



DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

MONTHLY UPDATE #254 – 17 September 2010

UPDATE is a monthly newsheet produced by the Defence Force Welfare Association containing current items of interest to the Service and ex-Service community. It is widely distributed to politicians, media outlets, senior Service and Public Service officers and DFWA members.

DFWA PUTS NEW GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION APPOINTEES AND THE INDEPENDENTS ON NOTICE

The Association welcomes the new Ministerial appointments and Opposition Shadows to the Defence and Veterans' Affairs portfolios. Prior to the election the DFWA lobbied political parties on the major issues that need to be resolved, including:

1. *Fair indexation of military superannuation pensions* – because, unlike the Age Pension and other welfare and superannuation pensions, the purchasing power of military superannuation pensions is not protected.
2. *Equitable treatment of veterans' disability pensions* – because the pensions of men and women who were disabled in the service of Australia have fallen behind in their value.
3. *Certainty in military compensation* – because ongoing indecision and uncertainty is stressful, unnecessary and unacceptable.
4. *Veterans' health care* – because mental health and residential accommodation for younger veterans in particular are issues that are increasing in frequency and severity.

UPDATE #253 of 17 August 2010 summarised the political parties positions on these matters and the Association will remind all elected representatives of the commitments they made and where further policy changes need to be made.

We are gratified that the Coalition, the Greens and the Independents supported proper indexation of military and commonwealth superannuation benefits. The Association, along with thousands of serving and retired military members, Defence widows and other military superannuants now look to them to follow up on the support they previously publicly gave.

The time has come to put words into action.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE MISLEADING FIGURES ?

The Association has been alerted to what is believed to be misleading figures for the costs of proper indexation of military and commonwealth superannuation benefits. Extensive financial analysis and explanation was provided support the claim.

It would appear that the Department of Finance has mixed nominal figures with discounted figures to produce a highly inflated view of the cost over the forward estimates to provide for proper indexation of superannuation benefits. This raises serious questions about the quality of actuarial advice that has been tendered to the Parliament from time to time. We believe an Inquiry into the Actuarial Costings and Assumptions that have held the financial security of 600,000 former military and commonwealth employees to ransom over the past 20 years, is warranted.

WOUNDED DIGGER WEBSITE

The Association welcomes the introduction of the Wounded Digger Website, an Army initiative aiming to provide serious casualties and their families with a wide range of information on support organisations and benefits. The site is a directory of information that seeks to provide education, interaction and networking for members suffering from injuries or illnesses, their families and other key stakeholders.

Wounded ADF members will require the nation's support for years to come and this welcome initiative is a small but important reflection of the debt we owe our wounded comrades.

CHAPLAINCY IN ADF OPERATIONS

Recent media reports that there is no permanent Catholic priest with the forces in Afghanistan is concerning. When a Catholic soldier is facing the possibility of death, the sacraments of the church are vital for spiritual strengthening: it is something all practicing Catholics have a right to expect. The Association understands that the stationing of Catholic chaplains is not the ADF bishop's prerogative, but the ADF's who may look at it as more of a "filling the billets" exercise with chaplains of various Christian denominations, on the basis that "one chaplain is as good as another".

In the danger of a war zone, it is vitally important that service men and women of all ranks have ready access to a Priest/Chaplain of their own faith, especially if they are seriously injured or dying. It is therefore important that the ADF recognizes and accommodates this as a basic right of all service men and women.

The Association is heartened to be advised that this matter is being reviewed at the highest levels so that Catholics have access to a Catholic Chaplain. The Association will keep a watching brief on the matter.

On a related matter (which may complicate policy making in the ADF), the media reports also suggest that religion is considered a private matter and so-called privacy issues override all, and so senior ADF clergy get only numbers of denominations, not names ! Could it also be that the media comment suggesting that senior ADF clergy did not know the denomination of a recently fallen soldier, but found out from the media, be true ? Surely not ?

THANK YOU TO OUTGOING MINISTERS AND OPPOSITION SPOKESPEOPLE

The National Executive wishes to thank the outgoing Defence and Veteran Affairs Ministers and their Opposition counterparts for their work supporting serving and former ADF members. We wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

VIRTUAL MEMBERSHIP OFFERED TO ALL ADF MEMBERS

The Association is offering members of the ADF "virtual membership" of the Association. This is a free service for serving ADF members although voluntary payment of fees and donations are very welcome. Membership fees and donations are tax deductible in certain circumstances so contact your accountant about your personal situation. Further information is available on our website.

Media Contacts

Executive Director:

Les Bienkiewicz 0411 444248

www.dfga.org.au

National President:

David Jamison 0416 107557