

MEDIA RELEASE

RECLASSIFICATION OF TIMOR SERVICE WELCOMED

A recent Defence announcement on the reclassification of service for members of the Australian Training Support Team – East Timor (ATST-EM) under Defence Cooperation Program tasks is welcome but long overdue says the National President of the Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association, Mr Paul Copeland.

Mr Copeland's comments came after the Australian Defence Force issued an announcement today which would see the service reclassified from Peacetime to Warlike.

"This means that like all other Australian forces in Timor who were engaged on active service between 16th September 1999 and 17 August 2003, these members will now be eligible for War Service Pension; receive the Australian Active Service Medal and the Return from Active Service Badge."

Mr Copeland said the Howard Government had accepted the inconsistency of service in October 2007 – which includes retrospective force assignment to the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET).

"All other Australian and international forces also received the United Nations medal for their service and the only element not to be awarded this medal was the ATST-EM whose main role was training members of the Timorese guerrilla army, FALINTIL, to become East Timor's first army."

Mr Copeland said some members of the ATST-EM were awarded their UN medal at the time - which was unbelievably withdrawn from them by the Australian Defence Force at a later stage.

"We are experiencing difficulty in obtaining retrospective awarding of the UN Medal East Timor for these members through the United Nations," Mr Copeland said.

"This is in stark contrast to the awarding of the UN Medal to the forces of other nations, who also made up the training team (Republic of Korea; Portugal; and New Zealand), at the time of their service in East Timor, serving alongside the Australian Team.

Mr Copeland said the only country out of the Training Team of the four nations to miss-out in the deserved recognition of the UN Medal was the Australian element.

"We view the reclassification as a positive step forward for those who deserve such recognition and look forward to resolving the issue of the UN Medal with the incumbent Government and the UN HQ New York – Department of Peacekeeping Operations."

Mr Copeland said he hoped these deficiencies in service classification; honours and awards between Australian forces in the same country on the same operation would never be repeated as these events had made members of the ATST-ET feel extremely undervalued in their contribution for nearly a decade.

The Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association was also responsible for the successful campaigning of the retrospective reclassification of service in Rwanda to Warlike Service in February 2006.

The Association is also currently working on a number of outstanding issues of retrospective reclassification, including the Arab/Israeli wars; Humanitarian Overseas Operations and Timor Leste from May 2006 to April 2008.

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RECLASSIFICATION OF DEFENCE COOPERATION PROGRAM SERVICE IN EAST TIMOR

Service by Defence Cooperation Program (DCP) personnel in East Timor between the period 16 September 1999 and 17 August 2003 has been reclassified as warlike.

This means that those who were involved in the Army Training Support Team—East Timor and other DCP tasks are now eligible to be awarded the Australian Active Service Medal (AASM) with clasp East Timor and Returned from Active Service badge (RASB).

Personnel who served in East Timor under DCP arrangements should apply to Defence Honours and Awards (DH&A) using the form Application for the Issue of Medals that is available on the DH&A website www.defence.gov.au/medals or by calling DH&A on **1800 111 321** (toll free). To assist the assessment process members should ensure that their PMKeyS Ops Log reflects their DCP service in East Timor.

The upgrade of the Australian Service Medal (ASM) to the AASM requires the ASM to be returned before the AASM is dispatched, unless the ASM has been awarded for another operation. Those who already hold the AASM will be issued the clasp after returning the ASM if required. Members will be advised on their particular requirements.

The RASB will be issued with the AASM if not previously issued for other qualifying service.

Qualification for both the AASM and ASM on a single rotation is not permitted.

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