



DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

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File: 40.25

27 January 2009

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

Dear Dr Dermody,

Submission –
Defence Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2008

The Defence Force Welfare Association (DFWA) thanks the Committee for this opportunity to comment on one aspect of the *Defence Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2008*, namely the provisions dealing with the making of regulations to cover the provision of medical and dental treatment (including pharmaceuticals) to an ADF member or cadet or a member of the family of an ADF member. In making this submission, DFWA has worked closely with Defence Families Australia (DFA).

Background of the Organisations

DFWA was formed in 1959 as the Regular Defence Force Welfare Association. Its purpose is to:

- a. To watch and foster the interests of members of the Australian Defence Force in any matter likely to affect them during their service or after discharge: and
- b. To advise or assist any serving or retired member of the Australian Defence Force, or their dependants, as required in matters affecting their welfare, free of charge to the member.

DFA is a group formed to represent the views of Defence families. Its aim is to improve the quality of life for Defence families by providing a recognised forum for their views and by reporting, making recommendations and influencing policy that directly affects families.

The Policy In Question

The provision of free medical and dental treatment for ADF family members was promised in the ALP's 2007 Defence Election Policy. The relevant section says:

REGULAR DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION INC

Incorporated in the ACT: Reg No: 1496

ABN 49 929 713 439

Free medical and dental care for ADF families

ADF families can face significant difficulties obtaining access to general medical and dental care for dependants, especially in regional and remote localities.

Posting to a remote location can mean that ADF families struggle to access the sort of health care that Australians enjoy.

A Rudd Labor Government will progressively extend free health care currently provided to ADF personnel to ADF dependent spouses and children.

Labor will begin this with a \$33.1 million investment starting at 12 Defence Family Health Care Clinics, with a focus on remote bases locations and major regional centres.

In commenting on both Parties' elections policies before the 2007 election, DFWA said of this measure:

Other election promises raise practical questions, eg the ALP's commitment to establish up to 12 Defence Family Healthcare Clinics to extend "free basic medical and dental care to spouses and children of Australian Defence Force personnel".

o What does "basic" mean in practice?

o What will be done to compensate ADF families who cannot access the free Healthcare Clinics?

o Given the shortage of doctors and nurses in general, and particularly in the ADF, where will the staff come from?

To those questions may be added another: what should constitute a "family"? For example, should "family" also include dependant relatives, perhaps elderly, who normally reside with the ADF family, perhaps in a remote locality, and how should they be identified, eg with an ID card?

Without details, DFWA is not sure that the scheme being proposed by Defence addresses problems of health services for ADF families in regional and remote areas, which was the original intent.

The Legislation

The *Defence Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2008* does nothing to answer such questions. It merely permits the making of regulations to establish the scheme and, given the disinclination of the Department of Defence to consult with outside organizations when making regulations, DFWA has no confidence that Defence will consult in this case, unless this Committee directs it do so in its report.

Recommendations

DFWA recommends that the Committee:

- a. in its questioning of Defence witnesses, seeks to establish the proposed details of the scheme; and
- b. in its report, requires the Department to consult with both DFWA and DFA before making the regulations.

Yours sincerely



Colonel David Jamison AM (Retd)
National President