

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Additional estimates 2007–2008; February 2008
Answers to questions on notice from Department of Veterans' Affairs

Question 1

Outcome 1: Outputs 1.1, 1.2,,1.5 & 1.7

Topic: Claims Processing Times

Hansard Proof 20 February 2008, p. 78

Senator CORMANN asked:

How long did it take to process new claims as at 1 November 1996?

How long did it take to process new claims as at 1 November 2007?

How long did it take to process new claims as at 1 February 2008?

Answer

Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988 (SRCA) = 206 days in the year to November 1996
Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA) claims = N/A (Act commenced in 2004)
Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA) = 76 days in the year to November 1997 *

* The system used to generate figures in relation to the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA)* does not hold complete data for 1996, so figures have been provided for November 1997.

SRCA = 221 days in the year to November 2007.
MRCA = 190 days in the year to November 2007
VEA = 88 days in the year to November 2007

SRCA = 202 days in the year to February 2008
MRCA = 160 days in the year to February 2008
VEA = 83 days in the year to February 2008

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Question 2

Outcome 1: Output 1.3

Topic: Veterans' Review Board Review Processing Times, Outstanding Cases and Appointments Process

Hansard Proof 20 February 2008, pp. 79–80

Senator CORMANN asked:

- (1) How much time does it take for the Veterans' Review Board to hear reviews.
- (2) How many cases were before the Veterans' Review Board in November 2007.
- (3) How many cases were before the Veterans' Review Board in February 2008.
- (4) Provide detail on current process underway on appointments to the VRB.

Answer

- (1) In 2006-07 the average time taken from lodgement of applications for review with the Department to finalisation of the review that were decided by a hearing of the Board was 438 days. Many cases are finalised without ever having a hearing because the applicant withdraws the application either because the matter is conceded by the Repatriation Commission or, for some other reason, the applicant decides not to proceed. The average time taken for such cases from lodgement of the application to finalisation is 347 days. The weighted average of these two finalisation methods is 401 days. Because applications for review must be lodged with the Department and not with the Board, the Veterans' Review Board is often not advised of applications for review until the Department provides it with a copy of the section 137 report, which is a copy of all the documents the Department has identified as being relevant to the review. The average time in 2006-07 from receipt of the section 137 report until finalisation was 391 days if finalised by a hearing, 317 days if withdrawn by the applicant, and the weighted average finalisation time was 362 days.
- (2) At 1 November 2007 the Veterans' Review Board had a register of 3743 applications outstanding.
- (3) At 1 February 2008 the Veterans' Review Board had a register of 3655 applications outstanding.
- (4) Section 158 of the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* provides that members are to be appointed by the Governor-General, and that the Board must have among its members persons, called 'Services Members', selected from lists submitted to the Minister, as requested, from organisations representing veterans throughout Australia. The Principal Member must be full-time. Section 141 provides for Senior Members, Services Members and other Members, who may be full-time or part-time.

The VRB currently comprises 48 members: a full-time Principal Member, a full-time Senior Member, 14 part-time Senior Members, 16 part-time Services Members, and 16 part-time Members. The members are distributed around the country but with the majority located in the three eastern states where some 85% of the work is conducted. The VRB

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part-time membership is in two groups in terms of appointment reflecting a move to staggered periods of appointment in 1998.

The terms of fifteen members of the Board will expire on 30 March 2008, across the categories of Senior Members, Services Members and Members. In accordance with the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* the Minister wrote to ex-service organisations in December 2007 inviting the submission of lists of recommended persons from which Services Members of the Board might be selected. Applications for appointment to the Board as Members and Senior Members were invited by national press advertisements in *The Australian* newspaper on 8 December 2007. The selection criteria, which were made publicly available, were:

- knowledge of administrative review principles;
- analytical ability – capacity to analyse evidence, to interpret and apply legislation and case law and to apply same to findings of fact;
- personal attributes of empathy, judgement and independence of mind, together with capacity to work as a team member and meet performance standards;
- communication skills – high standard of written and oral communication skills and strong listening skills;
- capacity to type decisions quickly and accurately and to utilise computer technology;
- availability to travel interstate as required;
- knowledge of veteran and compensation legislation; and
- knowledge/interest in military history and/or Australian participation in conflict/peacekeeping.

