

REPATRIATION

COMMISSION

ANNUAL REPORT 2008-2009

PRIME MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT.

TELEPRINTER MESSAGE.

D. 3265 1020

TO MR MAJOR, DEPT OF THE NAVY
HOUSE, CANBERRA THIS MORNING).

FROM SECRETARY DEPARTMENT OF

SECRET AND IMPORTANT
FOR TRANSMISSION TO HIS
AND THE PRIME MINISTER. FOLLOW
SEARCHES

(BEGINS)

THE NAVAL BOARD
AIR AND SURFACE SEARCH OF
H.M.A.S. " SYDNEY" HAS
TWO R.A.N. LIFEBOATS L
BADLY DAMAGED BY GUNFI

IT IS CONCLUD
ACTION AND FURTHER SE

MESSAGE ENDS 19++ 102= +++111027 30/11/41

WILL YOU PLEASE PHONE MR MAJOR AND INFORM HIM THAT YOU HAVE
THIS MESSAGE. HE WILL GIVE INSTRUCTIONS OR PROBABLY CALL FOR SAME++

ENDS

MSG RECD OK PMS TKS



Teleprinter message advising that the search for survivors of HMAS *Sydney II* has been abandoned
(National Archives of Australia A1608, S51/1/6)

Fromelles today (Department of Veterans' Affairs)

Winch extraction of wounded personnel, 1968 (Australian War Memorial image number CAM/68/0034D/VN)

Repatriation Commission Annual Report 2008–09

Functions and powers

The Repatriation Commission, previously an honorary body, was established officially on 1 July 1920 by proclamation of the *Australian Soldiers' Repatriation Act 1920*. When this Act and several other related Acts were replaced in 1986 by the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* (VEA), the Repatriation Commission was retained.

Under section 180 of the VEA, the functions of the Repatriation Commission are to:

- ▶ grant pensions and other benefits and provide treatment for veterans, their dependants and other eligible persons
- ▶ advise the Minister on the operation of the VEA
- ▶ generally administer the VEA, subject to the control of the Minister.

Section 181 of the VEA also gives the Repatriation Commission the power to take necessary actions in connection with the performance of its functions, duties and powers.

The responsible Minister under the VEA is the Minister for Veterans' Affairs. The Minister does not have any powers to direct the Repatriation Commission, beyond the power to approve various actions of the Commission. These powers are detailed under the Freedom of Information statement at Appendix D.

The Commission currently provides services under the VEA to around 395,000 veterans and members of the Australian Defence Force, their partners, widows/widowers and children. The Commission does not consider activity under the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004* or the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988*.

Structure

The Commission has three full time members appointed by the Governor-General: the President, Deputy President and Services member. The Services member is generally known as the Repatriation Commissioner and is selected from names submitted to the Minister by ex-service organisations.

The Commission members are also part-time members of the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (MRCC). The President serves as Chair of the MRCC and Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA). This ensures consistency between the two commissions and the Department in relation to policy, administration and fiscal accountability.

Administration of the VEA

The Repatriation Commission is vested with broad powers to enable it to carry out its functions, duties and powers under the VEA. It also has specific powers to enter into contracts, deal with real or personal property, undertake building works and engage individuals and organisations to perform services.

In relation to claims for pensions, benefits and treatment under the VEA, the Commission is the decision-maker. It has responsibility for deciding and reviewing individuals' entitlements to pensions, benefits and treatment in accordance with the VEA.

Relationship with the Department

The Repatriation Commission is responsible for the general administration of the VEA, with administrative support provided by the Department. The Commission has no staff of its own but delegates its powers under sub-section 213(1) of the VEA to staff of the Department. The responsibilities of both bodies are therefore inextricably linked and the Repatriation Commission has a vital interest in the activities of the Department and in the assessment of the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of departmental programs.

The Repatriation Commission also takes an active interest in the administrative arrangements of the Department, including the administration of major programs and the progress and outcome of all major reviews, including Australian National Audit Office efficiency audits.

Membership



Ian Campbell PSM

Ian was appointed Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs and President of the Repatriation Commission and Chair of the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission on 22 September 2008, replacing Mark Sullivan.

Prior to this appointment, Ian served as Australian Electoral Commissioner from July 2005 to September 2008, adding to an already extensive career in the Australian Public Service over a range of portfolios since the early 1970s.

This appointment was a return to the Department for Ian. During 2000–05, he served as Deputy President of the Repatriation Commission, undertook the duties of a Deputy Secretary of the Department and was a member of the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission.

Ian has an honours degree in economics from the University of New South Wales. Since the start of his public service career in 1972, he has worked in Treasury and various departments responsible for finance, communications, health, housing, community services, employment, education and training.



