

18 June 2018

Julian Leeser M.P.

Ref: Possible amalgamation of the three acts, namely, Veterans' Entitlement Act, Safety and Rehabilitation Act and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act.

Dear Mr. Leeser,

I am a member of The TPI Veterans Association of NSW, and I have read in our magazine SALUTE of Winter 2018, Page 7 that the Federal Government, of which you are a member, is taking submissions up until late June 2018 regarding the amalgamation of the three acts, Veterans' Entitlement Act, Safety and Rehabilitation Act and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act.

I am writing to you as I was conscripted into the Australian Army, and served in The Royal Australian Infantry in Vietnam, and as such my illnesses and injuries as I have earned a DVA GOLD Card are covered by The Department of Veterans' Affairs under The Veterans' Entitlement Act.

Before and after National Service I worked for the Federal Government and Statutory Authorities and if injured traveling to and from the job and while working on the job I was covered by The Commonwealth Compensation Act, which as I read it was the predecessor of what you call the Safety and Rehabilitation Act.

Working as a Telecommunications Technician-in-Training to a Telecommunications Principal Technical Officer over a 40year period I had considerable experience with the Commonwealth Compensation Act. I know what it offered, and I know its limitations. By the late 1970s, I found this a reasonable compensation scheme for injuries and illnesses sustained on the job while working in what was considered a high risk civilian occupation in Australia.

While working out of Hornsby in the Turrumurra – St. Ives area we were considered the highest risk occupation in Australia for potential Funnel Web Spider Bite. This was pretty scary before the antivenin was developed. Yet, this totally pales in comparison to working as an Infantryman being shot at day after day in a minefield, with Australian and enemy planted mines, which were planted, lifted, boobytrapped and replanted, mates being blown up and desperately trying to keep what remained of them alive until a 'Dustoff' helicopter can come and lift them out. Electronic mine detectors that don't work because there were mass barbed wire fences and star pickets covering most of the area, so as infantry we were back to the Australian Army method of probing with bayonets, over and over the same ground each day searching, and sometimes finding replanted boobytrapped jumping jack landmines.

To serve as a soldier, to be shot at and bombed by both enemy and supposed allies, to be blown up, to suffer rotten skin diseases and internal infections that never really cure, to have slept of a night, when one could get sleep in over a foot of water, in total darkness, with green slime, possibly containing Agent Orange dribbling all over you as the rain pelted down, there is NO COMPARISON to what help the Safety and Rehabilitation Act can offer as compared to the help and valued assistance the Veterans' Entitlement Act, which looks after me does now offer.

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Mr. Leeser, over the years many of the complications I suffered from my military operational service as a National Serviceman in The Australian Army have come back to haunt me and I find I am in great need of the, what I feel are the excellent services offered by The Veterans' Entitlement Act, and the people who work there.

From experience I feel the Safety and Rehabilitation Act, would not cover mine and other veterans' needs for the illnesses and diseases we have and the help we so desperately need.

Why would a Liberal – National Party Government want to change something that I think works? It was a Liberal – Country Party Government that conscripted us, put us in the Army, in many cases issued us with junk equipment and sent us to Vietnam (I couldn't even get a proper green bush hat until I was sent from the Reinforcement Unit in Vietnam to the Battalion, and there our tent (home) rotted, tore and fell to bits, three different 16X16 tents in six months), where we would not even use Australian made small arms (rifle) ammunition, much preferring to use the U.S. made ammunition on a month by month basis. Then to top it off we have suffered all the remainder of our lives from the effects of American defoliation policy. One dreaded when the U.S.A.F. C-123 Providers flew over, let alone when we went to guard of a night the northern water point, in the latter part of the dry season the only drinking water for the whole of The Australian Task Force and all the bushes and plants around the water point were dead, having been sprayed by what, and we lay in that.

Please don't mess me up any more, I find The Veterans' Entitlement Act works. Please can this Liberal - National Party Government just leave us with that?

Yours Faithfully

Ross Wood