

## Submission to Senate Inquiry into Defence Honours and Awards

Terms of Reference items this submission relates to:

- a) Experiences of Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel progressing through the honours and awards system;
- b) The effect of awards and honours on maintaining morale within the ADF;
- c) Any potential improvements to the Defence honours and awards system;

I am Able Seaman Rigney, a current serving member of the Royal Australian Navy. In this submission I am going to discuss my views, opinions and ideas regarding the experience of ADF personnel through the honours and awards system, the effect of awards and hours on maintaining morale within the ADF and how improvements can be made to the honours and awards system.

### Awarding of the National Emergency Medal (NEM)

The process of awarding the NEM has been, in my opinion, an unnecessarily challenging process that has seen many clasps of the award failing to be awarded to their recipients within an acceptable timeframe. The process to award the Bushfires 2019-20 NEM to ADF members has been delayed for five years, the only awarded medals for this clasp that I have seen have been awarded to personnel because of their civilian service to the disaster. With the new FLOODS FEB 2022 NEM being announced I believe the process in awarding the medal will take even longer. A larger team needs to be assembled to ensure that the timeframes to process and award these type of medals is significantly reduced. As I have heard many ADF members jokingly say that they will receive their NEM via the mail in eight years time after they have left the military. These type of comments may seem like an innocent joke but it highlights the failing processes and procedures of the Australian Honours and Awards team. This failing in process and procedures, I believe, is affecting ADF morale negatively as on days like ANZAC Day, many ADF members are left knowing they are eligible for a medal they are most likely never going to see awarded to them whilst on full time service.

### Operation FLOOD ASSIST 22-1 QLD/NSW eligibility period.

I served on Operation FLOOD ASSIST 22-1 QLD/NSW, and during that operation I felt like that for the first time in my short career I was truly helping the Australian people. I had volunteered in the early stages of the disaster and was within the area of operations when the then Prime Minister of Australia Mr Scott Morrison declared a national emergency on 11 Mar 22. When the eligibility period for FLOODS FEB 2022 was announced as 23 Feb 22 – 04 Mar 22 I was left confused, disappointed and angry as the disaster was not declared a national emergency until a week after the eligible end date. These dates, I believe, were deliberately chosen to limit the cost of issuing new medals to so many new recipients. As soon as these dates were announced, I witnessed the displeasure and anger of

many ADF members who felt like their service had been blatantly ignored and forgotten to save the ADF money. If the eligibility period were to be changed by two weeks from 23 Feb 22 to a new end date of 18 Mar 22, I can safely say a majority of personnel from every service, not only the ADF, would now be eligible for the NEM with the standard five day eligibility criteria. I believe morale across the ADF would improve because ADF personnel would realise their service has not been discarded and forgotten about, as was the case when the eligibility period was announced.

## Proposed Tier system for the Australian Operational Service Medal-Boarder Protection (AOSM-BP)

During my time serving up north in Darwin on Operation RESOLUTE, I came across many patrol boat sailors that were and still are very frustrated in the manner of how Major Fleet Unit (MFU) sailors are receiving their AOSM-BP. MFU sailors sail north to deploy on Operation RESLOUTE only to immediately leave the area of operations after completing the required 30 days service to qualify for the AOSM-BP. Although this is fully within their right, this systematic behaviour disheartens the patrol boat community by telling them the AOSM-BP is just another medal for MFUs to obtain whilst adding little to no capability to the operation. This behaviour undermines the time and hard work the patrol community contributes year after year protecting the north. Many patrol boat sailors that I have had discussions with, from SMN to LS, believe there should be a system in place that more so recognises their years of service on Operation RESLOUTE. Having a clear-cut process, that recognises the long service periods they contribute to Operation RESOLUTE, something that I whole-heartedly agree with. I am suggesting a new Tier system for the AOSM-BP denoting time served whilst on Operation RESOLUTE, here are my three options.

- Option one; A five Tier system Utilising the current Australian Operational Service Medal- Greater Middle Eastern Operations numerical clasps, This will save defence funds as the clasps have already been designed.
- Tier one = 200 days service denoted by numerical clasp "1"
- Tier two = 400 days service denoted by numerical clasp "2"
- Tier three = 600 days service denoted by numerical clasp "3"
- Tier four = 800 days service denoted by numerical clasp "4"
- Tier five = 1,000 days service denoted by numerical clasp "5"

The respective numeral will also be displayed on the AOSM-BP service ribbon.

- Option two; A new designed clasp with the same Tier system and eligibility periods as option one, each showcasing the Australian Coat of Arms in the middle of the clasp. With each qualifying clasp represented by an individual Pip on the service ribbon. The fifth clasp will contain the Australian Coat of Arms in the middle, The fifth 'Pip' will be represented by itself on the service ribbon in the appearance of The Bullhorns, which is a prominent symbol/ mascot and pays homage to the legacy of the Armidale Class Patrol Boats. Noting Cairns sailors mascot is a Marlin, If approved they will be afforded the option of wearing the Marlin in place of The Bullhorns for the fifth Pip.

- Option three; New designed clasps stating either the ships name or pennant number the qualifying service was completed on. I.e. 30 days of qualifying service aboard HMAS *Broome* will result in the awarding of a clasp to the AOSM-BP stating either “HMAS *Broome*” or “ACPB 90”. Further qualifying service periods of the AOSM-BP are recognised by the presentation of additional clasps of either the namesake of the qualifying vessel or her pennant number. These are worn above previously awarded clasps, in order of date of receipt.

I see the following options as a way forward.

- 1. Permit the Honours and Awards team to gain the required amount of members to help rectify the issue of delayed processing of the NEM.
- 2. Change the eligibility period of FLOODS FEB 22, this will improve morale and could positively affect retention.
- 3. Consider the options presented to you for a proposed Tier system for AOSM-BP.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I have discussed my views, opinions and presented my ideas regarding the experience of ADF personnel through the Honours and Awards system, the effect of awards and honours maintaining morale within the ADF and how improvement can be made to the honours and awards system.