Shane Carmody

Shane commenced a five-year term as Deputy President of the Repatriation Commission on 15 June 2009. In this position, he also undertakes the duties of the Deputy Secretary of the Department and is a member of the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission.

Shane is a former Army officer and has extensive experience throughout the public service, having held senior positions in the civil aviation, defence and finance portfolios. He was formerly Deputy Chief Executive Officer in the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and a former Deputy Secretary of Defence. He has strong credentials in policy development and implementation as well as financial and program management. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Queensland and a Master of Business Administration degree from Monash University.



Brigadier Bill Rolfe AO (Ret'd)

Bill is in the third year of a three-year appointment as the Services member of the Repatriation Commission and a member of the MRCC. His appointment commenced on 26 January 2007.

He is a graduate of the Royal Military College Duntroon and holds a Bachelor of Laws degree from the Australian National University.

Bill served for 27 years in the Army and saw service in Vietnam as an infantry officer with the 2nd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment. After retraining as a legal officer he was appointed as Director of Army Legal Services in 1986 and Director General of Defence Force Legal Services in 1989. On retirement in 1992, he worked in the National Security Branch of the Attorney-General's Department before appointment as the Principal Member of the Veterans' Review Board in 1997.

Bill was appointed as an Officer of the Order of Australia in January 2008 for service to veterans, particularly through leadership roles with the Veterans' Review Board, development and implementation of program initiatives and professional education.

Commission activity

During 2008–09, the Commission considered 95 submissions and held 15 formal meetings. Matters considered included:

- ▶ contracting and tendering for health services, including transport, Veterans' Home Care, community nursing and rehabilitation appliances
- ▶ hospital agreements price reviews
- ▶ Unique Healthcare Identifier Service
- ▶ standardisation of fees and business rules for dental services
- ▶ posthumous diagnosis of psychiatric conditions
- ▶ transport bookings systems
- ▶ new classification system and fee schedule in the community nursing program
- ▶ rules assessing eligibility for special rate and intermediate pension
- ▶ potential enhancements to Veterans' Home Care
- ▶ Vietnam Veterans' Family study
- ▶ implementation of statutory registration for health providers
- ▶ legal issues resulting from automated decision-making
- ▶ delegation of the Commission's powers and amendments to Chief Executive Instructions.

Strategic issues

The numbers of VEA beneficiaries are in decline and have been for some time. In the last five years the number of survivors of the Second World War have fallen by 44% from 189,900 at 30 June 2004 to 105,500 at 30 June 2009. In the same period the number of survivors of the Korean War, the Malayan Emergency and the Far East Strategic Reserve fell 13% from 16,200 to 14,100, and Vietnam War survivor numbers declined about 3% from 50,300 to 48,700.

The number of war widows under the VEA has peaked too. In the years from 30 June 2004 to 30 June 2009, they fell 8% from 114,000 to 105,000.

These rates of decline are projected to continue in the next decade. Total VEA veteran numbers are expected to fall about by a quarter from 185,214 at 30 June 2009 to 136,300 at 30 June 2014 and by 44% across the decade to 102,600 at 30 June 2019. War widow numbers are expected to drop 21% from 104,760 at 30 June 2009 to 82,700 at 30 June 2014 and another 31% to 56,500 at 30 June 2019.

Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission

The President of the Repatriation Commission and Secretary is also Chair of the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (MRCC), providing a link between the Department and the two commissions. These three arms work closely together to ensure that the needs of current and former members of the Defence Force and their dependants are met. The MRCC provides a separate report in this volume on its activities during the year.

Senior International Forum

The Senior International Forum (SIF) comprises members from veterans' administrations in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. The forum has created a tradition of beneficial exchange of information and ideas through annual meetings. Although the administrative structures differ between countries, there are commonalities which provide the opportunity for member countries to work collaboratively to improve processes and to develop innovative strategies in service delivery to veterans. The Deputy President of the Repatriation Commission and the General Manager, Policy and Development Division, attended the SIF in London in September 2008. The next SIF is due to be held in Wellington, New Zealand in February 2010, followed by the Ministerial International Forum.

Prime Ministerial Advisory Council

The Prime Ministerial Advisory Council on Ex-service Matters (PMAC) was established in September 2008 to consider strategic issues affecting the ex-service and defence communities and report to the Prime Minister via the Minister for Veterans' Affairs.

Members are not ex-service organisation (ESO) representatives but come from the ex-service and defence communities. The council had three scheduled face-to-face meetings during the year with additional meetings via teleconference and videoconference.

