



With an election just around the corner, the ex-service community will have a choice about which party they decide to vote for.

Labor has been listening and responding to the concerns raised by the ex-service community.

In this edition I have outlined a number of Labor's plans for the Veterans' Affairs portfolio and you will see that Labor has been taking the lead in a range of areas including the indexation of compensation payments, mental health issues in the ex-service community and the recognition of Veterans' service.

There will always be more work to be done to improve the services available for those who have served our country. Labor has fresh plans for the future in Veterans Affairs. It is clear that after 11 years the Howard Government has run out of ideas of its own.

I trust that those who intend to make up their mind about who to support on the basis of the policy and performance of both major parties will be in a position to do so when they go to cast their ballot.

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Disabled War Veterans Guaranteed Fair Indexation under Labor



Kevin Rudd speaking at the RSL National Congress in Melbourne.

The issue of erosion of disability compensation pensions has been a major issue of concern for the ex-service community. In fact, there has been no other issue that has been subject of greater sustained and passionate concern in the Veterans' Affairs policy area over the last ten years.

Since becoming Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin has been actively encouraging the Government to address this issue. In a speech in May last year, Alan said to the NSW RSL conference that *"one of the policy issues that I am very much aware is a concern to the Veterans' community, is the indexation of the remaining portion of the TPI payment"*.

During the last ten years the Howard Government have failed to act to address this injustice.

That's why on 6 May 2007 Kevin Rudd and Alan Griffin announced that a Rudd Labor Government would increase benefits for our nations most

severely disabled War Veterans. The announcement meant all Above General Rate disability pensioners would have the whole of their pensions indexed to movements in Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE) or the Consumer Price Index (CPI), whichever is greater.

Labor's announcement was welcomed by the TPI Federation, the Vietnam Veterans Association and Federation and the RSL. However the Minister chose to accuse Labor of *'a political stunt'* and stated in Parliament that Labors policy was *'unprincipled, unsustainable and unsubstantiated'*.

Labor continued to encourage the Government to support this policy. Kevin Rudd moved a motion in Parliament calling on the Government to back Labor's policy and acknowledge that the value of these pensions had eroded under the Howard Government. *(refer to page 2-3 to read a transcript of Kevin Rudd's speech).*

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During the motion the Government still refused to support our policy.

Prior to the RSL National Congress, Labor announced an extension of the original policy of this fairer indexation regime to recipients of the General Rate disability pension.

This announcement was a further step on the road to ensuring that our Veterans receive the compensation they deserve and affects nearly 96,000 disabled War Veterans.

After 10 long years, the Howard Government finally acted and during the Prime Minister's address at the RSL National Congress adopted Labor's policy on indexation. They also provided catch up payments to deal with some of the erosion of the value of payments under the Howard Government. This included a 5% increase in the General Rate Table and an increase of \$15 per fortnight for Extreme Disablement Adjustment Pensioners.

Kevin Rudd, also speaking at the RSL National Congress immediately endorsed and supported in full the parts of the Prime Minister's announcement that were not already part of Labor's policy.

In his speech Kevin said *"the Veterans community deserve an assurance that whoever forms government in this country will always have their interests first and foremost at heart, and this is why I begin my remarks tonight about the care of Veterans by embracing fully and without equivocation each and every commitment made tonight by the Prime Minister."*

Labor said at the time of our original announcement that the erosion of these pensions that has occurred under this Government should be addressed by the Government. We called on the Government to address the erosion and we pledged to support any measures to do so.

In the Budget, when the Government raised the Special Rate and Intermediate pensions following our calls, we supported them. When they raised the General Rate and EDA pensions at the RSL National Congress, we supported them.

The Government must now move to quell fears in the ex-service community that the Prime Minister's announcement will not become one of Mr Howard's famous 'non-core' promises. They must prove they are serious about their adoption of Labor's policy by introducing legislation into Parliament.

Labor has offered full support for the introduction of the legislation for these purposes.



Kevin Rudd moves Motion in Parliament...

