

# National President's Newsletter No 1 of 2014

- 1. The ANZAC Centenary.** This year marks the beginning of nearly a half decade of commemoration of the centenary of World War 1. The RSL has been involved at Sub Branch, Branch and National levels in planning in the lead up to this period and we should expect that many special and extra demands will be placed on the League and its members between now and 2019.

Some of the notable commemorative events this year include the centenary of the:

- outbreak of World War 1 on 4 August
- formation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Imperial Force on 15 August
- arrival of the battle cruiser HMAS *Australia* and other units of the Australian Fleet at Rabaul on 11 August in the unfulfilled hope of bringing to battle the Imperial German East Asia Squadron
- landing of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force at Rabaul on 12 September, the Battle of Bitia Paka including the loss of the first Australian killed in action during WW1, Seaman W.G.V. Williams, and others
- loss of the Australian submarine HMAS AE1 on 14 September and its crew of 35
- departure of first convoy of 1<sup>st</sup> AIF and New Zealand Expeditionary Force from Albany, WA on 1 November
- defeat of the Imperial German cruiser SMS *Emden* by the Australian cruiser HMAS *Sydney* at the Cocos Islands on 9 November
- departure of the hospital ship *Kyarra* from Brisbane on 21 November with a contingent of nurses of the Australian Army Nursing Service
- arrival of units of the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF in Egypt on 3 December
- formation of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps on 21 December under the command of Major General Sir William Birdwood

- 2. Change to National Committee.** The National Executive decided at its Tuesday 19 November 2013 meeting to no longer schedule meetings of the National Conditions of Service Committee and, in its place, to create a new body to be known as the National Defence Personnel and Families Committee (DPFC). There were several reasons for this change prime amongst which was a perceived need to more clearly focus on the needs of the families of those serving in the Australian Defence Force. There was also a need for a more nationally representative Committee involving members from RSL State Branches.

Membership of the DPFC is being finalised and will be advised in coming weeks. The Chairman will be the outgoing Chairman of the Conditions of Service Committee, Air Commodore (Ret'd) Peter McDermott and the Deputy Chairman, the RSL Queensland Branch President, Mr Terry Meehan. Places on the DPFC will be offered

to selected other ex-service organisations and to Defence Families of Australia and Legacy.

An important part of the work of the DFPC will be in guiding the RSL approach to our representations at hearings before the Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal (DFRT). To this end Commodore (Ret'd) Syd Lemon has been offered membership of the DFPC as his expertise and experience will be important in assisting the National Policy Advisor Lisa Geraghty who has been tasked as the RSL representative for all DFRT briefings and hearings.

- 3. RSL National Strategic Plan.** The National Executive will meet in Adelaide during the period 17 to 19 March to progress a first draft of an RSL National Strategic Plan considered at its final 2013 meeting.

The aim is to have a wide ranging debate about all aspects of the future of the League and that this will include discussion about a revision of the RSL National Constitution already in progress.

This key document must be updated to take account of changes to various pieces of legislation e.g. that concerning workplace health and safety, and to ensure it is appropriate to the needs of the RSL in coming decades.

The importance of keeping all RSL members informed about proposed changes to the National Constitution is well recognised. To this end it is intended to circulate the amended document to all Sub Branches and Branches for comment in due course; and for the finalisation of the document thereafter to be managed in an iterative process keeping all informed.

- 4. Retirement of National Solicitor.** Mr Brian Loftus retired from the honorary position of RSL National Solicitor at the end of 2013 after many years of distinguished and selfless service to the League. A likely replacement for Mr Loftus has been identified and it is hoped that an announcement about the appointment of a new National Solicitor will be made shortly.

- 5. Visits to Sub Branches and RSL National Lawn Bowls Carnival.** I was privileged to be a guest of the Bondi Junction/Waverley Sub Branch at their annual Remembrance Day Dinner on 8 November at Club Bondi and to meet and talk to many members. Then on 18 December I travelled to Taree at the invitation of the Taree RSL Sub Branch to attend a commemorative service and luncheon marking the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Sub Branch. Both these occasions provided me with an important chance for one-on-one discussions with members of the RSL about a wide variety of topics. My thanks to all who made me most welcome on both occasions.

On Sunday 29 December 2013 it was an honour to officially open the 47<sup>th</sup> National RSL Lawn Bowls Carnival at the Cabramatta Bowling Club in western Sydney. The weather was perfect for the teams from across the nation to compete in this important League sporting event and I congratulate the bowlers and the organisers

for their splendid efforts. The camaraderie engendered by this carnival does much for the wellbeing of participants and more generally the League.