

**Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade**  
**Inquiry into Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and**  
**Harmonisation) Bill 2024 [Provisions] – 13 September 2024**  
**Answers to questions on notice from the Veterans' Affairs portfolio**

IQ24-000013

**Topic: Communications Plan**

(Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Hansard Proof 13 September 2024, p 10-11)

**Senator Jacqui Lambie asked:**

Mr Brown: The observation you've made about bumps, I guess, in terms of claims intake is also something that we have anticipated, particularly post 1 July 2026 with particularly DRCA-only veterans currently testing their eligibility for gold cards, which will open up eligibility for them for the first time. Again, that's something that we have thought about. Noting the comments that Mr Kefford made about demand-driven funding, some resources have been provided to the department in anticipation of that.

Senator LAMBIE: I think my problem is: this bill could be through in four weeks time, so what's your plan? Where's your letter? What's going out to them? This could be through in four or six weeks time, and we're sitting here discussing how you're going to tell your thousands of veterans on your books what's just happened. Whether it starts on 1 July 2026 or not, if you've just put that legislation through then that's when you should be explaining and saying: 'Right, today this legislation has gone through. This is what it looks like.' I'd actually like to see what that rollout looks like from the time—this legislation will need a backup. I want to see what it looks like when it's put through and whether or not you are ready, so I don't have a heap of veterans out there going, 'What the hell,' and then hitting panic buttons.

Mr Kefford: As Mr Hill has just said, the department has been funded to communicate this process. We've made the point already today that part of the calculation of the commencement timing turns on having time to do this. I'm happy to take on notice the communication plan as you've just described it.

Senator LAMBIE: I would like to see that. I find it difficult if I'm going to—

Mr Brown: Absolutely.

...

CHAIR: I might just also mention on that point that a comms strategy or plan might be something that, if you do come back to us, the committee could look at in a private capacity. See if there are some other sensitivities that you might have about sharing that, but sharing it with Senator Lambie and few other members of the committee might be something you'd be willing to consider. And I'll take the point Senator Lambie is making. It's fair to say a large number of veterans go to her and to her office for assistance. I get some, but I think Jacqui get the bulk of them. At some point it might be something worth talking about.

Mr Kefford: It's a helpful—

CHAIR: It might help you, but it will also help us manage the anxiety that can be created out of these processes for a lot of people. They're not sure what's happened. We want to send a reassurance that it's a positive change for the community, for veterans and their families.

Senator LAMBIE: Yes, you've got to rebuild trust, you guys. Every time you make a move, every time [inaudible] you're going to have to notify them.

CHAIR: There's a lot of good work that the department and others have done. We just want to make sure that people aren't reading things into stuff that they probably shouldn't read things into and that these are the processes that we're going through. So maybe you can take on board anything you could share at a later stage. Maybe we could convene in a private capacity, Senator Lambie? It's something for the department to come back to the committee on.

Mr Kefford: That's a helpful suggestion; thank you. I welcome the spirit in which it's made. We'll

Speak with the minister, but we'll certainly provide you with the document. I think it would be useful to seek that counsel from the committee.

**Answer**

While the communication plan is under development, any final plan will be guided by the final report from the Senate Legislation Committee, and the form of the bill that is passed by the Parliament. In the meantime, the Department is willing to provide the Committee with a private briefing on considerations of engagement with the veteran and family community on the implementation of legislation reform.

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IQ24-000014

**Topic: Gold Card - partners of veterans**

(Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Hansard Proof 13 September 2024, p 12)

**Senator Jacqui Lambie asked:**

Senator LAMBIE: This bill doesn't fix this gold card issue. When the gold card goes to the widow or is passed over—once the gold card holder passes, that gold card is then passed to their widow. Correct?

Mr Brown: No. I know that's the way it's envisaged, but the partner becomes eligible for their own gold card, in their own right, under certain provisions. It's not a transferral of the veteran's gold card.

Senator LAMBIE: Do we have any rules about this? I don't know how many instances I've heard, over the years, where women have endured with those Vietnam veterans for many years and once their kids have gone and once they've hit their 60s they've gone: 'I've done my bit for you and the country; I am leaving. I've had it.' I'm using that as an example. Then they go and remarry and they're with that person for two years. The person who's, basically, looked after them their whole life or they've not been well receives nothing.

Mr Brown: There's nothing in this bill that would address that situation.

Senator LAMBIE: Is that large numbers, do you know? Have we done any numbers on that sort of thing that's going on? It is a problem.

Mr Kefford: It's certainly something that's been raised with us in other contexts. As Mr Brown says, this continues the current arrangements; it doesn't change it. I'm happy to take that on notice. I don't have that in front of me.

**Answer**

DVA is unable to report on the number of clients who have divorced and remarried or entered other relationships.

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IQ24-000015

**Topic: Repatriation Medical Authority - number of board members**  
(Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Hansard Proof 13 September 2024, p 16)

**Senator Jacqui Lambie asked:**

Senator LAMBIE: Okay. On the Repatriation Medical Authority board, how many people do we have?

Mr Hill: I'm not entirely sure of those current numbers. We'd have to come back to you on notice with the numbers that are on the RMA today.

**Answer**

The Repatriation Medical Authority (RMA) is comprised of a Chairperson and four other Members. Further information on the composition and membership of the RMA is available at [www.rma.gov.au/who-we-are/](http://www.rma.gov.au/who-we-are/).

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IQ24-000016

**Topic: Repatriation Medical Authority - consultation with Department of Defence**  
(Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Hansard Proof 13 September 2024, p 16)

**Senator Jacqui Lambie asked:**

Senator LAMBIE: And I'm assuming, if they need to know something on how Defence works or how this has occurred, they'd come and talk to someone within the department? Do you know what I mean? They go hand in hand. You have your medical practitioners, and sometimes they need to say, 'This how it works over here, and this is why this has happened,' so they can help make informed decisions.

Mr Brown: The RMA is a separate statutory authority, an independent statutory authority, and, for very good reasons, is independent from the department. We have a relationship where we can talk through issues but they operate independently. In terms of the way they access advice on defence context or military related matters, I'm probably not in a position to answer that question.

Senator LAMBIE: Do you think I could get an answer on that at some stage? I just want to know how they do it.

Mr Kefford: We'll provide a note to you on notice.

**Answer**

The Repatriation Medical Authority (RMA) engages with Defence in a variety of ways. Defence representatives attend RMA meetings as a stakeholder to provide an informed perspective and advice where the Authority requires additional information about Defence service or activities. The Defence representative is provided with draft Statements of Principles in advance of each meeting and can provide written submissions in advance of the meeting and raise any issues they wish to explore during the meetings. The RMA will also utilise Defence research where this constitutes sound medical and scientific evidence in accordance with the legislation.