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The Repatriation Commission

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Senator Kimberley Kitching
Chair
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator

I am writing in regard to evidence I provided to the Senate Inquiry into the TPI payment (Special Rate of Disability Pension) on 20 May 2021 and my concern that my evidence appears to have been misinterpreted. I would like to clarify the following discussion at the hearing regarding the sufficiency of the TPI payment:

CHAIR: Okay. For the people the department interacts with—veterans who might be receiving the TPI—is the overwhelming interaction you have one where people might say to you, 'It's not sufficient,' or do they say it is sufficient? From the data you collate when you're talking to people who might receive the TPI, do they say that it's sufficient?

Ms Pope: I would say that most of the information we receive is through various representatives of the TPI cohort as a whole. There are a range of views expressed in relation to that, as you've heard today and also in other submissions that you've received to this inquiry, that range very widely across the question that you've raised there. I—

CHAIR: A lot of what we've heard today is that it's not sufficient.

Ms Pope: We've certainly heard that expressed too—

CHAIR: I'm not sure anyone has really said that it's sufficient.

Ms Pope: I think some of the other submissions made comments in that regard, but I don't think it's for me to make a judgement on that. But, certainly, individuals and organisations have expressed a view that the compensation is insufficient. I'm happy to agree with that view.

It appears that this exchange has led to the following finding in the Report of the Inquiry:

“Further, the committee notes that in evidence before the committee, DVA official Ms Kate Pope PSM did not attempt to defend the government’s position and agreed with the view that compensation for TPI veterans was insufficient.”

I would like to clarify that it is not appropriate for official government witnesses to comment on government policy. I would respectfully offer that it was not my role to “defend the government’s position”. The following excerpt from *Government Guidelines for Official Witnesses before Parliamentary Committees and Related Matters February 2015* published on the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet website provides advice on this matter:

4.3 Matters of policy in oral evidence

4.3.1 It is not the role of an official witness to give opinions on matters of policy. It is the role of an official witness to speak to any written submission provided to the committee and to provide, in answer to questions, factual and background material to assist the understanding of the issues involved. The detailed rules applying to written submissions also apply to oral evidence. Not all restrictions necessarily apply to statutory officers (see [section 2.9](#)).

4.3.2 The Senate resolutions (see section 2.11) provide that, "an officer of a department of the Commonwealth or of a State shall not be asked to give opinions on matters of policy, and shall be given reasonable opportunity to refer questions asked of the officer to superior officers or to a Minister" (resolution 1.16).

4.3.3 Senate resolutions also prescribe the procedure by which a witness may object to answering "any question put to the witness" on "any ground" (resolution 1.10). This would include the ground that the question requires the witness to give an opinion on a matter of policy contrary to Senate resolution 1.16. In such a situation an official may ask the person chairing the committee to consider whether questions which fall within the parameters of policy positions are in order.

I would also like to clarify that it was not an accurate interpretation of my evidence to state in the Report that I “agreed with the view that compensation for TPI veterans was insufficient.” While I did agree that some people hold the view that the TPI payment is insufficient, I was making every effort not to offer a personal opinion and did not agree (or disagree) with the view being put to me. I am sure this is an inadvertent misinterpretation of my evidence.

I would be most grateful if the record in relation to this matter could be corrected, as I feel it reflects poorly on my professionalism and reputation.

Yours sincerely

Kate Pope PSM
Deputy President
Repatriation Commission

27 July 2021