Mr Rudd Leader of the Opposition – I move: That the House:

- 1** Affirms its recognition of the sacrifices made by Australia's Veterans;
- 2** Accepts its obligation to ensure that Veterans' sacrifices are acknowledged and that benefits earned by Veterans are paid to them on a just and fair basis;
- 3** Acknowledges in particular the plight of our most severely disabled Veterans;
- 4** Acknowledges that the value of the Special Rate Disability Pension (TPI and TTI), Intermediate Rate and Extreme Disablement Adjustment Pensions have eroded under the Howard Government; and
- 5** Supports Labor's policy to index the remaining portions of the Above General Rate Disability Pensions to movements in Male Total Average Weekly Earnings, in recognition of the more severe work and lifestyle effects suffered by the recipients of these entitlements.

Kevin Rudd speaks on Motion in Parliament

(Extracts from Kevin's Speech)

There is perhaps no greater duty that we as a nation and as a Parliament have than to honour, remember and express our gratitude to those Australians who have served in the defence of our nation in times of war, because our security and liberty has not come without a price. It is why all of us are immensely proud of all our men and women in uniform—those who have served and returned and the 100,000 Australians who have died in the service of their country. For those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the defence of our nation and in pursuit of peace, their courage and service should never be forgotten. For those Veterans who have returned, and especially those with disabilities, we owe an equally great duty.

It is why this motion that I have put before this House is so important. All of us share an obligation to ensure that the support we give to our Veterans and their families, through pensions, benefits and other services, 

are given on an ongoing, just and fair basis. In so doing, we need to recognise the circumstances of our most severely disabled Veterans and to do all we can to support them and their families to live happy, fulfilling and rewarding lives with as little discomfort and anxiety as possible.

It is particularly disheartening and, I believe, dishonourable that, over the past decade or so, the value of the Special Rate disability pension—the TPI and TTI—the Intermediate Rate and Extreme Disablement Adjustment pensions has been eroded. It is why recently I announced that a Labor government would increase benefits for our nation's most severely disabled War Veterans. Labor would index all Above General Rate pensions to

movements in the cost and standard of living...

...Labor is committed to increasing the benefits for the most severely disabled Veterans in recognition of the more difficult work and lifestyle limitations that they share. I am pleased that the leading Veterans groups, including the TPI Federation, the Vietnam Veterans Association, the Vietnam Veterans Federation and the RSL have welcomed Labor's approach in this area.

The truth is that neither side of politics has got the treatment of our Veterans and their families completely right. It is why Labor—and me personally—are deeply committed to ensuring that we recognise, respect and support those who have given our nation

the peace, security and prosperity that we all enjoy.

I conclude where I began. There is no more fundamental obligation that we have as a community than to ensure that those who have fought for our country and those who have suffered injury as a consequence of engaging the enemy for our country should be looked after properly by our country. This is a basic axiom of national decency, and that forms the basis for the principles which we have enunciated today. We would encourage the Government to reflect again on the position we have put forward in the hope and expectation that they might also support it to ensure that our Veterans can have that secure commitment into the future.

Ex-Service Organisations meet with Kevin Rudd

The day after Kevin Rudd moved a motion seeking the Government's support for Labor's policy on the indexation of Above General Rate pensions, representatives from major ex-service organisations were invited to meet with Labor's Leader.

During the meeting a range of issues were discussed including the continuing erosion of benefits paid to the ex-service community and the unique nature of military service. There was also a discussion of Labor's Veterans' Affairs policy and specific policy initiatives



From Left to Right – Ron Coxon, VVAA; Bill Crews, RSL; Paul Copeland, APPVA; June Healy, WWG; Kevin Rudd MP; Narelle Brombead, PVA; Ian Wills, Legacy; Blue Ryan, TPI Federation; Alan Griffin MP and Tim McCombe, VVFA.

proposed by the different ex-service organisations.

Labor is committed to listening to the needs of the Veterans' community and will ensure that the

Veterans' community have every opportunity to put forward their views in the development of Labor's Veterans' Affairs policy.

Labor's Policy Announcements

Federal Labor has recently announced a number of policy initiatives beyond the increase in benefits for all of our nations' disabled War Veterans. Some of these include a study into suicide in the ex-service community, a mental health 'lifecycle' package, an interdepartmental working group to examine ways of rationalising the administrative burden on ex-service personnel, additional funding for the ASIST program and a review of Long Tan gallantry awards. Labor will be announcing further policies leading into the election campaign.



Photo courtesy the Australian War Memorial

Study into Suicide in Ex-Service Community

The study proposed by Federal Labor will examine the broad issue of suicide among the ex-service community and a number of specific cases of suicide that have occurred over the last three years.

