

National President's Newsletter No 1 of 2012

1. Keeping RSL Members informed

The 2010 initiative of compiling and forwarding regular National President's Newsletters to State and Territory Branch Presidents improved the flow of information from the National Office to Branches, Districts, Sub Branches and Members - but has generally worked well in keeping us all informed on current issues. I am of the view that it is now time to extend the coverage of the newsletter so that our broader membership is similarly kept informed.

As a consequence my 2012 newsletters will be posted on the RSL National Website. The reaction of RSL members to this further attempt to improve the flow of information will determine whether other changes will be made.

Please note that the RSL annual budget submission remains posted on the League's national website. This document is revised and updated every year to take account of issues brought forward through debate at the State Branch Conferences and at the National Congress. We continue to urge action on all matters included in this budget submission at every opportunity.

2. Indexation of Military Superannuation Payments

The quest for an improvement in the indexation of military superannuation payments to DFRB, DFRDB and MSBS superannuants remains a top priority of the National Executive.

- In late 2009 the National Executive authorised the compilation a comprehensive submission to Government aimed at justifying an improvement in the rate of indexation of military superannuation payments.
- I raised this matter with Prime Minister Rudd when invited to meet with him in January 2010. He was not persuaded by my arguments for an improved rate of indexation but agreed to consider a formal written submission about the matter.
- The RSL Military Superannuation Indexation Submission was approved by National Executive and forwarded under an accompanying letter I signed and sent to Prime Minister Rudd on 22 February 2010. One week later a copy of this RSL Submission was posted on the RSL national website.
- Despite regular and frequent requests for a reply from the Minister, it was not until Monday 13 February 2012 that a reply was finalised. A copy of this letter from Minister Snowdon and its attachment are included as part of this newsletter. It is disappointing no reason was advanced for the inordinate delay of 2 years in responding given the acknowledgement that "The Government is well aware of the concern of the veteran community about superannuation indexation..."

The response is predictably disappointing given the Government's decision in the Senate on Thursday 16 June 2011 to oppose the Fair Indexation Bill.

Though the outlook is bleak we have no intention of relenting in our efforts to bring about justified improvement in the level of indexation of payments to military superannuants. We will continue to use every opportunity to raise the matter with all Senators and Members of the House of Representatives regardless of their political affiliations; and the National Executive will consider what other actions might be taken at its forthcoming meeting in Darwin on Monday 20 February 2012. An update will be provided in my next newsletter.

3. BEST Funding

At the conclusion of the meeting of the Ex-Service Organisations(ESOs) Round Table Conference on Thursday 24 November there was agreement that additional meetings were needed in the short term to try to resolve a better formula for the distribution of BEST funding. This was recorded in part in my last newsletter. As a consequence, Mr Sean Farrelly (DVA) arranged and chaired meetings on this sole topic on 9 December 2011 and again on 24 January 2012.

These meetings were well attended by National Presidents of ESOs (or their representatives) with the National Veterans' Affairs Advisor John Hodges being present with me to represent RSL views on both

days. Progress is being made towards a more equitable formula for allocating BEST funding; and the benefits of considering an arrangement such as exists at the Veterans' Centres in Victoria is included in the mix.

4. Meeting with Minister Snowdon 23 January 2012

In addition to items 2 and 3 above, matters discussed included:

- The quest for recognition by ex-service personnel who served in the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (BCOF) after the Second World War. Minister Snowdon was unequivocal in his commitment to bring this matter to a final decision in the near term. I am advised the Minister has since given similar advice to members of the BCOF Association. The Minister was left in no doubt that the RSL considers this matter must be dealt with as soon as possible – and that we will continue to support the quest by members of the BCOF Association.
- The outcome of Defence reviews following the 2011 Skype incident at ADFA. The Minister advised that this was being handled solely by the Minister for Defence. I have subsequently had private meetings with the stood aside Commandant of ADFA and with several of the most senior leaders of the Australian Defence Force. I will continue to refrain from public comment about these matters as a consequence of these private discussions.
- The advice from all RSL Branches that the League does not support a proposal to award the Victoria Cross to the Unknown Soldier interred at the Australian War Memorial. I have since written to the Chairman of the Defence Honours & Awards Appeals Tribunal advising him of this decision. This letter referred to a question without notice I was asked when I appeared before the Tribunal on 2 December 2011.
- Relocation of defence assets to the north. Minister Snowdon advised that no new information was available but that his Chief of Staff would seek information from the staff of the Minister for Defence. I hope to include more information in my next newsletter.

5. Review of *Military Rehabilitation & Compensation Act 2004*

Advice from the Chief of Staff to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs is that the Military Rehabilitation & Compensation Commission in conjunction with the Department of Veterans' Affairs are working through the 47 submissions (including 14 from ESOs) received in response to the 108 recommendations of the MRCA Review. The Minister for Veterans' Affairs is proposing to provide a response to the MRCA Review in the context of the 2012/2013 budget.

6. Access to Service Records as allowed under the *Archives Act*

At the invitation of the Chairman of the National Conditions of Service Committee, Mrs Anne Piggott, Acting Director Section 33, National Archives of Australia addressed the Committee on 5 December 2011. Subsequently the information provided by Mrs Piggott was used when compiling an RSL Policy Options paper about this sensitive matter. This document is to be considered by the National Executive at its meeting on Monday 20 February.

Attachment: Copy of Minister Snowdon's letter to me of 13 February 2012 along with a copy of the attachment to that letter.

Ken Doolan