REPATRIATION COMMISSION

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Repatriation Commission Annual Report 2007–08

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, 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;
- to advise the Minister on the operation of the VEA; and
- generally to administer the VEA, subject to the control of the Minister.

The VEA also gives the Repatriation Commission the power to take necessary actions in connection with the performance of its functions, duties and powers (section 181). 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 Repatriation Commission. These powers are detailed under the Freedom of Information statement at Appendix C.

The Repatriation Commission currently provides services under the VEA to 414,968 veterans and members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), their partners, widows/widowers and children.

Structure

The Repatriation Commission has three full-time members appointed by the Governor-General:

- the President, Mr Mark Sullivan AO, was appointed on 2 December 2004 until 25 October 2008;
- the Deputy President, Mr Ed Killesteyn PSM, was appointed on 15 August 2005 until 14 August 2008; and
- the Services member (generally known as the Repatriation Commissioner) Brigadier William (Bill) Rolfe AO (Retd), was appointed on 26 January 2007 until 25 January 2010. (The third member of the Repatriation Commission is chosen from names submitted to the Minister by ex-service organisations.)

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

1 Mr Sullivan resigned as President of the Repatriation Commission and Secretary of the Department of Veterans’ Affairs with effect from 11 July 2008.
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 Repatriation Commission is the decision-maker. It has responsibility for deciding and reviewing individuals’ entitlements to pensions, benefits and treatment in accordance with the VEA. Although the Commission has no staff of its own, it is able (by sub-section 213(1) of the VEA) to delegate its powers. In practice, these delegates are staff of the department.

Relationship with the department

The Repatriation Commission is responsible for the general administration of the VEA, while the department provides administrative support to the Commission. 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. Over the past year the Commission has taken a particular interest in the department’s continued embedding of its new structure and the refinement of the department’s governance arrangements.

DID YOU KNOW?

That Governor-General Major General Michael Jeffery AC CVO MC (Retd), pictured with former Secretary Mark Sullivan (r), and Minister for Veterans’ Affairs the Hon Alan Griffin MP helped mark the 90th anniversary of the Repatriation Commission by launching a staff fundraising program for the Kokoda Track Foundation.

DVA staff decided to celebrate the Commission’s milestone by raising funds for a community in need. The Governor-General, the patron of the Foundation, and the Minister launched the fundraising program in April 2008.
Membership

Mark Sullivan AO

Mr Sullivan was appointed President of the Repatriation Commission, Chair of the MRCC and Secretary of the Department of Veterans’ Affairs in October 2004. Mr Sullivan previously had held the positions of Secretary of the Department of Family and Community Services and Chief Executive Officer of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. He also was Deputy Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. He has extensive senior managerial experience in the private and public sectors including with WANG Australia, SBS, the Department of Social Security and the Australian Taxation Office. Mr Sullivan was appointed as an Officer of the Order of Australia in the Australia Day Honours in 2008 for service to the community, particularly Australia’s veterans, through contributions to new governance arrangements, and to major public policy developments in the areas of family support, multicultural affairs and indigenous service delivery.

Mr Sullivan is a Fellow of the Society of Certified Practising Accountants and a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management and has a Bachelor of Economics from Sydney University.

Ed Killesteyn PSM

Mr Killesteyn was appointed Deputy President of the Repatriation Commission and a member of the MRCC in August 2005. Mr Killesteyn joined the Australian Taxation Office in 1972, having graduated from Macquarie University with 1st Class Honours in Accounting. While working for the ATO, he also lectured and tutored in Accounting at Macquarie University and the Australian National University.

Mr Killesteyn served as Deputy Commissioner of Taxation in charge of the Sydney South Taxation Office from 1989 to 1991 and in 1993 was appointed the ATO’s inaugural Chief Finance Officer. In 1994, he transferred to the then Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) as First Assistant Secretary and was responsible for implementation of the highly successful Electronic Travel Authority. Mr Killesteyn was appointed the inaugural Chief Information Officer in DIMIA as part of the department’s strategic response to managing issues arising from Y2K and DIMIA’s significant investment in information technology to support its business.

