

National President's Newsletter No 7 of 2014

1. Resignation of Mr Don Rowe OAM as Deputy National President.

The recent resignation of Mr Don Rowe as Deputy National President, NSW Branch State President and many other positions for health reasons brings to an end an exemplary period of service from which all in the RSL have benefitted. On a personal note I record my heartfelt thanks for Don's many kindnesses over many years, his determination to always strive to do all he could to help those in need, his unstinting loyalty and his very genuine friendship.

Don's legacy is enormous both at the State Branch level and nationally. He represented the RSL at national and international events on many occasions, most recently in Timor L'Este and was ever ready to undertake additional tasks benefitting all.

On behalf of all RSL members I wish Don and his family all the best for the future and for him personally a return to robust good health.

2. Election of Mr Terry Meehan as Deputy National President.

As is required by the RSL National Constitution an election was held for the position of Deputy National President vacated by Mr Rowe and on Tuesday 8 December the Queensland Branch State President Mr Terry Meehan was declared elected Deputy National President.

On behalf of all members I congratulate Terry on this appointment,

3. RSL Strategic Plan 2015-2020.

At its meeting in Perth in late October the National Board approved the Strategic Plan 2015-2020 subject to minor variations which have since been endorsed. As I promised at several public events during 2014 this document is now made available for all members of the RSL. To this end it is circulated as an attachment to this newsletter. Also attached is a complementary document, the National Office Strategic Plan 2015-2020.

4. RSL 2015/2016 Budget Submission.

Although the Government has acknowledged receipt of the RSL Annual Budget Submission forwarded on 29 August 2014 (and available for reference on the RSL National web site), I have once again written to the Prime Minister about some of the matters put forward in our submission.

I have taken this action to reinforce the importance the RSL attaches to our most pressing concerns – the change on 1 July 2017 to the indexation regime for several important payments to members of the ex-service community and their dependants.

An extract from my letter of 7 December 2014 to the Prime Minister reads:

'In an earlier letter I commended the Government on behalf of the RSL for fulfilling its election promise by legislating for fair indexation of payments to DFRB and DFRDB Superannuants. The legislation explicitly acknowledged that indexing by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) was unfair.

Logic dictates that if this was unfair so too is the change to indexing by CPI from 1 July 2017 to the Service and Aged pension, Income Support Supplement, Disability Pension, War Widow(er) Pension and equivalent MRCA payments.

The RSL calls on the Government to redress this inconsistency in policy by revoking the changes due to take effect on 1 July 2017.'

5. ADF Workplace Remuneration Arrangement (WRA):

The period of October to November was a busy time as the Government and the ADF considered the new WRA pay rise for the military. The RSL met with the Defence Military Remuneration team, who were responsible for the coordination of the process, on a regular basis. I am sure you have all read about the final outcome of a pay offer of 1.5% each year over three years with the loss of conditions to be used as an offset. The RSL was quick to submit to the ADF, the Government and the media that we in no way supported the pay offer and expressed our disappointment of the final outcome being less than CPI.

I am pleased to say that a number of media outlets contacted my office and I had an opportunity to further express the RSL's stand. We have now seen that the Government has reversed a part of the initial arrangement and the forfeited conditions, which included leave and allowances, has been reinstated.

6. Theft of RSL Plaque at Gallipoli.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs has advised that in late October an RSL plaque located just outside the Lone Pine Cemetery in the Gallipoli Historical Park was stolen. This plaque was placed when then RSL National President the late Brigadier A B Garland AM planted a pine tree nearby on 25 April 1990. Other plaques were also stolen.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs is sourcing and funding replacement commemorative plaques which are a Commonwealth responsibility and to the great credit of the Secretary and staff at the Department a replacement RSL plaque will be sourced and replaced at no cost to the RSL.

7. Award of RSL Honorary Life Membership to Dr Graeme Killer AO.

To acknowledge the extraordinary service Dr Graeme Killer has provided to the ex-service community over more than two decades as principal medical advisor to the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the RSL National Board approved the award to him of RSL Honorary Life Membership. Dr Killer is to stand down from his position in the Department in the very near future.

In making the presentation of Honorary Life Membership to Dr Killer at the annual Department of Veterans' Affairs end of year/Christmas function on Wednesday 3 December I took the opportunity of commending him publically in front of a large gathering for the many instances where he stepped in to help ex-service personnel. I also conveyed the thanks of all in the RSL and the other ex-service organisations for his unstinting assistance over so many years.

8. RSL National Conferences 2015 and 2016.

The 2015 National Conference and associated activities will be held in Brisbane during the period 21 to 23 September 2015. The RSL National Board will meet on Monday 21 September with the National Conference opening, wreath laying ceremony and conference dinner being scheduled for Tuesday 22 September. The Conference will conclude on Wednesday 23 on completion of the Annual General Meeting. The Brisbane venue for this event will be advised early in 2015.

In a break with recent custom and to recognise the importance of marking the Centenary of the establishment of the RSL, the 2016 National Conference will be held in Melbourne during the period 4 to 6 June 2015. The likely program is for the RSL National Board to meet on Saturday 4 June, the formal opening and wreath laying ceremony to be conducted on Sunday 5 June, exactly one hundred years since the foundation of what has become the RSL, and for Monday 6 June to be devoted to the completion of conference business and the 2016 Annual General Meeting.

A shortlist of central Melbourne venues is under consideration with the expectation that a firm booking will take place in the next few months.

I join with members of the RSL National Board in encouraging members to consider attending these important events.

9. Revision of RSL National Constitution.

There may be some misunderstanding about how this important matter is being progressed. As I promised at various RSL gatherings during the year the first draft was circulated to all for information. Judged by a few comments I have received it appears some members took this first draft to be the final of the amended RSL governing document.

That is not the case. The first draft is exactly that – a first step on a deliberately consultative revision process. The next step in this important updating was agreed by the National Board at our meeting in Perth in late October.

A second draft is to be produced by a National Constitution Revision writing team chaired by the Victorian Branch State President with members being the Queensland Branch State President the Chief Executive Officer of the South Australian Branch and the National Policy Advisor. The expectation is that the second draft will be submitted by consideration by the Board at its first meeting in 2015 currently scheduled for Thursday 12 March. Subject to the Board's deliberations, this document will once again be widely circulated so as to ensure all members are kept fully informed and that the iterative consultative process about which I spoke on many occasions will continue.

10. The RSL Book of World War 1 released.

A unique book containing 100 stories written by those who served during World War 1 which were subsequently published in RSL magazines such as Reveille, Listening Post and Mufti has been released. Edited by John Gatfield and Richard Landels, *The RSL Book of World War 1* is a superb tribute to those who recorded their experiences of the Great War and a timely reminder of the great work of the RSL over nearly 100 years in recording these texts in our official publications. The editors have worked closely with all State and Territory Branches in producing this book and as is entirely appropriate the RSL Badge adorns the front cover.

The book is published by Harper Collins.

11. Seasons Greetings.

I wish all members of the RSL and their families a happy and safe Christmas and all the best for 2015.