

18th May 2018

The Chairperson,
Veterans Compensation and
Rehabilitation Inquiry,
Productivity Commission,
GPO Box 1428,
CANBERRA ACT 2004

Garry Ridge,

Dear Sir Madam,

**Re service standards
Department Veteran Affairs**

Firstly, allow me to congratulate you on holding an inquiry into the woeful conduct of the Department Veteran Affairs, indeed a great responsibility given the large number of veterans who are in dire need of practical assistance.

It is the view of most Australian citizens that the primary role of a Departmental minister and a Department Secretary is to generally oversee the performance of their particular portfolio. To ensure that the policies in force are practical and effective and that the actions of the public servants are aligned to assisting the Department's clientele.

Unfortunately this is a department which has for many years achieved neither of those goals. Veteran Affairs over years has morphed into an organization which is wholly orientated towards administering the various Acts, limiting expenditure and devoting the very least of its staff resource towards assisting veterans.

Prior Ministers including Mr. Tehan have paid lip service to the easily identified departmental problems stating that every effort is being provided to assist veterans when the reality is very different. These ministers have preferred to not make any changes, not upset the status quo (Prime Minister) in order that their chances of promotion to a higher status Department would not be jeopardized – Mr. Tehan's situation as a prime example.

It is sincerely hoped that the Department will not be permitted to continue on its well-worn path and that the outcome of this review will practically improve conditions within the department, resulting in actual service being provided to veterans.

The service process is flawed from the Secretary down with each staff member not agitating for any changes obviously in fear of loss of promotional opportunities or even worse, non-retention of their jobs.

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The department has an adversarial approach to veterans, continuing an established practice of denying any claims, forcing the veteran into a three part appeal process which can take anywhere up to three years (personal experience) – all the while offering an opportunity to withdraw anytime. No personal assistance is provided, with the veteran directed to volunteer RSL veteran representatives for any help.

Fact sheets, an obvious misnomer, are deliberately convoluted in order to confuse entitlements - what you do not understand you can make no claim on - being the approach. The Act and the budget rules all – this entrenched approach needs to be reversed and it is only changes brought about by this review which can achieve this, for no one will endanger their jobs.

I have previously provided to any number of Senators and Ministers including the Prime Minister as well as private organizations a suggested approach which will identify problems and assist with providing solutions. This process very much involves those people most experienced with veterans' departmental problems, the volunteer RSL veteran representatives.

I have attached a copy of this correspondence for its contents are most relevant to a review of Departmental process. That it could be acted upon, its contents as a whole or at least in part, would be of great benefit to departmental clientele. An addendum is attached quoting terms used by the Department Secretary in his recent half page newsletter advice to veterans – a perfect example of meaningless public service drivel by an out of touch public servant.

As a breath of hope for veterans, this review is capable of effecting changes within the Department of Veteran Affairs, changes which have been needed for a very long time. Reorientating the department toward a veteran service approach will have a tremendously positive effect on veterans and which will in the very least, stem the developed trend of suicide amongst frustrated veterans. They need a department which then can trust.

The future direction of the Department of Veteran Affairs lays entirely in the hands of the Productivity Commission inquiry and the veteran community awaits with some trepidation the actions that it will take.

I thank you for the opportunity to contribute and look forward to an acknowledgement of the inclusion of this submission. I would be pleased to discuss these matters at any time.

~~Yours faithfully,~~

G.W Ridge