

## National President's Newsletter No 3 of 2014

- 1. Legislation passed to improve indexation of DFRB and DFRDB superannuation payments.** It is pleasing to report that on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2014 the Senate passed the *Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Legislation Amendment (Fair Indexation) Bill 2014* with this important legislation having been passed by the House of Representatives on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2014. I was in the House of Representatives visitors' gallery on 25<sup>th</sup> March to hear the Bill debated.

I convey my thanks to all in the RSL and to those in the wider service and ex-service community who have assisted over many years in our quest for this improvement in the indexation of military superannuation payments.

This fulfilment of a pre-election promise by the Government is most heartening and as a consequence I have written to the Prime Minister stating in part:

*You will recall the occasion at the Bendigo RSL Sub Branch when you handed me a letter you signed in my presence in which you gave a written undertaking to enact this legislation if the Coalition was elected to Government. Your fulfilment of this promise is to your very great credit.*

*Please convey my thanks to those of your colleagues who have been in the forefront of championing this issue over several years.*

- 2. RSL Strategic Planning Conference.** The Presidents of all State and Territory Branches and their Chief Executive Officers along with the National Solicitor, National Secretary, National Treasurer, National Veterans Affairs Advisor, National Policy Advisor and Chairman of the National Trustees attended an RSL Strategic Planning Conference I chaired at Adelaide on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> March. To assist us in charting the way ahead for the League we employed an experienced expert facilitator who has since forwarded a comprehensive written record of the outcomes of this important meeting.

This document is now being considered by all Branch Presidents and National Officers.

Much was achieved at this gathering and the challenge now is to put the agreements and understandings reached into action. In broad terms there was acceptance of the need for the RSL to be a much more cohesive proactive whole; for us to vastly improve the way in which we tell Australians what we do and what we achieve; to streamline our governance by eradicating duplication (e.g. removing the practice which exists in some States of separate Constitutions – National, State and District); and to become the undoubted “go to” organisation for those who need the help we are able to provide.

The fact that our membership increased by over 3000 during the calendar year 2013 gives confidence that we will rise to these challenges. There was agreement that the National Executive should be renamed the National Board and a formal resolution to this effect will be put to an additional special meeting to be held in Sydney on 23 May 2014 to progress these important matters. The changes envisaged will not be easy – but they are essential.

I will continue to keep members informed of progress with these bold initiatives; and, of course, some matters, such as the updating and simplification of the National Constitution will be referred to all Branches and Sub Branches for consideration before they are brought forward to the National Conference for decision.

**3. Call on the Leader of the Opposition.** I met with the Hon Bill Shorten MP in his Parliament House office on 27 March to discuss the Opposition’s outlook on the Veteran’s Affairs and Defence portfolios. I also took the opportunity to thank Mr Shorten for the Opposition’s support of the Government’s Fair Indexation Bill allowing it to pass through the House of Representatives the previous day.

Also present at this meeting were Senator the Hon Don Farrell, Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, the former Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, the Hon Warren Snowden and Mr Shorten’s Defence and Security Advisor, the Hon Dr Mike Kelly, a former Minister in the previous government.

Mr Shorten explained that he wanted to make best use of Senator Farrell’s talent during his few remaining months as a member of the

Senate and that to underscore the importance he attached to the work of the RSL and the esteem in which he holds the organisation he would be prepared to consider accepting invitations to attend forthcoming RSL State Conferences accompanying Senator Farrell. I have since communicated this advice to Branch Presidents.

The outlook for the Australian Defence Force in light of the projected new Defence White Paper being prepared by the Government was another topic of discussion. I also took the opportunity to brief the Leader of the Opposition about the RSL's renewed emphasis on standing up for the members of the ADF when pay and allowance matters are being considered by the Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal.

- 4. RSL Queensland State President wrongly accused by ANZMI.** As he has recently explained to those attending Queensland Branch District Conferences, the RSL Queensland Branch State President has been wrongly accused on the ANZMI web site of wearing a medal he was awarded inappropriately. The medal in question is the Western Australian Police Medal awarded to Mr Meehan for service in that force and for which extant policy is that it is to be worn on the left breast after other medals. It is to be hoped ANZMI will correct this mistake on their website and more closely check the facts in future.
- 5. Other Events.** I convey my thanks to those who made me welcome at the Wynnum and Cooroy Sub Branches when I attended two Queensland District Conferences in March. It was heartening to see the significant number who turned out for these important gatherings and I much appreciated the opportunity to address delegates and to listen to what they had to say about a variety of issues. I have also had meetings with the Ambassador of Timor L'Este and a visiting delegation from that nation about the way in which the RSL might help that nation to establish a veterans' organisation. More recently I have met with the Director of War Graves Brigadier Chris Appleton to be briefed about the Australian Memorial being established in the refurbished park adjacent to the New Zealand National War Memorial in Wellington (expected to be dedicated next year); and about the projected Australian Visitors/Interpretative centre proposed by the Australian Government to be established at Villiers-Bretonneux, France.

It was an honour on behalf of all in the RSL to participate in several events honouring the former Governor General in the weeks preceding the expiry of Her Excellency's term of office.

- 6. ANZAC Peace Prize and ANZAC of the Year Awards.** I chaired a meeting of the ANZAC Awards Committee on Wednesday 26 March and shared the disappointment of the Committee members, (distinguished Australians who give freely of their time each year to assist the RSL in this respect) at the lack of nominations.

A particular disappointment was the lack of even one nomination for the ANZAC Peace Prize.

There are many who are worthy of nomination for these prestigious annual awards and I strongly encourage all RSL members to put forward the names of outstanding Australians. Don't just leave it to someone else – write out a nomination yourself and send it in.