

EX-VIETNAM SERVICES ASSN.INC.
Representing Vietnam Veterans and their Families

***Viet Nam – Putting Things Right:
A Defining Project in the Year of the Veteran***

“Today’s announcement of a package of measures for Viet Nam veterans and their families is the culmination of many years of sustained effort from a range of individuals and organisations. There are the individuals who have kept these issues alive throughout the many years of official denial often at considerable personal and family cost. EVSA thanks these people”, said Chris Mullane EVSA spokesperson today.

“We also thank those behind the veteran initiative 'Parade'98-Vietnam Remembered', an event that significantly raised awareness within the Vietnam Veteran community, and with the Government and amongst the wider public, of some of the serious concerns facing our people.

"Our thanks too to the Health Select Committee for its investigation into Agent Orange and to those who made the effort to ensure the HSC was accurately informed. The truth about Agent Orange and its effects was finally revealed in the HSC Report, and the report's recommendations became the foundation for the 'Joint Working Group on the Concerns of Vietnam Veterans'.

"Our thanks to members of the Vietnam Veteran community - veterans, wives & partners, widows, children and their many supporters who participated in the JWG consultation process.

"EVSA thanks the RNZRSA and particularly John Campbell for supporting EVSA throughout the past two years.

“With clear support from Prime Minister Helen Clark, Ministers Goff and Barker have risen to the challenge of both understanding and comprehensively responding to the complex range of issues that the JWG dealt with and reported on.

"Today's announced package is now the Government's formal response to the JWG's Report. This package successfully achieves the desired outcome of being 'Fair and Sustainable' as it provides for immediate benefits for those in need, a robust process for researching, analysing and dealing with problems in the future as well as addressing the very foundation and framework for providing services to Veterans through its review of both the War Pensions Act and the office of Veterans Affairs. It is a great credit to the foresight and courage of both Ministers.

"Today the real work begins. The Joint Implementation Group will be the mechanism that ensures all measures provided for in the Package are fully implemented.

"The challenge is now for all members of the Vietnam Veteran community to engage fully in the various processes and programmes the package offers and to ensure that all eligible benefits and opportunities being provided are taken up. EVSA will continue a lead role in this process.

"This package and its subsequent implementation presents a unique opportunity for reconciliation and healing and represents the beginning of a whole new relationship between the Government, Vietnam Veterans and the New Zealand public.

"EVSA is pleased to have had the opportunity to play a lead role in what will now be widely regarded as one of the significant and defining projects of New Zealand's Year of the Veteran", said Mr Mullane.

ENDS

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