



RSL
Australia

THE RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA LTD

Patron: His Majesty The King

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Committee Secretary
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and
Trade References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Via email: fadt.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary,

The Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL Australia) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee inquiry into the Defence Honours and Awards system (see Annexure 1).

The RSL values the integrity and efficacy of the system and stands ready to work with government in helping to make critical enhancements to the Defence Honours and Awards systems to better acknowledge the service of our Australian Defence Force personnel who have served and continue to serve our nation.

Yours sincerely,

Greg Melick
National President
The Returned & Services League of Australia

Annexure:

1 – Submission by RSL Australia – Senate Committee inquiry into the Defence Honours and Awards System

Submission by the Returned and Services League of Australia to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee inquiry into the Defence Honours and Awards System

The Returned and Services League of Australia (RSL Australia) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Inquiry into the Defence Honours and Awards System.

RSL Australia notes the importance of a fair and well considered approach to the Defence Honours and Awards system. The current balance of rank and gender, spread across the Services, appears to be sound.

The importance of the Defence Honours and Awards system, to recognise the unique nature of military service and demands on serving members, is considered vital in terms of morale and a nation's 'thanks' and recognition for Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel, whether for operational or peacetime service.

The demands of leadership and command warrant recognition for all levels of leadership in the ADF. The changes in criteria to warlike operations (from in 'action') for awards such as the 'Distinguished Service Cross' are appropriate given these roles still provide 'distinguished leadership' whilst not going on the front line, or directly 'in action'.

The RSL is of the opinion that the Defence Honours and Awards Appeal Tribunal must remain an independent body to ensure transparency of the review of Defence Honours and Awards matters.

The RSL recommends:

- That until allegations are lawfully investigated and substantiated and the matter comes to conclusion, no medal or citation should be pre-emptively 'stripped' from a veteran.
- That any change to the eligibility criteria of existing honours and awards or the introduction of new ones is widely communicated through veterans networks and the Department of Veterans' Affairs. RSL members have noted that after separating from Service, it is difficult to know of the eligibility for new awards.
- That the eligibility criteria of 'temporary duty' of members undertaking operational service be revised and annotated as 'allotted/assigned' to recognise their service and distinguish it from that of a 'visitor'.
- That recipients of the Defence Force Service Medal (DFSM) who undertake further Reserve service have the opportunity to continue to accrue efficient service toward the DFSM and not be required to return the medal in lieu of the Defence Long Service Medal (DLSM). Members who have been awarded the DFSM, who have then transferred to the Reserve Force, no longer have their Reserve service, including any continuous full-time service, recognised as contributing service under the DFSM. They are required to surrender the medal (often treasured) and have previously unrecognised and future service grouped under the DLSM.
- That the awarding of all honours and awards is automatically initiated by Defence Honours and Awards, in particular milestone awards, for example long service medals and the Federation Star. The onus should not be on a member to 'apply' for an award or medal that honours their outstanding service and contributions as a member of the ADF. RSL members have noted that while the Federation Star is cited as a major achievement (40 years' service) it is not automatically granted and members must apply for the award. With the existence of an electronic human resource and pay system (for example PMKeyS), an automated approach would be more appropriate.