It is hoped that the study will identify;

- Ex-service members that are at an increased risk of self harm.
- Any common contributing factors among ex-service members who have committed, or attempted, suicide.
- The extent of suicide within the ex-service community.
- Lifestyle or other factors that may be contributing to suicide in the ex-service community.
- Any administrative reforms or initiatives that will help combat suicide within the ex-service community.

Labor is committed to listening and responding to the needs of the ex-service community and will develop detailed terms of reference in

consultation with the major ex-service organisations.

The study will be conducted independently from the Department of Veterans' Affairs but with its full support, and will be funded from existing Department resources.

ASIST Program

Federal Labor has pledged to provide an extra \$1 million over four years for to the Applied Suicide and Intervention Skills Training Program (ASIST) aimed at preventing suicides within the ex-service community. These funds will support a range of reforms including:

- Greater promotion of ASIST through an increase in its advertising budget.
- More information and training sessions to be held in rural and regional areas.
- An expansion of the suite of programs offered by ASIST trainers.

Labor has also committed to bring the ASIST program formally under the control of VVCS to help facilitate these reforms, and to ensure long term viability and independence of the ASIST program.



Mental Health 'Lifecycle' Package

A Rudd Labor Government will introduce a package of strategic mental health initiatives targeted across the four stages of an Australian Defence Force (ADF) member's 'lifecycle'.

Under Labors 'lifecycle' approach, mental health care will be integrated across four stages of the ADF; recruitment into the ADF, ADF service, transition or discharge from the ADF, and rehabilitation and resettlement into civilian life.

The package aims to achieve four outcomes across the ADF 'lifecycle'

- Enhanced psychological resilience among serving personnel.
- Better early intervention and mental health surveillance.
- Successful transition from defence to civilian life for the member and their family, and
- Effective rehabilitation and timely mental health treatment.

Federal Labor is aware that mental health is a significant issue for both current defence personnel and the ex-service community. There are some 52,473 Veterans with an accepted mental health disability.

The package will be undertaken as a partnership between the Department of Defence, the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the Australian Centre for Post-Traumatic Mental Health.

Interdepartmental working group

An interdepartmental working group would be established under a Labor Government to examine ways of rationalising the administrative burden on Veterans and ex-service personnel who have to deal with multiple agencies.

Currently Veterans, ex-service personnel and their families have to deal with the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Centrelink, the Defence Forces Retirement and Death Benefits Authority, Comsuper and the Department of Defence to obtain their entitlements, compensation or income. Federal Labor understands that this can cause confusion and anxiety for the ex-service community and their families.

Labor's working group would be chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs and will comprise representatives from all other agencies and have formal representation from the ex-service community.

The working group will be expected to report back to the Minister within eighteen months of its formation.



Photo courtesy the Australian War Memorial

Long Tan Review

Labor has previously announced that it will conduct a formal and independent review of the gallantry awards and citations made at Long Tan and supports the award of the GRVN Cross of Gallantry Unit Citation with Palm to 6RAR D Company.

Alan Griffin, Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs, and Graham Edwards, Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence and Veterans' Affairs, re-affirmed this commitment recently given the Prime Minister's silence on this issue a year after he gave a personal undertaking about this issue to the commanding officer of 6RAR D Company, then Major Harry Smith.

Harry Smith and those in D Company, will receive the justice they deserve under a Rudd Labor Government.

War Widows Domestic Allowance

Labor understands that, like Veterans, War Widows are suffering with increased costs of living. That's why a Rudd Labor Government will apply the same indexation arrangements to the Domestic Allowance component of the War Widows Pension as currently exist for the rest of that pension.

The Howard Government has refused to index the Domestic Allowance component of the War Widows Pension over a long period of time despite the Clarke Report in 2004 making the recommendation to do so.

The indexation of the carers' Domestic Allowance will affect more than 110,000 War Widows.

Minister Billson will have an opportunity to follow Labor's lead at the Legacy National Conference in October, to ensure that no matter who forms the next Government, War Widows will receive the acknowledgment and support they deserve.

