

Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support
(Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024
Exposure Draft Consultation

PURPOSE

1. To reflect the outcomes of consultation and meetings arising from the circulation of the proposal, Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 Exposure Draft Consultation, to the volunteer compensation and wellbeing advocacy from the Maroochy RSL Veterans' Hub, located on the Sunshine Coast at Maroochydore.

BROAD CONSULTATION OUTCOMES

2. Whilst it is widely accepted throughout the Veteran community that changes to the legislation, in an effort to simplify the overly complicated system that three separate acts present, it was equally applauded that the "Exposure Draft Consultation" has, by and large, met the expectations of the current Veteran cohort. However, the expectation that the need to consider ongoing consequential amendments would be subject to widespread consultation going forward was evident.

SUBMISSION

3. All parties contacted agreed, that the common approach to the draft legislation as a "Harmonisation, and Standardisation of the current three acts, fails in providing the enhancements expected in the treatment of the war widow/er automatic grant categories under Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA), by only increasing the funeral allowance to \$3,000.00. As the increase has been explained (during the Webinar programed on Wednesday, 17th April 2024) as meeting CPI increases, not previously made to this allowance over past years, the emerging consensus within the advocate fraternity, contests that this rise is not an enhancement as purported, and recommends that the VEA funeral allowance, be replaced with the availability of the reimbursement of funeral expenses up to \$14,062.00, in line with the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA) and potentially the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-Related Claims) Act 1988 (DRCA) benefits.

REASONING

4. Section 12 of the MRC Act (Deceased members whose dependents are entitled to benefits under this act), has three categories of eligibility for members dependents. They are:
- s12 (1) “Deceased members whose death was service related”;
 - s12 (2) “Deceased members eligible for Special Rate Disability Pension (SRDP)”;
 - and
 - s2 (3) “Deceased member with 80 impairment points”.

All three of these categories are eligible to compensation as outlined in Chapter 5 of the act. Member’s dependents who are eligible under s12 (2) and s12 (3), under the act, are not restricted in accessing all entitled benefits (including the availability reimbursement of funeral expenses up to \$14,000.00) as a result of the death of the member. Further, should a DRCA member become eligible for a SRDP and Gold Card under certain circumstances as proposed, the death of this member would then trigger dependent benefits equal to that of the MRCA deceased member (under s12 (2) which is not exclusively a service-related death), inclusive of the availability of reimbursement of funeral expenses up to \$14,062.00.

CONCLUSION

5. When describing the single ongoing act to Veterans, the descriptive titles are indeed uplifting and exciting, albeit briefly, however, when conveying the impacts and changes to current VEA TPI Veterans, “Harmonising” does not equate to fairness, justice and equal opportunity, nor does “Enhancements” reflect an increase in value, desirability or attractiveness. For these Veterans, “Standardisation and Simplification”, means the process of making things the same, less complex or complicated. It is understandable then, that individual issues will always wash to the surface, but in doing so, it sometimes highlights sensibility to complicated systems that may need readjustment in making that final decision, and in getting it right for all. The compensation and wellbeing advocacy here at the Maroochy RSL Veteran Hub, are united in the belief that the adoption of eligibility for automatic grant categories under the VEA to access the availability of reimbursement of the funeral expenses up to \$14,062.00, would better reflect the benefits of the Bill and bring true harmonisation to the single ongoing act enhancements.

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