**Veterans Entitlements, Treatment and Support**

**(Simplification and Harmonization) Bill 2024**

**Exposure Draft**

Reference A <https://www.dva.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-02/Legislation%20Reform%202024-WEB.pdf>

Reference B <https://www.dva.gov.au/about/royal-commission/veterans-legislation-reform-exposure-draft-consultation/draft-legislation-what-it-and-what-it-will-do/draft-legislation-and-explanatory-documents>

Reference C <https://www.dva.gov.au/about/royal-commission/veterans-legislation-reform-exposure-draft-consultation>

1. I refer you to the above headline and references in relation to the harmonization of the Acts that have dictated veterans’ treatment and benefits for some time. The complications and confusion in navigating these three Acts in some instances has resulted in claims processing being delayed or being refused through no fault of the veteran which has caused hardship to them and their families.

Through the ESORT this matter has been an area of concern for years and whenever raised, have been advised that nothing could be done about it or it was legally to difficult to change. Frustrating for those wishing to influence change, but much more frustrating for advocates trying to assist veterans in claims and very damaging for veterans and families who were directly negatively affected.

1. The Royal Commission interim report raised this issue and now through our Minister, Matt Keogh MP, this matter has been addressed. Although we are apolitical, we believe in giving credit where credit is due, and Matt Keogh is the first Veterans Minister who has addressed this issue with considerable expertise and urgency. Thankfully the Minister is a lawyer and has got on top of this brief quickly and with considerable legal insight and experience, to where we have a Government approved Acts harmonization proposal.
2. I have had a chance to look at the draft bill and I cant see anything that risks any entitlements or benefits for individuals currently operating under VEA, MRCA or SRCA, by bundling all three Acts into MRCA. But you need to be the judge of that and the quote below from DVA encourages input from all.
3. *“The Government is committed to ensuring that Defence personnel, veterans and their families are well looked after.*

*Highlighted by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide in its* [*Interim Report*](https://defenceveteransuicide.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/interim-report)*, and fully* [*supported by the Government*](https://www.dva.gov.au/node/20203) *, we are simplifying and harmonising veterans’ legislation that governs compensation and rehabilitation, so veterans and their families can more easily get the support they are entitled to.*

*We want your feedback on the draft Veterans’ Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024. Here you can review the proposed changes, understand what’s different and why, learn how changes may impact you, and of course, get involved and provide feedback. An* [*information booklet*](https://www.dva.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-02/Legislation%20Reform%202024-WEB.pdf) *is also available.*

[*Submissions can be provided*](https://www.dva.gov.au/about/royal-commission/veterans-legislation-reform-exposure-draft-consultation/how-get-involved-and-submit-your-feedback) *until 28 April 2024.”*

1. Get on to the links listed above and have a good look at this recommendation which is the right way to go providing that nobody is worse off, and I don’t believe that is the case. This harmonisation is going to save a lot of time and heartache to ensure that veterans claims are handled quicker and more succinctly to benefit the veteran and family in the first instance and DVA’s moral, where legislation has been simplified creating less conflict and anxiety. A win-win for all concerned including frustrated advocates.

In conclusion, I think this draft Bill is a great bit of news and I encourage everybody either affected or working in that space to have a good study of the draft Bill and raise and comments that you may have direct to me so that I am able to collate to present to DVA.

Duty First

Mike

Michael von Berg MC OAM

President