

Answers for RNZRSA QUESTIONS

PRINCIPLES

Yes. The National Party recognises the special status of war veterans and is committed to recognising this status within legislation and honouring their contribution. National has welcomed the discussion paper produced by the Law Commission and is awaiting the result of the consultation process.

1. WAR DISABLEMENT PENSION RATES

Question 1 and Question 2

National's policy is to remove the 70% War Disablement Pension requirement, thereby opening up entitlement to all veterans with qualifying operational service.

2. ACC AND EQUITABLE BASIS

National doesn't want to prejudge the consultative process that the Law Commission has started. We are supportive of the review and RNZRSA members can be assured that we will be giving full weight to the final conclusions.

3. EX GRATIA PAYMENTS

Questions 1 and 2

It was a National Party MP, Judith Collins, (currently our Veterans' Affairs spokeswoman), who initiated the Health Select Committee inquiry in 2003 into the use and effects of Agent Orange. Although the Labour Government's Memorandum of Understanding with the RNZRSA and the EVSA has been promoted as a \$30 million package, we understand that veterans groups estimate that only 100 of their estimated 2,700 members will receive any compensation for the five medical conditions prescribed. National believes that the MOU should be endorsed as a living document which is capable of further enhancement to meet changing circumstances. We also support Vietnam Veterans having free annual medical checks and enhanced medical care for offspring suffering from Agent Orange-related illness. We are also committed to an ongoing review of international research relating to the effects of exposure of Agent Orange to ensure the established list of Agent Orange-related illnesses is updated on a regular basis.

4. TAX PAID BY VIETNAM VETERANS

National accepts that it is of great importance to Vietnam Veterans that the historical facts of this matter are determined. We note that the MOU did not conclude that there should be payment. National was not party to the information that the Labour Government had when it decided not to agree to an ex gratia payment to our Vietnam Veterans. We will determine our position once all appropriate information is received.

5. ACCESS TO THE VETERANS PENSION

National's policy is to remove the 70% WDP requirement, thereby opening up entitlement to all veterans with qualifying operational service. National agrees with the RNZRSA that all veterans on obtaining the age of 65 should qualify for the Veteran's Pension in place of New Zealand Superannuation.

6. SUPPORT TO THE RNZRSA WELFARE INFRASTRUCTURE

Yes. National agrees that the RNZRSA must be given assistance to continue its welfare support work to the 60,000 veterans of the nation and their families, and we support the ongoing annual funding announced in the Budget.

7. A MEDAL FOR SERVICE TO THE NATION

National endorses the RNZRSA proposal to introduce the NZ Defence Medal recognising service in both regular and non-regular services, with appropriate qualifying periods of service.

8. MEDALS HERITAGE

Yes. National would support the strengthening of the criteria to prevent the sale or disposal overseas of orders, decorations and medals awarded to New Zealanders

9. DEFENCE POLICY

Historically, New Zealand has always relied upon its friends and allies to help defend our country. Though the Defence Force has equipment for low-level contingencies in the Pacific, its recent report pointed out the major issues facing the NZDF. On broader security issues, New Zealand will always be part of a large multilateral force, and therefore we provide highly focused capabilities, which can include combat capabilities. Our friends and allies, such as Australia, enhance our own, and the region's, security.

10. WAR VETERANS HOMES AND HOSPITALS

National supported the loans made to three war veterans' homes and hospitals and we support the ongoing role as Centres of Excellence. Our Veterans' Affairs spokeswoman has visited two of the homes and is aware of the planning and work being undertaken to retain and to improve services available. National supports these efforts and is keen to work with the homes to provide what assistance we can.