

Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee inquiry into the *Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment (Digital Readiness and Other Measures) Bill 2016*

Submission provided by the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia Inc

BACKGROUND.

For many years the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia have had a close working relationship with the Department of Veterans' Affairs, during that time key activities have been:

Investigation into the effect of "Agent Orange" chemical contamination of veterans related to the Vietnam War.

Formation of the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service, later changed to the current Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS)

The Men's Health Peer Education Program.

Ongoing representation by trained advocates of the association representing veterans and their families in dealing with the department.

The VVAA have been part of the Department of Veterans' Affairs Ex-Service organization Round Table that provides an ongoing working relationship between the department and ex service organizations and also a number of working parties and policy groups.

OUR CONCERNS

For many years there has been a growing concern regarding the department's ability to handle the work of looking after veterans, key areas of concern are:

The inability of the current computer systems to manage multiple acts and legislations has been obvious for many years and discussion with the department has often led to identifying the good intent of management hampered by lack of resources.

The difficulties of the current and most recent computer systems to relate to each other as they manage the three acts administered by the department being;

Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988 (SRCA)

Veterans Entitlement Act 1986

Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004

Delays in decision making by delegates of the department when assessing claims for treatment and compensation for service related injuries that could be improved by the use of modern computer systems.

Over the past months I have received DVA briefings on the proposed Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment (Digital Readiness and Other Measures) Bill 2016 and a number of initial concerns have been address to the extent that we believe there is an understanding of the intent and potential of this process.

SUMMARY.

The primary objective of the VVAA in this matter is to support the introduction of a modern computer system that will be of benefit to the veteran community, to potentially reduce time taken to act and respond to changes by the department, at the same time maintain our the ability of the ex-service community to keep a watching brief on the operation of new electronic procedures as they are introduced.

As National President of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia and a practicing advocate on behalf of veterans and their families I believe I understand the content and intent of the bill and its potential to assist the Department of Veterans' Affairs to upgrade its system.

This submission, I hope, will confirm that the VVAA has a good working relationship with the department, that we are aware of their intentions and the ongoing benefits to all concerned in the passing of the bill.

We would support any future government commitment to an upgrade of the department's computer systems that has a potential benefit in efficiency, accuracy and the potential to reduce operating costs to government

Ken Foster OAM JP
National President
Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia
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