

## National President's Newsletter No 2 of 2014

- 1. ComSuper Annual Report 2012-2013.** Highlights of this document are:  
Military Schemes: All applications for routine military scheme benefits were processed on average within four days with an increase of 7.5% of processed benefits of MilitarySuper and DFRDB. 754 MilitarySuper and 29 DFRDB members received invalidity classifications who meet legislative criteria for those medically discharged from the ADF. This determines the level of benefits members receive due to their capacity for civilian employment.

ComSuper participation in Cross Agency Collaboration: ComSuper participated in a review of incapacity provisions for ADF personnel with a multi-agency working group chaired by DVA. A report is being prepared with recommendations consistent with a whole-of-government approach to incapacity payments. Co-ordinating with Defence to ensure the Joint eHealth Data and Information (JeHDI) project is designed with the needs of ComSuper incorporated. The project aims to provide one health record for every ADF member from recruitment to discharge and through to management with other agencies. ComSuper is continuing to work with DVA with their On Base Advisory Service (OBAS) in providing ongoing training to assist caseworkers to better understand superannuation implications of medical discharge.

Legislative Changes: The *Superannuation Laws Amendment (MySuper Capital Gains Tax Relief and Other Measures) Act 2013* now allows a lump sum payment to be paid from a superannuation interest in the DFRDB scheme to meet a debt account discharge liability for ADF members who are assessed by the Australian Taxation Office as very high income earners.

- 2. Two Theatre Productions of interest to RSL Members.** I have recently had the opportunity of attending two theatre productions about aspects of ADF service which reflect on issues of importance. The ADF is currently staging *The Long Way Home*, a stark and bold portrayal of some of the implications on the physical and psychological health of those who return from theatres of war. This production involves members of the ADF who do not pull any punches in portraying what it is like to suffer. The production is currently playing in Sydney and is to tour nationally. I encourage members to see this production not least because of our work in trying to assist those suffering from PTSD and the other aftermaths of war. Branches and Sub Branches might also consider

providing financial support to this very worthy endeavour portraying to the broader Australian community the difficulties of re-integrating former service personnel with civilian society. Donations can be made to the ADF Theatre Project and the contact is Brigadier Alison Creagh CSC on 02 62656474 in the Office of the Chief of the Defence Force.

The other production *Black Diggers* is a poignant portrayal of the service of Aboriginal diggers during the First World War. It is an excellent production which contrasts the mateship of First World War diggers regardless of their ethnicity with the alienation Aborigines suffered in Australia during the early 1900s. This production is played by professional actors who do a superb job of bringing this portrayal of history to the stage. It shows yet again how those in the nation's fighting forces regard each other as being all of one company. The show opened in Sydney and is to tour nationally.

**3. Appointment of National Solicitor.** The National Executive has agreed out of session to the appointment of Mr Rick Harley as the new National Solicitor. He replaces the long serving Mr Brian Loftus to whom we owe a considerable debt for his efforts on our behalf over many years. Mr Harley is an Adelaide based legal practitioner who is also a member of the State Executive of the RSL South Australian Branch.

**4. Revision of RSL National Constitution.** A recent review of the RSL National Constitution confirmed that this key document had to be updated. Changes to legislation and compliance issues demanded that action be initiated. This work is well advanced. In undertaking the rewrite the emphasis is on producing a document couched in unambiguous language which is easily understood. We will also attempt to use language which will avoid the necessity of having to amend the National Constitution every time there is a change to relevant Commonwealth legislation. Also, to the extent possible and where legally allowable, items will be moved out of the National Constitution for placement in By Laws. It is planned that the first full draft of the revision will be considered by the National Executive at the meeting in Adelaide in late March 2014. Thereafter it is likely the agreed draft will be widely circulated to Branches and Sub Branches for comment. Once this is received the document will be further revised, considered once again by the National Executive and then, finally as is required, it will be put before a meeting of the National Conference.

**5. Visits to Sub Branches and Commemorative Activities.** I have had the pleasure of discussions with many members of the League on a variety of topics in recent weeks during my visits to Holbrook NSW for the NSW Branch Far South Western District Conference on Sunday 2 February; and to Burwood NSW to attend the Burwood Sub Branch Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 5 February.

It has also been pleasing to see the large turn up of RSL members at important commemorative events. The gathering in Macquarie Place Sydney to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the commencement of the Remembrance Drive project on Wednesday 5 February was well attended by the RSL; and it was just as pleasing to see the large turnout by RSL members at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration of the dedication of the National Australian Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial at Ballarat, Victoria on 9 February. On a sadder note I represented the RSL and delivered one of the Eulogies at the State Memorial Service for a former Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the late Honourable Arthur Gietzelt AO at Sutherland, NSW on 6 February. As I compile this newsletter I am about to depart to attend a commemorative service onboard HMAS *Vampire* at the Australian National Maritime Museum marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the loss of HMAS *Voyager*. This event is of particular importance to me as I served in the destroyer throughout 1962 with shipmates who lost their lives in this greatest Australian naval peacetime tragedy.