Mr Killesteyn was appointed to the position of DIMIA Deputy Secretary in 2002. He was awarded a Public Service Medal (PSM) in the June 2004 Queen’s Birthday Honours list for his work in establishing the world’s first global electronic visa processing system and his work in APEC.

Mr Killesteyn is a Fellow of the Society of Certified Practising Accountants.
Brigadier Bill Rolfe AO (Retd)

Brigadier Rolfe was appointed as the Services member of the Repatriation Commission and a member of the MRCC on 26 January 2007 for a period of three years.

BRIG Rolfe served in the Army for 27 years. Following his service in Vietnam as an infantry officer with the 2nd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment in 1970 he retrained as a legal officer. He held a variety of legal officer positions and 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. BRIG Rolfe was appointed as an Officer of the Order of Australia for service to veterans, particularly through leadership roles with the Veterans’ Review Board, to the development and implementation of program initiatives, and to professional education.

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

Commission Activity

During 2007–08 the Repatriation Commission considered 82 submissions and held 10 formal meetings. Matters considered by the Repatriation Commission included:

- Review of Veterans’ Home Care Program;
- Quality Assurance Framework;
- Applied Research Program—funding proposals and intellectual property;
- Family Study Program;
- transfer of long-term patients from Rozelle Hospital;
- review of Agency Agreements with the United Kingdom and New Zealand;
- Journal article: *Australian Participants in British Nuclear Tests in Australia 1952–1960, Dosimetry, Mortality and Cancer Incidence Study*;
- submissions to the Repatriation Medical Authority concerning reviews of Statements of Principles;
- public and private hospital services;
- day procedure centres;
- transport services;
- other health services, including pharmaceuticals, aids and appliances and non-emergency ambulance services;
- claim forms;
- legal appeals;
- appointment of members to Treatment Monitoring Committees and Veterans’ Children Education Boards; and
- delegation of powers under the VEA.
Strategic Issues
The Repatriation Commission continues to work closely with the MRCC and the Department of Veterans’ Affairs to ensure that the needs of current and former members of the ADF and their dependants are met.

In the past year the Repatriation Commission has continued to focus on maintaining and standardising service provision in an environment of continuing significant demographic changes in the veteran community.

Ministerial International Forum
The Minister and the President of the Commission attended the Ministerial International Forum in Washington DC in April 2008 to discuss issues of common concern with colleagues from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and New Zealand. The main issues discussed included operational and policy issues related to the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, and discussions around the ageing of the veteran population and the delivery of benefits to veterans.

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 and senior departmental officers attended the SIF in Canada in September 2007 to discuss issues of mutual concern.

Predictive Analysis
In June 2008 senior representatives of the department met with colleagues from Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom as part of the Business Innovation Group of the SIF. One of the significant outcomes from this meeting was an agreement to continue exploration for multilateral collaboration between the veterans’ administrations on the use of detailed historical data analysis as a tool in predicting a variety of compensation outcomes for veterans. Another advantage of using these analysis techniques would include identifying triggers and benefits for early intervention for rehabilitation. Australia is leading the international examination of the use of this approach and the sharing of compensation and rehabilitation outcomes across participating countries.

Disability in the 21st Century
At the September 2007 meeting of the SIF, Australia was asked to review and report on how disability is perceived and dealt with in the 21st century.

The SIF recognised that it is important that approaches to disability are relevant to modern medical remediation. It also noted that existing definitions may be out-dated and may not reflect technological advancements that allow individuals to be more active in society.

In early 2008, the department commissioned a literature review into definitions of disability in different legislation disciplines around the world. Phase 2 of the project is underway and involves
research and analysis of international trends and approaches to dealing with disability, as well as investigation into any unique impact the military environment may have on perspectives of disability and compensation. The results of phases 1 and 2 of the project will be presented at the September 2008 SIF.

Prime Ministerial Advisory Council on Ex-Service Matters
The Commission supported the Minister in encouraging veterans and their organisations to provide their views to the Government on the composition and operation of the Prime Ministerial Advisory Council on Ex-Service Matters which was announced as part of the Government’s election commitment to the Veterans’ Affairs portfolio.

