

## **National President's Newsletter No 6 of 2014**

### **1. RSL help for the Wounded Injured and Ill at the Invictus Games.**

Many RSL members will have seen some of the extensive television and media coverage of the Invictus Games held in London last month. The effort put in by the RSL throughout the nation in actively supporting this event was highly commendable and was most favourably commented upon by many. I send my gratitude to all who provided that support.

In conveying this thanks I would be remiss if I did not single out one person in particular. NSW Branch State Councillor Mr Darren McManus-Smith organised and managed the RSL supported part of the team and worked tirelessly to ensure it was successfully integrated with the ADF supported part of the team. He did a superb job, a fact recently commented upon in a laudatory letter sent by the Head of the ADF staff at the Australian High Commission in London.

The RSL supported contingent numbered 21 and formed part of a total of 36. The team was warmly welcomed in the UK by teams from other nations and by those organising this most significant and important international event. Each team member was accompanied by a supporter with the RSL providing over \$300,000 to ensure all needs were met.

Prior to the commencement of the Games, the entire team and supporters attended a reception at Australia House, London at which all had the opportunity of meeting and talking to His Royal Highness Prince Harry, the driving force behind the staging of the event.

During subsequent competition the Australian Invictus Games team acquitted themselves with great distinction, participated to the full and based on the discussions I had with many were helped significantly in their rehabilitation by their participation. All strove to give of their best and the friendly rivalry between teams and individuals from many nations did not overshadow the aim of the games in helping individual team members overcome the health setbacks they had experienced as a consequence of service in defence of the nation.

The challenge which participants, the ADF and the RSL now face is how best to assist the ongoing recovery of these folk and the many others similarly afflicted who were not able to participate in the Invictus Games.

In an attempt to quantify the health and wellbeing benefits gained by Invictus Games participants we are compiling as comprehensive a documentary as possible from the RSL supported members of the team. We will use this in further discussions with the ADF and in planning the way ahead.

A Recovery Summit was held on the penultimate day of competition to provide the leaders of national delegations with an opportunity of looking to the future and discussing outcomes and ideas. This was chaired by the UK's Chief of Defence Personnel, Lieutenant General Andrew Gregory and was addressed by Prince Harry.

In a recent letter General Gregory has advised that it is possible a new international forum on recovery may be formed. It is likely this will be kicked off by participation in a planned US Department of Defense symposium in 2015 titled "Warrior Care in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."

## **2. RSL National Board Meeting Perth 27 October 2014.**

Major topics for discussion or decision at the final Board meeting for 2014 include:

- an RSL Strategic Plan
- a Business Plan for the RSL National Office
- revision of the RSL National Constitution
- Plans for the 2016 RSL National Conference the year of the RSL Centenary
- Reports from RSL National Committees including submissions about the forthcoming Defence White Paper and the ADF Pay Case (see below).

To dispel misunderstandings which may have developed about the revision of RSL National Constitution I affirm that the first draft forwarded to all Branches earlier this year was exactly that – a first draft. It was the initiating action in a multi-step but essential consultative process needed to allow us to update this important document. No further work has been undertaken on the first draft pending receipt of comments and suggestions from Sub Branches and Branches. I

encourage all members to become involved in this process and focus on constructive comment aimed at improving the draft. Central questions all might ask is how best can the RSL marshal and deploy our very significant human and financial resources in the years ahead to further promote our objects? And how can this be best expressed in our National Constitution?

### **3. ADF Pay Case.**

The RSL submission to the Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal for the recent pay case given the title of “WRA” (Workplace Remuneration Arrangement) was forwarded on 19 October 2014. It read: “The Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL) would like to thank the Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal (DFRT) for the opportunity to make a submission on the 2014 Workplace Remuneration Arrangement (Matter no.9 of 2014).

The RSL cannot support the proposal as currently proposed for consideration by the DFRT. The RSL cannot support any outcome from the current WRA round that does not protect the value of ADF Remuneration, especially where this will involve trade-offs of other conditions of service.

We advise that we seek an outcome that supports the special nature of defence service in determining all conditions of service for members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), and we express our disappointment for a proposal which involves the trading-off of leave (and other conditions) for pay rises which are less than CPI.

