

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

25 February 2019

Dear Committee Secretary

I welcome the opportunity to make this brief Submission regarding the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee's inquiry into the ***Australian Veterans' Recognition (Putting Veterans and their Families First) Bill 2019 [Provisions]***.

I am a retired Army officer. I served for 26 years in the Australian Regular Army and a further seven years of Active Reserve until 1999. This included active service in South Vietnam and in a variety of infantry command, training, regimental duty, staff and equipment procurement management appointments. Since retiring I have followed actively various issues concerning military veterans' service conditions.

Based on the perspectives gained during this service, it is my considered opinion that the motives behind this Bill are excellent and to be commended.

However, their expression in the Bill and related media opportunities leaves much to be desired. Indeed, the Bill evokes insincere tokenism to me. As expressed, it gives me no confidence at all that it will result in any better, veteran-centric care or support, or lead to an upturn in the number of beneficial decisions under current veterans' legislation.

The intention of Part 2 Section 7 is ostensibly beneficial, however, the word 'committed' does not entirely reflect that, especially when read in conjunction with Part 4, Section 10. I recommend that sub Sections 7 (1) and (2) should each be rewritten to commence along these lines:

Decision makers are to etc [my emphasis]

Without this form of obligation in law, it seems to me that the whole Section would remain just a feel-good expression of well-meaning but hollow intentions.

Personally, I consider Part 3 of the Bill, about proposed pins, cards and other artefacts, to be clichéd and bordering on insulting – especially in the light of contemporaneous treatment of veterans' real concerns [see below]. If they wish, qualified veterans can wear a Returned from Active Service badge. Others can wear any of the Navy, Army or Air Force lapel pins available from the Australian War Memorial: many do so now. I recommend that Part 3 be removed entirely, with the exception of the idea that the words *Military Veteran* could be inscribed on Department of Veterans' Affairs issued White and Gold Cards.

Part 4 Section 10 of the Bill lends considerable weight to the impression that the proposed legislation is nothing more than a hollow piece of disingenuous rhetoric; much like the oft stated mantra honouring and thanking veterans for their service, when actual practice often points to the contrary.

Finally, I believe that the various military superannuation acts should probably also be listed under Section 7 (1):

- (d) the *Defence Forces Retirement Benefits Act 1948*;
- (e) the *Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Act 1973*;
- (f) the *Military Superannuation and Benefits Act 1991*;
- (g) the *Australian Defence Force Superannuation Act 2015*.

The *Defence Act 1903* should also be added to this list.

My criticism that the intentions behind the Bill are not as real as they appear to be is based on the lack of progress on some current key and well-known veterans' issues, which neither side of politics appear to be interested in actually dealing with, let alone solve.

One example of this lack of action [respect] is the government's failure to remedy the continuing erosion in the rate of economic loss compensation for Totally and Permanently Incapacitated/Special Rate veterans – our most severely disabled veterans who are no longer able to work. We need to fix the well recognised and harmful financial disadvantage they suffer. [Submissions to the current Productivity Commission *Inquiry into Compensation and Rehabilitation for Veterans* are replete with other examples, especially at individual level.]

I shall not go into detail here except to point to the attached graph, which says it all without any need for further explanation. Both the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition have agreed that this needs fixing! All it needs is an amendment to Section 24, subsection (4) of the *Veterans Entitlements Act 1986*, as follows:

(4) Subject to subsections (5), (5A) and (6), the rate at which pension is payable to a veteran to whom this section applies is [delete \$919.40] [insert \$1,796.60 per fortnight].

Finally, I think that it would be exceptionally thoughtless and disrespectful of any government to introduce legislation like this, without first dealing with (at least) this most obvious and serious failing by the Nation to honour the very spirit which this 'Recognition' legislation is supposedly articulating.

I commend these thoughts to the Committee's consideration, and trust that Members take them in the spirit intended: in the expectation that the Parliament and decision makers will always act beneficially under law for the well being, compensation, support and rehabilitation of veterans and their families.

Yours sincerely

Military Veteran

Attached:

Veteran Special Rate TPI Compensation as a % of Average Weekly Earnings,
P. Thornton 2016

PROPOSAL – TO STRUCTURALLY ADJUST & REFERENCE THE ‘ECONOMIC LOSS’ COMPONENT OF TPI/SRDP COMPENSATION TO THE EFFECTIVE TAX-FREE AMOUNT OF AUSTRALIA’S MINIMUM WAGE