A key activity of the council has been consideration of the review of the Department's consultation arrangements, mental health issues, the recommendations of the Clarke Review not acted on by the previous government and the Military Compensation Review.

Review of consultation arrangements

On 9 April 2009, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Hon. Alan Griffin MP, announced new consultative arrangements for veterans. The resulting consultation framework was developed by the Department, taking into account the views of the ex-service and defence communities and other stakeholders in relation to the PMAC.

The framework consists of an ESO Round Table which is the main forum for dialogue with the leadership of key ex-service organisations complemented by four national forums that have a strategic focus on policy and program areas, along with state and territory forums to address local and national policy and service delivery matters.

The four national forums are:

- ▶ the Operational Working Party, which will focus on service delivery and operational issues
- ▶ the National Health Aged and Community Care Forum, which will be the link between ESOs, providers and the Department in the discussion of health, aged and community care issues
- ▶ the Current and Former members of the ADF – Emerging Issues Forum, which will offer regular consultation and discussion about issues affecting younger and recently discharged members and their families
- ▶ the National Health Mental Forum, which will enable broad consultation on mental health issues.

Special interest or industry-specific groups may be formed to address specific matters if required. This fresh approach to consultation will provide a strong foundation for the Repatriation Commission, the MRCC and the Department to work closely together to strengthen engagement and be more appropriate to the changing focus of the ex-service and defence communities. Meetings of the new national and state and territory forums are expected to occur progressively from October 2009.

Vietnam Veterans' Family Study

Brigadier Bill Rolfe AO (Ret'd) continued in his role as Chair of the Consultative Forum for the Vietnam Veterans' Family Study. Along with an independent scientific advisory committee, the forum has assisted with stakeholder engagement and recruitment for the study, which is reported under Outcome 2.

Suicide study and mental health review

The Repatriation Commission will use the findings of two independent studies by Professor David Dunt, epidemiologist and public health specialist, to provide appropriate services for younger veterans who are transitioning from military to civilian life. As a result of Professor Dunt's recommendations, additional funding was provided to boost mental health services for veterans and ex-service personnel.

Refer to the MRCC's and the Department's annual reports for more detail about the Dunt reviews.

Solomon Islands study completed

A study into the health of Solomon Islands veterans examined the physical, emotional and social effects of service in the Solomon Islands and found no immediate ill-effects from deployment. This study was the first in a series looking at the health effects of deployment. Further studies in the coming year will look at veterans deployed to East Timor, Bougainville and the Middle East Area of Operations.

Clarke Review of Veterans' Entitlements

More than 470 submissions were received from the veteran community and ex-service organisations on recommendations of the Clarke Review of Veterans' Entitlements that were not acted on by the previous government. The review will be concluded during the coming year.

Military compensation review

Military compensation arrangements are being reviewed in response to numerous concerns expressed by the veteran and ex-service community about the operation of, and support provided by, the current military compensation system. The review steering committee, chaired by the Chair of the MRCC and reporting directly to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, will provide a report to the Minister early in 2010. Refer to the MRCC Annual Report for more detail about the review.

Commemorative activities

It was another busy year of commemorative activities and ceremonies. More details are provided under Outcome 3 of the DVA Annual Report.

On 3 September 2008, the first official observance of Battle for Australia Day took place, and the wartime service of merchant mariners was remembered on Merchant Navy Day on the same date.

Remembrance Day 2008 marked the 90th anniversary of the Armistice that ended the First World War. Ceremonies were conducted in all capital cities and at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

Dawn services around the world marked the 94th anniversary of Anzac Day in April 2009, and the 40th anniversary of the Battle of Binh Ba, one of the most decisive Australian victories of the Vietnam War, was commemorated in Canberra in June.

Office of Australian War Graves

The Office of Australian War Graves again had a full program (see Outcome 3 of the DVA Annual Report).

A memorial to the efforts of more than 20,000 Australian servicemen involved in ending Japanese occupation of Brunei in the Second World War was dedicated in December 2008. In France, the restoration of the Australian Corps memorial at Le Hamel was completed in time for Remembrance Day services in 2008. A restored memorial commemorating eight Second World War airmen who died when their Lancaster bomber was shot down near Stadil, Denmark, was dedicated late last year, as were a number of other privately owned memorials.

Keeping veterans informed

In addition to the long-standing newspaper, *Vetaffairs*, the veteran community can now subscribe to *e-News*, a monthly electronic news service that keeps subscribers informed about news from the Department. The service provides a brief update on programs and activities, website changes, Ministerial announcements, upcoming anniversaries or changes to legislation. It is a good way for ex-service organisations to keep up to date and to keep their members informed.