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Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

NEW SOUTH WALES OFFICE

Mrs Anne Bonner
NSW President
War Widows' Guild of Australia
Level 2, 175 Castlereagh Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mrs Bonner

I am writing in relation to the inclusion of information about ex-service organisations (ESOs) in determination letters sent to new pension beneficiaries.

The Repatriation Commission has recently considered its policy on the provision of information concerning ESOs. This has occurred in order to ensure the Department provides information in a manner consistent with what should be expected of a government agency.

The *Public Service Act 1999* and the Australian Public Service (APS) Values and Code of Conduct outline the obligations of Australian government agencies in the way they perform their duties and deliver services to the community. These requirements include delivering services fairly and impartially.

Currently there are different State- and Territory-based practices in place as to the distribution of ESO information to pension recipients or beneficiaries. These arrangements have often been made on a local or individual basis and favour some organisations over others. By providing membership details for one organisation, for example, the Department could be seen to be endorsing that organisation where no such endorsement exists. This is not in line with the concept of impartiality required by the APS Values and Code of Conduct.

To ensure that the Department's provision of information about ESO groups is consistent and in line with the responsibilities of government agencies, the Repatriation Commission has agreed to put in place measures that advise pension beneficiaries about all ESO groups equally.

This is being achieved by the inclusion of a new standard paragraph in decision letters advising that ESOs provide a range of services and functions that may be of assistance to the claimant:

There are many Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs) that operate to support and assist veterans, war widow/ers, serving and former Australian Defence Force members and their families. These organisations may provide assistance and advice with pension, compensation, rehabilitation and welfare matters, camaraderie, unit associations and other types of help and support. If you feel that an ESO may be of interest or assistance to you, they can be found in your local Yellow Pages telephone directory or on the internet.

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Tabled paper #05
Held by Senator Ronaldson
Saluting Their Service

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10.10pm, 23 Feb 11. 2 pages

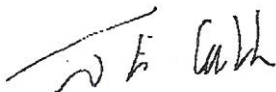
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This means the Department is no longer distributing specific information about any particular organisation, although I must stress that this has only occurred on a very limited basis in the past.

Finally, I can assure you that the Commission and the Department continue to recognise the important and significant role played by your organisation in supporting veterans and their families.

Yours sincerely



Jennifer Collins
Deputy Commissioner NSW & ACT

19 November 2010