Member for Lyne, Rob Oakeshott. However, there has otherwise been little evidence that it actually supports the principle, consistently claiming that the current CPI method of indexing military superannuation pension payments is 'fair' and 'generous'.

Notwithstanding, two recent meetings were held with Mike Kelly MP, member for Eden-Monaro and now Minister for Defence Materiel, to discuss indexation issues. One on Friday 15 March and the other on Thursday 28 March. Both meetings confirmed that he had been both lobbying his colleagues (for support) and working with the Prime Minister's office on a range of possible indexation solutions. While decisions on a model had yet to be made, he acknowledged that budgetary problems would have a constraint on any outcome. NDIS and Gonski were two clear priorities of the Government at the moment.

Minister Kelly informed that not only military but Commonwealth and other retirees are likely to be part of any final outcome the Government will consider as a package in the budget.

Other Major Issues

Proposed Military Covenant

Discussions were held on Wednesday 20 March 2013 with the Minister for Veterans Affairs, The Hon Warren Snowdon, and VCDF, AM Mark Binskin on the topic of a proposed '**Australian Military Covenant**'. Their support was sought for the Covenant itself plus its possible implementation during the Centenary of ANZAC.

As background, for several years, the National Executive of DFWA had worked on a basis upon which efforts to improve the conditions of service for both serving and former ADF members could be better articulated. The conclusion was that there was an abiding need to have a philosophical foundation for such proposals in a way that the uniqueness of military service in the ADF can be more readily defined. A need to better understand that 'uniqueness' had to be found, not only within Government but also more widely in the public domain.

During the discussion on the '**Australian Military Covenant**', it was concluded that its high principles of mutual obligations of the Nation to its service men and women, and in turn their obligations to the Australian people somewhat matched the principles of the ANZAC tradition. On

that basis, the VCDF would look to invite the National President DFWA to a meeting of the Centenary of ANZAC Committee.

Outsourcing ADF Medical Care

A meeting was held with officials from Medibank Health Solutions to determine the status of implementation of the outsourcing contract. During the discussion the officials were advised of the deep concern that remained among many ADF members that the new system would not be able to provide the best medical care for them, nor maintain the level of service they previously enjoyed from the old system. This was because it was well known that large numbers of specialist doctors, arguably the most experienced and best qualified in the country, had simply withdrawn their services and continue to refuse to sign up to the new contractor. Discussions in the filed by the DFWA National President seemed to confirm that problems were reasonably wide spread and needed to be eventually resolved.

The situation will continue to be monitored by DFWA. In the interim, the officials from Medibank Health Solutions proffered that the ADF had officially signed off on the Garrison Health Services contract in early February 2012. Medibank is thus now fully responsible for the management and coordination of ‘effective healthcare services’ for all eligible ADF personnel nationally, from point of injury or illness through to recovery.

All contract packages are apparently fully functional, including:

- Pathology - live on 1 September as planned.
- Radiology and Imaging - live on 1 September as planned.
- Off-base - live on 29 October as planned.
- On-base - live on 5 November as planned.
- Optometry - live on 5 November as planned.
- Allied Health Case Management service - live on 5 November as planned.
- Central Appointment Team – live on 29 October - processes circa 700 off-base referrals/day.

The Government considers this to be a major reform and intends for it to stay in place. Medibank has been tasked to rebuild the ADF health system, providing care nationally for all servicemen and women.

Feedback on the performance of the new scheme to DFWA is sought. We want to report directly to Government on grass roots opinions vis the new system so that it can be improved as necessary.

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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 (RARAC) and the Australian Special Air Service Association (ASASA).