The RSL notes the WRA to be put forward for DFRT consideration is an agreed position between the ADF and the Commonwealth, and in these circumstances we do not oppose the proposal before the DFRT, but seek to register our concern that the financial position of ADF personnel is not being maintained at a time when Australia is asking significantly more of our servicemen and women. We do note and support the statement of the Chief of Defence (CDF) in his CDF Signal, released on Friday 10 October 2014, that should circumstances require the arrangement may be revisited and the CDF is able to return the matter to the DFRT during the WRA period.”

Members may recall that on your behalf I have written previously to Government expressing concern about the process now in vogue which almost always results in the Government and the ADF presenting “agreed” ADF pay cases to the DFRT. We were rebuffed in our previous attempt to have this process revert to the procedure of yesteryear where most often the CDF presented a pay case on behalf of ADF personnel and the Government separately put its point of view. We intend raising this matter again.

At the recent DFRT hearing of the WRA case, the RSL was represented by the National Policy Advisor who spoke about the RSL concerns. At the time of writing the DFRT continues to reserve its decision about this pay case.

#### **4. RSL Annual Budget Submission.**

Sincere thanks to all who put in considerable effort to allow the RSL to compile a detailed and comprehensive Submission to Government for the 2015/2016 Federal Budget. As previously advised this submission was more expansive than earlier versions in that we advised Government and the Opposition of what the RSL was achieving on behalf of the ex-service and veteran community and more broadly the Australian community. Amongst other matters we wrote that “the majority of ‘heavy lifting’ in the Welfare space is done by our volunteer Welfare Officers in the 1,200 sub Branches across Australia. It is conservatively estimated that these volunteer hours totalled 1,368,750 for the year 2013. At the nominal rate of \$25 per hour this equates to a contribution to the nation of over \$34M.”

That the Commonwealth Government respects and heeds what the RSL submits is evidenced by the text of a letter I have received from the Prime Minister. In his letter of 16 October 2014 Mr Abbott wrote “Thank you for your letter dated 29 August 2014 and the attached submission in regard to Veterans’ Affairs issues for consideration in the 2015-16 Federal Budget.

I appreciate the time you and the National Board and Members of the Returned and Services League of Australia have taken to consider these important issues.

I have referred your letter to the Treasurer, the Hon. Joe Hockey MP, who has portfolio responsibility for the Federal Budget. I have also provided a copy of your letter to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson.

Once again, thank you for bringing these matters to my attention.”

#### **5. 2015 Defence White Paper RSL Input.**

We are on track to complete and forward a substantial submission for consideration by the team charged by Government with compiling the proposed 2015 Defence White Paper. Given the current and foreseeable uncertain strategic outlook this statement of Government policy will be of particular importance and it is to be hoped will take account of submissions from organisations such as the RSL.

Members of the National Defence and Defence Personnel and Families Committees have made significant contributions to our input and are deserving of our thanks.

#### **6. Significant Diary Events.**

During the past few months I have had the privilege of meeting many RSL members at various events. Attendance at the Invictus Games in September and at the Annual General Meeting of the Royal New Zealand Returned Services Association in October provided me with the opportunity of meeting with many of our international colleagues and of advising about current RSL issues. In mid- September it was a great pleasure to host one of two London based Royal Commonwealth Ex-Service League representatives at the Australian War Memorial when Viscount Slim visited Australia. He has for many years represented the RSL most ably at the regular London RCEL meetings and I am most grateful for his diligence in so doing.

On 23/24 September I much enjoyed the hospitality of the Bundaberg Sub-Branch as they and others came together to commemorate the Centenary of the departure of Army Nurses to World War 1. Then on 11 October I was honoured to attend and address the very large gathering who attended the dedication at Hervey Bay of the magnificent new Memorial in the shape of a mounted member of the Light Horse at Hervey Bay. The Sub-Branch President John Kelsey, the Committee and members of the Hervey Bay Sub-Branch worked tirelessly with the local

community to bring this important memorial to the ANZAC Centenary to fruition and are to be commended on a job extremely well done. It certainly showed what the RSL can do in fostering community spirit and of reminding all of what this important centenary means. Most recently I travelled to Brisbane to attend the funeral of the late Viv Quinn, a tireless worker on behalf of so many members of the RSL not only in Queensland but across the nation. I thank the Gaythorne Sub-Branch President and his Committee for the warmth of the welcome I was accorded during the wake following the funeral.