Commemorations
Anzac Day commemorations continued to be a major focus. The department has prime responsibility for the planning and conduct of Anzac Day commemorations at Gallipoli, Turkey, with the Repatriation Commission President chairing the Australia-New Zealand Bilateral Committee and continuing to liaise closely with Turkish Government officials to ensure a dignified and safe event. The department was responsible for the first Dawn Service to be held at the Australian National Memorial, Villers-Bretonneux, France, following the Australian Government’s decision to mark the 90th anniversary of the final battles on the Western Front during the First World War in this way. The strong interest in the first Dawn Service at Villers-Bretonneux resulted in the Prime Minister announcing that services would be held annually from 2009.

Two commemorative missions dedicated memorials in Malaysia and Israel. In September 2007 Brigadier Rolfe led a mission party of Second World War veterans to Parit Sulong, Malaysia for the dedication of the memorial to those who fought and died in the Battle of Muar River and those who were massacred at Parit Sulong in 1942.

The President together with BRIG Rolfe, who also led the mission party of veterans who served in light horse units in the Second World War, attended the dedication of the Park of the Australian Soldier at Be’er-Sheva, Israel, in April 2008.

The Repatriation Commission played a key role in planning and staging commemorative events in Canberra and Townsville during May 2008 to mark the 40th anniversary of the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral in Vietnam.

Transport
The Repatriation Commission continued to oversee reforms to the Repatriation Transport Scheme (RTS) in 2007–08. Improvements to policy and the development of more sophisticated systems to streamline business processes are needed in response to the ageing veteran population and their increasing need for transport.

The final stage of the 2006 RTS reforms was implemented with the extension of the time period for the lodgement of travel reimbursement claims from 3 months to 12 months. The Commission oversaw a major review of the system for administering taxi and hire car bookings (the department took more than 800,000 in the year). It has also approved the implementation of a statutory registration scheme for taxi and hire car companies.
As the department is positioning itself for the future, it is developing several ICT projects. The first is the Service Delivery Model Process/Transport Reimbursements project, which has led to significant changes to travel reimbursement claims forms and claims processing. The automation of the analysis of ambulance data provides the department greater accuracy, transparency and accountability, particularly as expenditure on ambulance transport grows.

Vietnam Veterans’ Family Study
BRIG Rolfe has been appointed as the Chair of the Consultative Forum for the Vietnam Veterans’ Family Study, which is the first of its kind and will investigate the impact of military service in Vietnam on the children of veterans and the family unit as a whole. The Consultative Forum will assist with stakeholder engagement and ensure a veteran community perspective is included in this important study.

Veterans’ Service Centre
The Veterans’ Service Centre continues to manage incoming telephone calls for callers in Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria and currently resolves about 60 per cent of enquiries at first point of contact. While it was reported last year that there would be a national roll-out in 2007–08, the Commission agreed with the department’s proposal to stabilise the existing arrangement before introducing more work into the centre. The national roll-out will occur in 2008–09 with services remaining in the existing three sites.

Quality Assurance
In July 2007 the Repatriation Commission endorsed the adoption of a nationally consistent quality assurance (QA) framework. QA processes help assure the integrity of departmental operations and enhance service delivery outcomes. The department is reviewing its QA processes to establish consistency with the national guidelines and identify additional functions that should be covered by a QA process.

Service Improvements
Last year processing times for primary claims made under the VEA dropped from 89 to 75 days on average, the department’s benchmark levels, as a consequence of the implementation of the Special Claims Unit, implemented in late 2007, and a number of other processing improvements.

There were service improvements for health providers and their patients as well. The administrative burden on medical and allied health professionals registering and claiming as DVA providers was eased with reductions in bureaucratic requirements. Veterans’ access to surgical and hospital facilities was improved through the tender exercises to contract more than 190 private day procedure centres and seven Tier 2 private hospitals around Australia.

Training and Information Program / Building Excellence in Support and Training
Education of ex-service organisation representatives in both the SRCA and MRCA legislation continues to be provided through the Training and Information Program (TIP). TIP is also providing points of reference for members of the ADF using the Integrated People Support Strategy, the joint DVA/Defence program that assists members leaving the ADF.

The Commission will consider a discussion paper on the sustainability and future directions of TIP in 2008–09.