Previous policy announced by Labor includes;

- *An extension of bereavement payments to single TPI and EDA Veterans.*
- *Proclamation of Merchant Navy Day and Battle for Australia Day.*
- *Free Australian flags for families of Veterans for use at funeral services.*
- *The implementation of recommendations of Post Armistice Korean Service Review.*
- *Funds to assist the maintenance of the Ballarat POW Memorial.*
- *Automatic granting of War Widows Pension to Widows of TTI and Intermediate Rate pensioners.*

Labor will be making further announcements relating to Veterans' Affairs portfolio.

You can find further details and a summary of all policy announcements Labor has made so far at www.griffinmp.com.



Children of Vietnam Veterans Health Study

After sustained pressure from Federal Labor and the ex-service community the Government has finally announced that they will conduct a study into the health of children of Vietnam Veterans.

Labor went to the last election with a commitment to conduct such a study and further announced that a study would be conducted under a Rudd Labor Government on 25 May at a meeting with the Children of Vietnam Veterans Health Study Group in Ballarat.

After consultation with the ex-service community Labor has now formally endorsed the Government's proposed study, and it will now form part of our Veterans' Affairs Policy for the upcoming election.



Dave Matheson and Sue Parker from the Children of Vietnam Veterans Health Study Group discuss Labors commitment with Local MP Catherine King and Shadow Minister Alan Griffin.

There have been some concerns raised about appropriate consultation and Labor understands that the Government is yet to decide on the consultative mechanisms that will be put in place.

A Rudd Labor Government would ensure that any consultative

mechanisms attached to this study will involve representatives of the ex-service community who have a direct interest in the findings of the study.

However, after three years this is a step in the right direction and the Minister should be congratulated for committing to this important study.

Pe-ac-ed with Love Partners of Veterans Association Quilt Project



Maree Gebhardt from PVA, Vietnam Veteran and Federal MP Graham Edwards and Alan Griffin at the PVA quilt exhibition in Canberra

Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, and Vietnam Veteran and Federal MP Graham Edwards recently visited the Partners

of Veterans National Quilt Project on show during the Canberra Craft and Quilt Fair.

The Project: *Pe-ac-ed with Love – transgenerational quilts and stories by widows, partners and families of Australian War Veterans* is a moving exhibition that aims to give recognition to the ongoing care and devotion families provide to War Veterans.

The Partners of Veterans Association (PVA) first launched the project in 2003 to give families of Veterans the opportunity to share their stories through the development of these

quilts, and through that, PVA hopes to give the public an insight in to the pain and futility of war and to remember the sacrifice our War Veterans and families have made for this country.

The quilts have been touring nationally, exclusive to the Craft and Quilt Fairs and from Canberra the exhibition will travel to New Zealand on the 20-23 September, Brisbane from 24-28 October and Adelaide 8-11 November.

Further details can be found at www.pva.org.au.

Budget Estimates

Labor has been trying to get answers from the Minister about a range of issues of concern to the ex-service community. During the Budget Estimates Labor placed a range of Questions on Notice, and after months of delay from the Minister some of the responses have finally been received.

Claims Processing

The figures provided by the department reveal that there is still a major problem with the time taken to process claims. As of the 30 June 2007 there were 3,869 claims exceeding the time usually taken to process.

This comes at a time when the Howard Government has forced the department to implement a net reduction of 12.5 per cent in staff allocated to compensation claims processed under the Veterans Entitlement Act.

Labor has consistently said that at this difficult time, when Veterans and their families are dealing with the claims process and often are not well or at their most vulnerable the Minister should not be cutting staff or resources when the department is failing to meet its obligations.

Mental Health Advertising

The department has revealed that on average over the last two financial years the Government spent only \$177,535 on mental health publicity and awareness campaigns. When you compare this with the fact the Government spent a quarter of a billion dollars on Government advertising last financial year this figure is way too low.

We know that mental health is a serious issue for the ex-service community, we know that 31 Veterans have committed suicide as a result of their service over the last five years; however this does not include statistics for Veterans waiting for their claims to be processed.

The Government has to do more to address the mental health issues in the Veterans' community. Labor has made

a commitment to increase funding to the ASIST program, to encompass a greater promotion of ASIST through an increase in its advertising budget.

Minister Spends on Self Promotion

It has been revealed that the Minister has recently spent almost \$200,000 advertising and promoting the Government's budget measures including the mail out to TPI and Intermediate Rate Pensioners to boast about their policy on catch up payments.

