



MEDIA STATEMENT

Leaders of Ex-Service Organisations Appalled by Delay in Veterans' Reform Bill

The leaders of the Ex-Service Organisations listed below¹ are concerned that the passage of the **Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2015** has been delayed in the Senate. The Bill introduces much needed reforms that have not only been discussed by that leadership group but has their full support, including the support of their families. The group is a National Defence Ex-Service Round Table consultative one that represents some 150,000 to 200,000 serving and former members of the ADF. The Bill even passed unopposed in the House of Representatives on 20 August 2015.

The catalyst for referral to the Senate Committee appears to have been a published opinion piece titled '**Bill Strips Veterans of Appeal Right**' that emanated from a law firm. In essence, that opinion literally flies in the face of what had all along been the biggest complaint within the Ex Service community, that being that the MRCA review system was overly restrictive, cumbersome in nature and time consuming in practice.

There has been criticism of the Bill on the grounds of an apparent removal of a veterans' right to request internal reconsideration of an adverse decision by the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission.

The National Ex-Service Organisations Leaders believe that:

- the single path set out in the Bill, and
- the firm and enduring assurance given by the Minister that every adverse decision by the Commission that is the subject of an application to the Veterans Review Board will be reviewed by the Commission before the VRB process begins,

adequately safeguard veterans' rights and interests. The Ex-Service Organisations Leaders also believes that, in the event of the current trial of Alternative Dispute Resolution procedures in NSW and the ACT being extended to all Review Board proceedings, veterans' interests will be further protected.

The 'Single Path' for reconsideration of decisions contained in the Bill was recommended by the Review of Military Compensation Arrangements Committee and has received widespread support from the veteran community.

The ongoing concern for the Ex-Service Community is the imbalance in legal resources with the Department being able to fund expensive legal advice and assistance to contest claims while legal aid funds available to veterans and ex-service men and women are restricted. The cost of justice is often out of the reach of ordinary people.

Media Contacts

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Note 1: Defence Force Welfare Association; Naval Association of Australia; Australian Special Air Service Association; Royal Australian Regiment Corporation; Royal Australian Air Force; Australian Federation of Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Ex-Service Men and Women; Partners of Veterans Association of Australia; Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia; Legacy Australia Council; and War Widows Guild of Australia.