



VIETNAM VETERANS' FEDERATION

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Incorporating

Vietnam Veterans Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Association NSW Branch

Vietnam Veterans Federation Queensland Branch

Vietnam Veterans Federation ACT Branch

Vietnam Veterans Federation Victorian Branch

Vietnam Veterans Federation South Australian Branch

Vietnam Peacekeepers Peacemakers Federation of Tasmania

Vietnam Veterans, Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Federation of Australia WA Branch

Hon Alan Griffin MP
Minister for Veterans Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
16 July 2010

Dear Alan,

There is an election on the horizon.

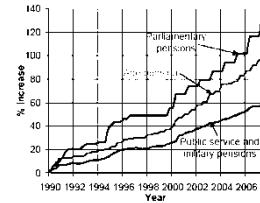
We thank you for the long list of 2007 election promises you have honoured. We note that the promise to scrap pharmaceutical co-payments for war caused disabilities, whilst making progress, is not yet implemented. We hope this might be a priority should the government be re-elected.

We are particularly grateful for your having made the 2007 promise to fairly index the TPI and other disability pensions. The promise resulted in these pensions ceasing to fall further and further behind Australia's rising standard of living. We note, too, that your promise resulted in the pensions making up some of their lost ground. Disability pensioners are substantially better off because of these changes.

The issues we presently think important are as follows:

- Five years ago the RMA considered again 'smoking and prostate cancer' and rejected any link. We appealed the decision to the SMRC. After a number of delays, the hearing was set for June 2010. Five years delay is an outrageous denial of justice. Worse still, the SMRC makes its judgements only on the evidence on which the RMA made its decision. That body of evidence is now, of course, five years old. That the evidence generated in the past five years can not taken into account by the SMRC makes a farce of the hearing.
- Due to a dark period in the history of the NAC as well as the Department's desire to destroy the independence of the Counselling Service, the Darwin and Hobart VVCS are co-located with DVA premises. Worse, in each case, counselling sessions can be overheard in DVA offices. With more and more younger veterans, many of them serving, needing counselling, geographic separation and a clearly observable operational independence of VVCS from DVA, is vital.

- Whilst there were welcome increases to the Service and Widows Pensions in the 2009 budget, there were no increases to the TPI and other disability pensions. It is an anomaly that should be rectified.
- Compensation offsetting is a fraught area. DVA is attempting to take it to extremes. We are concerned the MRCA review will also take an extreme view.
- Legal Aid resources available to war veterans for AAT hearings can be pitifully little compared with those deployed by DVA. We understand there may be some amelioration of this injustice by changes being introduced by the Attorney General but we have heard no details.
- A widow gets 62.5% of a war veteran's military superannuation (DFRB/DFRDB/MSBS) pension whilst a widow of a parliamentarian get 82.5%. The difference cannot be justified.
- Inadequate indexation of military superannuation (DFRB/DFRBF/MSBS) pensions means they have increased far less over the years compared with parliamentary superannuation and with other government pensions. The graph shows this result:



- The taper rate of the Service Pension was increased from 40 cents to 50 cents in the 2009 budget. Many Part Service Pensioners will be substantially worse off as a result. When financial conditions permit, this reduction to pension payments should be reversed.
- Volume 3 of the Official History of the Vietnam war contains a flawed and insulting account of the Agent Orange controversy. The AWM Director, the Official Historian (Peter Edwards) and the author of the most recent volumes of the Official History (Ashley Ekins) all agree a new account should be written. The AWM, however, has so far declined to take on the project. The flawed and insulting official account is a wound in the side of Vietnam veterans that continues to weep and will do so until the record is set straight. (we have previously sent you the detail of this issue)

Yours sincerely,

Tim McCombe
President