

VVAG - VIETNAM VETERANS ACTION GROUP



From the desk of the Secretary.

Statement by VVAG in regards to New Zealand Vietnam Veterans Day

A comparison of the Winteringham Agent Orange Joint Working Group recommendations to Government in April 2006 to the EVSA, NZRSA, Crown Memorandum of Understanding signed December 2006, reveals “the care for the NZ Vietnam Veterans underscored by a Crown doing it on the cheap” This means this NZ Vietnam Veterans Day is another anniversary which marks since 1972 the unbroken, parsimonious, miserable and shabby treatment of those who were ordered to place their lives in harms way in furtherance of this countries then foreign policy.

The “Winteringham” Package as formally reported to the NZ Govt in April 2006 had recommendations concerning an Apology and Acknowledgment, Whakanoa, Viet Nam Campaign Medal, South Vietnamese Gallantry Awards, recording the Viet Nam Stories, and most important in its “Putting things Right” section recommended :-

1. Viet Nam veterans diagnosed with a ***Prescribed Condition***¹ receive
 - (a) tax free lump sum payment of \$40,000 (as reparation); and
 - (b) automatic eligibility for a war disablement pension under section 23 of the War Pensions Act (c. \$14, 301 P/A), BACKDATED to date of diagnosis and then inclusive ongoing medical costs for treatment for the prescribed condition NB no further medical or specialist consultation is

¹ Prostate Cancer, Respiratory Cancers, Multiple Myeloma, Soft tissue sarcomas, Hodgkin’s Disease, Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia

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to be required where the person is already in receipt of a war disablement pension for the prescribed condition).

VVAG want to emphasize it is the ever growing medical costs that will be the major cost component with one member of VVAG reporting annual costs of \$92,000.00 in medical costs

2. Vietnam veterans diagnosed in the future with a *Prescribed Condition* receive :
 - (a) As reparation , a tax-free lump sum payment of \$40,000 at date of diagnosis; and
 - (b) Automatic eligibility for a war disablement pension under section 23 of the War Pensions Act, at the maximum rate of \$14,301 per annum, from date of diagnosis, and ongoing medical costs of treatment for the prescribed condition.;

The JWG recommends that where a Vietnam veteran is diagnosed with an *Associated Condition*² , there is an automatic presumption that the condition is due to service, and the veteran is eligible for a war disablement pension, at a percentage related to disability, under current procedures.

3. In regards progeny of Vietnam veterans the JWG recommended:-

² Peripheral neuropathy, Type 2 Diabetes, Chloracne, Porphyria cutenea tarda, post traumatic stress disorder

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- (a) Progeny of Viet Nam veterans diagnosed with one of the five conditions (and their sequelae) associated with a forbears service in Viet Nam, and set out in Annex 3, receive ...
- (b) As reparation tax free lump sum payment of \$30,000; and
- (c) under the automatic presumption that the condition is due to a war service, eligibility for a war disablement pension, at a percentage related to the disability, and medical costs , on the same basis as a veteran.
- (d) The JWG also asked the Govt to consider broadening support for progeny of veterans by permitting :-
- (e) that where one of five accepted conditions is absent but two or more sequelae to those conditions are present be treated Under the automatic presumption that the condition is due to a war service, eligibility for a war disablement pension, at a percentage related to the disability, and medical costs , on the same basis as a veteran; - and that progeny of the Vietnam veterans who, in the opinion of the Secretary of War Pensions, have conditions which are lifelong and seriously debilitating, qualify for reimbursement of medical expenses.

Finally the JWG recommended the Government commit to addressing the long term intergenerational effects of exposure to the toxic environment of Viet Nam by ensuring that relevant research is accessed and incorporated into policies for the descendants of Viet Nam veterans.

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4. Recommendations were made regarding surviving spouses or surviving partners to receive an ex gratia payment of \$25,000.00; and a review of eligibility criteria for surviving spouse pension in particular those relating to cessation of pension on remarriage or new relationship.
5. Families of a Viet Nam veteran with a child or grandchild who has one of the five medical conditions associated with exposure to the toxic environment were to receive an ex gratia payment of \$30,000.
6. All surviving veterans were to receive ex gratia amounts of between \$5000 - \$8000 each in settlement of the payment of tax issue, with government to consider making this payment to surviving spouses/partners. [costed by Crown at 17 – 27.2 million NZD]
7. There were a number of measures recommended in terms of improving services to Viet Nam veterans, they being , an annual medical check, a national register, a veterans card, information for medical clinicians, a post-establishment review of VANZ (inclusive of its treatment of the 20% of veterans who reside in Australia)

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VVAG costed the above JWG package at circa 150 million NZD

The Memorandum of Understanding signed off by EVSA, RNRSA and the Crown on sixth December 2006 reduced the *“Prescribed Condition* by removing *“Prostate Cancer, respiratory cancers, multiple myeloma”*, adding *“chloracne”*, did away with “Associated Conditions” relabeling that list *“Limited or Suggested Evidence of an Association”*; provided for a one off ex gratia payment of \$40,000 to each veteran , or \$25,000 for a surviving spouse /partner ; and completely removed the war disability pension *(with their associated medical costs payment entitlements) recommendations of the JWG (with all backdating to date of diagnosis removed).

The MOU in its treatment of children established Five Accepted Conditions gives a one off \$30,000 for each so affected child, and does nothing for ongoing medical costs. The remainder of the MOU is about loaning \$7 million to a trust for 30 years established to provide support to Viet Nam veterans and their families in relation to concerns and circumstances not addressed elsewhere.

Congratulations to Mr Wintringham for his appointment to overseeing the use of the \$7,000,000 MOU endowment fund, the question must be asked

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would not a better use of his State sector skills have been his appointment to structural reform of VANZ service delivery.

The Crown costs for its MOU putting right package VVAG estimates it to be around 7/15 million dollars

