

National President's Newsletter No 8 of 2011

1. Ex-Service Organisations Round Table Meeting 24 November. Items discussed included:

a. DVA presence on ADF bases. As at 23 November 2011, DVA had established a presence at 37 ADF bases throughout the nation. The exemplar is Lavarack Health Centre Townsville where there is a DVA presence 5 days each week. At Puckapunyal it is 1 day per month. This is a welcome improvement of services to members of the ADF and complements the efforts of the ex-service organisations which will continue to be needed for the foreseeable future.

b. BEST Round 14 funding. Minister Snowdon was present for discussion about this item. It was agreed DVA would arrange meetings for negotiations about BEST Round 14 funding with all indications being that these would start in December 2011.

c. Standardised OH&S Laws. Safe Work Australia explained that the three levels of government are seeking to harmonise OH&S laws throughout the nation. This will take effect in all states and territories from 1 January 2012 except for WA and VIC whose governments have indicated a one year delay. The major change is that the OH&S laws are not confined to employees/employers but recognises the concept of workers including volunteers. The new laws also impose duties on senior officers. There are some exemptions for volunteer organisations which do not have any employees. Volunteer officers do have responsibilities but are immune from prosecution. The implications for the RSL appear to be that there will be a once only administrative load imposed as the new OH&S laws are introduced. All are advised to visit the Safe Work Australia web site and, in particular, the section on Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).

d. Future direction of the Defence Community Organisation. The Director General Mr Callan advised that in stage 3 of the DCO reform program the organisation plans to engage with ex-service organisations. They are planning to 'up skill' family liaison officers, reduce management overheads and provide an additional 10% of frontline workers.

e. No likelihood of a single agency for Defence Force Income Support Allowance (DIFSA). This allowance is an income support payment made by DVA to those whose social security income support payment is reduced or not payable because of adjusted disability pension. It would be preferable that this be paid by a single agency but this has not been arranged because it would require IT system funding of \$30M over 4 years.

f. Jet fuel exposure syndrome study. Dr Ian Gardiner advised that the services have funded this study. It will take place over 4 calendar years and will take account of a 30 year study undertaken by the petroleum industry (noting that the petroleum industry study did not take account of splashes of fuel). Difficulties include the fact that the precise content of fuels used in the past is not necessarily known. It was stated that allies are paying close attention to this study as it has not been undertaken anywhere else as yet.

g. Coordinated veterans care program. Dr Killer advised they are working on a new concept for veterans and doctors because of changes in primary health care. New factors include that only 25% of new doctors are choosing to become GPs and that it is taking a lot more time to manage older patients. The aim in the new model is to identify veterans with complex issues; to up skill practice nurses so some of the care can be delegated to them; to provide home visits where appropriate; and

to provide resources to GPs managing complex veteran cases. On a voluntary basis doctors will be encouraged to identify patients with a high usage of services.

Dr Killer also advised that a home medication review is underway and explained the benefits to veterans and doctors likely to arise from this review.

h. Major General Fogarty advised that the outcome of several reviews on personnel issues are mostly complete; that they contain over 1000 recommendations; and that as a consequence Defence is developing a strategy to embrace the totality of what is involved and how the way ahead should be managed. He also noted that although ADF retention rates were at a record in May, a competitive employment era has returned and that recruiting inquiry rates have reduced.

2. The quest for improved indexation of military superannuation payments. This was most recently debated at the WA State Branch Congress on Saturday 26 November where delegates were provided with a comprehensive explanation about what the RSL has done and is doing to try to convince the Government to the validity of the issues put forward in our comprehensive submission of February 2010. Important issues arising from this debate are:

- the RSL approach to this issue complements the efforts of other ex-service organisations while retaining the RSL apolitical stance.
- Government has not yet responded to our comprehensive February 2010 submission
- Prime Ministers Rudd and Gillard separately indicated there is no prospect of the government agreeing to any change to any of the indexation of military superannuation schemes. This is consistent with the government's rejection of the Fair Indexation Bill put forward by the Opposition in the Senate in June.
- the RSL will not relent in this quest and every opportunity is taken to put the validity of the case to members of the Commonwealth Parliament.

4. ADF Pay Case. Major General Fogarty met with the National President and the RSL DFRT Representative Commodore Lemon on 20 October to explain the approach planned when the ADF pay case was put before the Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal. The decision not to formally object to the position of a 4% pay rise this year followed by two and a half percent pay rises in the following two years was taken reluctantly – and only on the understanding that there may be some room to renegotiate the increases in years 2 and 3. All issues, including the adamant stance by Government that retrospectivity would not be entertained were taken into account. In the event the DFRT granted the increase – but we will remain vigilant about this issue because of our concern that the rates of remuneration of members of the ADF must take account of increases in cost of living.

5. Release of personal records from National Archives. The release of personal service records from the National Archives is a cause for concern. In one case recently cited less than complementary comments on a confidential report were included in an obituary and could have caused offence to the deceased person's family. The National Executive has agreed to prepare a comprehensive submission about this matter and it is planned that this will be ready for consideration at the first meeting in 2012.

6. Other events. These included a meeting with ACM Angus Houston on 5 October; accepting the invitation of the Veterans of the Republic of China to the 100th anniversary celebrations in Taiwan 9 to 12 October; appearing as a witness before the Senate Committee inquiring into National

Memorials on 14 October; attending a meeting of the Defence Reserve Support Council on 15 October; attending the production of a special Forces Entertainment Board Christmas video for ADF personnel deployed on operations on 18 October; addressing the NSW RSL State Executive on 19 October; laying a wreath at the National Merchant Navy War Memorial on 23 October; attending an Australian War Memorial function to greet HM the Queen and HRH the Duke of Edinburgh on 25 October; attending the War Widows Guild National Council Dinner on 27 October; attending a briefing by the Fleet Commander on 28 October; laying a wreath at the National Australian Hellenic Memorial in Canberra on 30 October; attending the Sir David Martin Foundation Charity Ball on 5 November; guest speaker at the NSW Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen on 6 November; meeting with the RSL Deputy National President on 9 November; chairing the meeting of the Australian War Memorial Council's Finance, Audit & Compliance Committee then attending a meeting of the AWM Council on 10 November; attending the national Remembrance Day Service, a remembrance service at the French Embassy and the AWM Oration on 11 November; chairing a meeting of the National Executive on 15 November; attending and addressing the annual congress of the RNZRSA at Wellington on 16 November; attending the address to the Federal Parliament by President Obama on 17 November; attending the 70th anniversary commemoration service for HMAS Sydney II at Geraldton on 19 November; visits to the Cockburn City RSL Sub Branch and the Serpentine/Jarrahdale RSL Sub Branch on 21 November; a call on the Governor of Western Australia on 22 November; attending a reception at the Japanese Embassy on 23 November; attending the ESO Round Table Conference on 24 November; laying a wreath at the WA State War Memorial in Perth on 25 November; attending and addressing the WA RSL State Branch Congress on 26 November; a call on the Chief of Navy on 29 November; and chairing a meeting of the Forces Entertainment Board on 30 November.