Applicants were interviewed by a panel comprising Mr Michael Griffin, Principal Member of the VRB, Ms Narelle Bell, a Senior Member of the Administrative Appeal Tribunal (AAT) and Brigadier Philip McNamara CSC (Rtd), Director General of the New South Wales State Emergency Service. The panel recommended the re-appointment of 14 current members and the appointment of seven additional members, each for terms commencing on 31 March 2008 to 30 September 2009. One of those recommended for appointment later withdrew his application. These appointments will align with the appointments of the full-time Senior Member, and the remaining 31 part-time whose terms expire on 30 September 2009 (except for the Principal Member whose appointment continues into 2012).

The Minister recommended these appointments to the Prime Minister and Cabinet agreed to the appointments. They were made by His Excellency the Governor-General in Council on 5 March 2008 and announced on 20 March 2008.

As at 31 March 2008, the VRB had 52 members in four categories: one full-time Principal Member, one full-time and 16 part-time Senior Members, 19 part-time Services Members and 15 part-time Members.

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Question 3

Outcome 1: Output 1.5

Topic: Military Compensation

Hansard Proof 20 February 2008, p. 80

Senator CORMANN asked:

How many veterans are being paid by DVA and what is the degree of disability under the MRCA?

Provide information on age profile as at 1 February 2008?

Answer

As at 6 February, 2008, 317 persons were receiving ongoing incapacity benefits under the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004*. The age profile of these persons is shown in the following table. There is no 'degree of disability' for persons receiving incapacity benefits. Rather, the amount paid is based upon the individual's pre and post injury earning capacity.

Age Group	Number
Under 25	90
25 - 30	72
30 - 35	60
35 - 40	41
40 - 45	24
45 - 50	15
50 - 55	10
55 - 60	4
60 - 65	1
TOTAL	317

Forty-nine of these persons have each received a Permanent Impairment payment in respect of their injuries. Details of impairment ratings and ages have not been provided because the small numbers involved may allow individuals to be identified.

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Question 4

Outcome 1: Output 1.5

Topic: Military Compensation

Hansard Proof 20 February 2008, p. 80

Senator CORMANN asked:

How many veterans are being paid and what is the degree of disability under the SRCA?

Provide information on age profile as at 1 February 2008?

Answer

As at 6 February, 2008, 2,169 persons were receiving ongoing incapacity benefits under the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988*. The age profile of these persons is shown in the following table. There is no 'degree of disability' for persons receiving these benefits. Rather, the amount paid is based upon the individual's pre and post injury earning capacity.

Age Group	Number
Under 25	133
25 - 30	168
30 - 35	247
35 - 40	361
40 - 45	264
45 - 50	235
50 - 55	182
55 - 60	252
60 - 65	206
65 - 70	22
70 - 75	34
75 - 80	40
80 - 85	19
85 - 90	5
90 - 95	1
TOTAL	2169

With respect to Permanent Impairment payments and associated degrees of disability, my Department has advised that it would take a considerable amount of resources to extract the information requested. I am therefore not prepared to authorise such a significant diversion of resources to answer this question.

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Question 5

Outcome 2: Output 2.1

Topic: Respite

Hansard Proof 20 February 2008, p. 87

Senator CORMANN asked:

How many people have been able to stay at home as a result of Respite Care?

Answer

In the 2006–07 financial year 6,707 veterans and war widows received in-home respite funded by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. As at 21 March 2008 4,972 veterans and war widows have received in-home respite.

Question 6

Outcome 4: Output 4.1

Topic: Utilities Allowance

Hansard Proof 20 February 2008, p. 96

Senator CORMANN asked:

What was the cost of sending out letters to the veteran population on the utilities allowance?

Answer

Printing and postage cost for these letters was \$159,453.71. The letters also provided information on increased seniors concession allowance. A key purpose of this letter was to establish which veterans are eligible for increased telephone allowance as a result of having an internet connection. An application for increased telephone allowance and reply paid envelope was included with each letter.

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Question 7

Output 6

Topic: DVA Senior Salaries

Hansard Proof 20 February 2008, p. 102

Senator IAN MACDONALD asked:

How many staff are above \$127,000?

Answer

As at 29 February 2008, 42 staff employed by Department of Veterans' Affairs were receiving a base salary higher than \$127,000 per annum.