

Veterans' Legislation Reform

To whom it may concern,

Ref: (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024.

Background. Both my wife and I are veterans receiving entitlements under various legislation. Although we both served approximately 17-years each and both served overseas on active service, we each receive different payment amounts.

I injured myself early in my career with Defence accepting liability under VEA. I sustained other injuries throughout my career however there was a culture of hiding injuries so as to remain competitive for promotion and avoid discharge so these injuries were never fully documented.

The accepted injury deteriorated after an accident while participating in Defence-organised sport. I was then subjected to ongoing bullying as I was unable to fulfil all of my duties due to the injury. I eventually accepted discharge for the VEA-accepted injury and was awarded a 30% VEA pension and a class-B pension through Commonwealth Super. I had a lot of underlying health issues including undiagnosed PTSD which were highlighted on my discharge medical but not investigated further so as to not slow down the discharge process. Part of the class-B entitlement is for payment of incapacity payments for 45 weeks, these then cease. My injuries and mental health issues meant that I was unable to hold down a job and I remained a stay-at-home dad for the duration of my wife's career. It was not until my wife was going through the discharge process that she challenged me to attend to my health issues. After a three-year battle I was awarded 100% VEA pension and Gold Card. After my doctor suggested I should also be on a class-A Commonwealth Super pension, I spent the next three years having this reviewed before finally being upgraded to class-A. I do not however receive incapacity payments.

My wife also served for approximately 17-years and sustained Defence related injuries. Unlike me, her injuries were fully documented and I was able to assist her with her advocacy under VEA and MRCA. My wife discharge with a 100% VEA pension, Gold Card, and a class-A pension through Commonwealth Super. She is also entitled to ongoing incapacity payments until retirement age.

Although we are both now receiving the same VEA and Commonwealth Super entitlements I do not receive incapacity payments, making our entitlements inequitable.

It should also be noted that in order to receive her incapacity payments, my wife must attend an annual medical with her GP - regardless that she has been deemed unable to work again. This adds stress for a number of reasons. Firstly, we currently have a GP familiar with the Defence processes. He is ageing and will most likely retire soon leaving us with the prospect of having to find another GP familiar with the documentation. Secondly, those administering the scheme send out a reminder approximately a fortnight before the due date. Each year the document has altered slightly. This process does not take into account the up-to four week waiting period to get in to see our GP. As such we have already filled out the previous years forms and attended the Doctor's before we even receive these updates so there is stress that somebody in administration may reject the claim. Additionally, we have other veteran friends who automatically receive incapacity payments without having to attend a doctor - creating inequity within our network.

Suggest, if incapacity payments are designed to compensate for lost earnings and anyone on a class-A Commonwealth Super pension is unable to work, then, rather than have two schemes, pay class-A at 100% of earnings until retirement age. This would mean I would be receiving the same as my wife and my wife would not have to endure the stress of the paperwork associated with processing incapacity payments. The Department could then relocate personnel to areas of need in stead of having to process said paperwork.

Regards,

