

FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE and TRADE COMMITTEE

**Department of The Senate
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Canberra ACT. 2600**

Inquiry into the: ***TPI Payment (Special Rate of Disability Pension)***

Submitter: Mr. R jones

TPI PAYMENT (Special Rate of Disability Pension)

26th April 2021

SENATORS

To give some background to my comments within this submission, as a 20-year-old in 1967 I was training in the field of Land Surveying and Civil Engineering, first with The State Rivers and Water Supply Commission, then The Shire of Cobram and later The City of Mordialloc (now City of Kingston).

These formative years were of course the era of the ballot and conscription, and like all 20-year-olds at the time when told of your call up, without fear favor or rancor, did the right thing by the Government of the day and went and did your duty. After the initial training period I was posted to an Infantry battalion as a rifleman on operations within South Vietnam 1968-1969.

Since that time, due to my military service, I suffer ongoing psychological problems that have from time-to-time needed intervention through the Repatriation Hospital Heidelberg, and countless appointments with psychiatrists, I Have also been dealing with the DVA since the mid 1980's with claims for other injuries sustained in South Vietnam and was made TPI in 2002.

Three things made the Vietnam war different from other recent conflicts,

Public Support: The support at home for the Australian soldier was nonexistent, indeed, elements of the public openly supported the other side displaying the Nth. Vietnamese flag in major city protest marches, and the local sport of that time by Uni students was to daub red paint over soldiers leaving for Vietnam on their march outs through CBD's.

Conscription: The Conscription process was brutal to say the least in a lot of cases it took single siblings from families and some of those sons never made it back home leaving families devastated, some 200 conscripts died in Vietnam, the overall Australian death toll 521.

Agent Orange: The Agent Orange nightmare is still with us today, manifesting itself in various forms of cancers from that time, the various agents of this carcinogen were everywhere in Vietnam if you weren't sprayed from above with it you picked it up via waterways on water resupplies, a form of it was also constantly sprayed through Company lines at Nui Dat leaving a constant thickness in the back of the throat. To many life is still a lottery waiting for that dormant cancer to rear its ugly head, that's the life a lot of us face now.

I give the above preamble to Senators of this particular Inquiry because it perhaps highlights what the servicemen and servicewomen have, and do endure in this country's name, and to highlight the absolute intransigence of politicians to honour their part of the bargain in making sure that veterans welfare is kept as current as possible. The issue of the economic loss compensation has been in decline over five decades and needs to be addressed urgently.

The TPI Federation has been calling on politicians over a number of years now to have the problem remediated, in 2018 when the Minister for Veterans Affairs Darren Chester was asked about the very same issue, he stated he thought that that there was a case for a step up in TPI's compensation since that statement was made, we are still without an equitable economic loss component to our compensation payment.

In recent years the Prime Minister asked one of the largest accountancy firms KPMG to do a fact finding remit on the adequacy of the TPI payments, by engaging with KPMG he destroyed a lot of credibility within the veteran community, we wanted leadership from our Prime Minister, to perhaps show some compassion, and certainly not put us in the hands of an accounting firm that has no understanding of the veteran community or their nuanced needs, this was his way of credibly sidestepping the issue, indeed, its findings were, that after taking into account the total of all components that TPI's receive (both monetary and the gold card) the compensation package was adequate, in other words they used the old argument of conflating total payments instead of looking at the actual loss component and the adoption of a mechanism whereby a fit for purpose benchmark, (percentage based) scale that keeps their compensation payments at a constant with any ongoing movements in wages, and the most suitable benchmark would be the tax adjusted minimum wage, this change would over a short period of time be largely revenue neutral for the government because of this cohorts advancing years.

In 2018 the government through the Productivity Commission held an Inquiry **A Better Way to Support Veterans** this held out hope within the veteran TPI community that perhaps a mechanism for the economic loss component would finally be achieved. The presiding commissioner to that inquiry Mr. Robert Fitzgerald AM, who, I might add, in producing the Draft Report wrote on the fitness level of ADF personnel was akin to ballet dancers training (my paraphrasing), and his view of the TPI payments was virtually dismissed out of hand where he once again, like KPMG, conflated the total TPI payments argument instead of addressing the benchmarking question.

In closing, I would like to mention the geopolitical situation, at the time of writing, Scott Morrison has just notified the general public of the release of seven hundred and forty seven million dollars to be spent on reinforcing the Australian ADF on the back of reports within the government of the ongoing threat and rise of China, this surely highlights for all members of this Inquiry how important it is to finally get a fit for purpose support system in place, we surely owe it to our ADF men and women and veterans now more than ever.

