

## Submission by AATTV Association WA Branch– A better way for veterans

The draft Productivity Report – A better way for veterans needs to be canned especially in relation to those veterans that come under VEA Act 1986. The methodology used in the report is flawed because it makes the premise that all veterans are equal. The report has taken an easy way out by over simplifying the complexities of the existing Acts and placing them into two Schemes. The major flaw in the report is the term ‘veteran’ which the commission saw fit to reclassify. It has put all members of the ADF into the one basket by inferring that they are all veterans from day one of entry into the ADF. A cop out that the veteran community will not accept.

The main emphasis of the Acts which have been legislated and changed over the years are based on the varying types of service conditions that veterans endured during their service. For example, veterans under the VEA Act were under worse conditions of service than those that are now in the service. Service remuneration and allowances were not as generous, for example compare the hazard pay paid to the Vietnam veteran which was insignificant and health and welfare compensation virtually non-existent due to the attitude towards Vietnam veterans by DVA at the time. In other words, the system in place was not effectively looking after those veterans. It took many years for the government to wake up to the needs of those veterans and it was only the fight for change made by Vietnam veterans that brought about change. Concessions hard fought for that should not just be thrown away as in a number of cases the Commission is suggesting.

Veterans in service today are well paid, have a generous scheme for those injured during service and an even better superannuation scheme. They are paid generous amounts of hazard pay and other allowances as compared to the war veteran of past conflicts. But the commission has seen fit to put everyone under the one umbrella. This is not a satisfactory outcome for those that have served on active duty. The war veteran still sees that they are a different species than the service person that has only served in peacetime. The current Acts understand this and that is why there are differentiation in payments for the various classes of service, for example, Warlike, non-warlike, peacekeepers etc.

Another aspect of the Commissions bundling all into the one category of veteran is that there will be a rate of pension at one level for all. There did not appear to be any indication in the report as to what rate this would be but then again this is not acceptable. Veterans, especially war veterans see this as an affront to their service. The Commission would do better to revisit their determination as to what the term ‘veteran’ does mean. It is a cop out to try on simplify the re-writing of the Acts to put all service personnel within one category. Yes, the current Acts are complex in their nature but this is due to the variance of service conditions of ADF personnel over many decades.

The Commission needs to allow the current Acts to remain in force. For example, the VEA Act which has many current veterans under its arm will eventually die out due to the ages of those veterans now and as there is a cut-off date for this Act. The numbers under this Act will dwindle over the coming years. Therefore, meddling with this Act is seen as unnecessary as it contains conditions that have been accepted due to the nature of service under which veterans of that era were covered. It is accepted that all veterans currently receiving pensions under this Act will remain untouched and nor should they be.

There is a concern however, that dependants especially those that would be eligible for a War Widows pension and Gold Card will be targeted by the Commission. It is the current condition that once a Totally and Permanently Incapacitated veteran (TPI) passes on that the dependent gets the War Widows pension and Gold Card. The Commission in its report appears to give the impression that if the war veteran does not die from a service related injury then this should not happen. The Commission also appears to infer that the TPI should not be issued with a Gold Card that covers all conditions. What the Commission has failed to see is that Gold Card gives the TPI solace and comfort in knowing that no matter what they suffer during their lifetime they will be looked after by the VEA system. These concessions are paramount to the wellbeing of those on TPI pensioners. The Gold Card is not seen as a prize to be won but as an essential part of the compensation package for the TPI pensioner.

The Commission also asks for submissions for the Gold Card for dependents be looked at. It is proposed by our organisation that the Gold Card for dependents of TPIs be granted when the Gold Card is issued to the TPI pensioner. The reason behind this proposal is that many dependents of TPI pensioners suffer years of hardship with a TPI to care for and look after. Wives/partners become full time carers and often suffer their own health problems from the constant caring of their TPI partner. This is especially apparent when a veteran suffers from mental health problems such as PTSD. It is questionable as to why the dependent should wait until the passing of their TPI partner before the Gold Card is given.

The Commission should look at this aspect with a sympathetic outlook as opposed to a cost cutting measure. Should the Commission decide our proposal is unacceptable then the Gold Card should at the very least be offered to dependents of TPI at age 60 years. Once again it is the complexities of the written Acts as to why a War Widows pension and Gold Card exist. The Commission needs to not interfere with the current conditions especially when it comes to VEA Act 1986. Especially if it comes to the detriment of TPIs and their dependents.

The award of the Gold Card to those over 70 years of age with operational service by the Howard Government was seen as a vote catching exercise. It in essence devalued the meaning of the Gold Card in the eyes of TPIs and their dependents. The Howard would have been better to have awarded to Gold Card to the dependents of TPIs to show gratitude to those dependents for caring for their TPI partner.

The draft report also considers the removal of a number of payments to veterans, for example, Decoration Allowance. Although the Commission sees such a payment as small that has never been indexed, it is still a right for those who have earned the allowance. The Commission should be proposing an increase rather than getting rid of this allowance. There are other allowances that the Commission wants removed from the Acts but we suggest that they look at the reasons behind such allowances before deciding to remove them.

In particular, there is concern about the indication about the vehicle replacement allowances for TPIs every two years being removed. These concessions such as non-payment of the GST for purchase of a new vehicle are considered as necessary to ensure that the TPI can at least get some discount. The removal of GST on spare parts etc is also an aspect that should not be touched. We also wish to indicate to the Commission that not many TPIs can afford to purchase a new vehicle every two years. In our organisation veterans have had their vehicle for 20 years. It is suggested that the two year period is there for those that can afford it and that the vehicle does not depreciate too much over that two year period.

In conclusion, we have found the report wanting. It has taken the easy way out by over simplifying the term 'veteran'. It has shied away from the complexities of the existing Acts without the realisation that the content of those Acts reflect the type and nature of service faced by those service personnel over the generations it covers. As indicated, the VEA Act 1986 should be left alone and left to die a natural death after all those veterans covered are deceased but should continue to provide for dependents under those conditions shown in the Act until they too are deceased. The Commission has rightly recognised that those currently under pensions in the Act should remain so but that needs to extend to our dependents and non-interference in the current conditions under this Act.

We agree the Acts are complex but the streamlining of processes by both Defence and DVA should be enhanced with better use of information technology. We are aware that DVA are looking into these processes and wish them well. It would also be more acceptable by veterans if DVA was more user friendly when it comes to entitlements, for example, DVA should guide the veteran to just what their entitlements are rather than the veteran having to try and determine themselves as to what is an entitlement. Maybe the use of case officers for veterans could be looked at.

Our organisation has faith in the DVA and the services they provide.

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