This is an outrageous waste of taxpayer's money by a desperate Government who has lost touch with the needs of the Veteran's community. It also demonstrates the Government's priorities when it is compared with the amount of money spent on mental health advertising.

DVA Budget – The Real Story is the Minister the “Budget Bandit”?

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs has often made the claim that over the course of the Howard Government expenditure by DVA has increased from \$6.36 billion to \$11 billion - an increase of \$4.64 billion, or 73%.

While this is true, looking below the surface paints a more accurate picture of spending patterns of this Government:

- More than 80% of this increase, or close to \$3.7 billion, is due to indexation and automatic cost increases. That is the increased cost of delivering the existing services. This is not increased spending the Government can claim credit for as it would have occurred under any Government.
- By not maintaining Above General Rate Pensions at the percentage of Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE) they were when the Howard Government was elected, the Government has short-changed our most disabled veterans by over \$350 million in the last five years alone. More than enough to pay for the Prime Minister's most recent announcements.
- By introducing a system whereby Veterans pay for part of the cost of their medicines, the Howard Government has ripped off our Veterans over \$110 million in the last decade and that figure continues to grow.
- Actual budgetary growth figures reported in this year's budget show that the growth in the DVA budget over the previous ten years was 42% less than the growth in Government revenue - meaning that expenditure on DVA as a proportion of budget revenue has fallen under this Government.

Labor Senator Retraces Sandakan 'Death Marches'



In July 2007 Labor Senator for South Australia, Anne McEwen led a group of 20 fellow Australians on a trek to Sabah in Malaysian Borneo retracing 100km of the original route that Australian Prisoners of War (POWs) were forced to march during World War Two. (pictured above)

After the fall of Singapore in 1942, more than 2400 Australian and British POWs were taken to camps in Sandakan on the coast of Malaysian Borneo. Hundreds died in these camps from disease and starvation

During 1945 nearly 1000 starving and sick POWs were forced to walk from Sandakan to Ranau, a trek of 250km along jungle tracks in blistering heat. Those who could not keep up the pace were murdered. Most of those who made it to the POW camp in Ranau subsequently died.

Of the more than 2400 Australian and British POWs who were originally interned at Sandakan after the fall of Singapore in 1942, only six men survived.

Senator McEwen said "The story of what happened to our soldiers in Borneo is not particularly well known. For many years the families

of our POWs confronted a wall of silence or deliberate misinformation when they tried to find out what had happened to their fathers, brothers and husbands. Fortunately the story of Sandakan is becoming more well known. It is only by acknowledging our past history and learning from mistakes that we can protect our service personnel in the future.

It was a great privilege to walk where the POWs had been and to meet many of the people in Malaysia whose families had helped Australians during the War. It was a hard walk for us, but nothing compared to what the POWs had to endure."

During the trek, Senator McEwen joined the Sabahan Minister for Tourism, Culture & Environment, Datuk Masidi Manjun in unveiling a memorial plaque for Private Alan Quaily, one of the POWs who were killed on the Death March in 1945.

Senator McEwen with Jenny Sandercock, Bill Bowden (former POW) and Graham Sandercock (son of Alan Sandercock, POW who died at Sandakan) at the Sandakan memorial in Adelaide.



Notices

ATTENTION ALL EDA AND INTERMEDIATE RATE RECIPIENTS

The National Association of Extremely Disabled War Veterans is holding its Annual Conference on Monday, 15th and Tuesday, 16th October, 2007 at the Toukley RSL Club, Holmes Avenue, Toukley, NSW, 2263.

All EDA and Intermediate Rate recipients and their Carers are invited to attend. For further information, please contact:

Mrs Helen Young
Honorary Secretary
Phone: 02 4341 9264
Email: secretary@nationaleda.org.au

ALAN GRIFFIN'S WEBSITE

Remember to check out Alan Griffin's Veterans' Affairs website at www.griffinmp.com. On the site you will find copies of Alan's speeches, newsletters, press releases, information kits and community notices. A new Veteran's policy page has also been created that will provide details of all of Labors Veterans policy announcements and will be continually updated.



Visits

If you would like Alan Griffin or your local member or candidate to attend and/or speak at one of your functions please forward your details to the Office of Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600 or contact Alan at www.griffinmp.com or phone (02) 6277 4374.