

Bill brings veterans a step closer to fairer pensions

29 October 2012: KAP Federal Member for Kennedy Bob Katter today introduced legislation that requires the Federal Government to bring defence veterans' pensions in line with aged pensions within six months.

"The Fair Indexation of Military Superannuation Entitlements Bill 2012 is to look after our soldiers. It is an expression from the Parliament of Australia, representing the people of Australia, that we appreciate what you do," Mr Katter told the House of Representatives.

"We appreciate that, if you are in the services now, you will almost certainly be sent to Afghanistan at some time and that, if you are sent to Afghanistan, you have a one in 400 or one in 500 chance of dying."

"And those of us who attend the funerals of the people from our areas—as I attended the funeral of Ben Chuck, a commando, in Yungaburra—will never forget them.

"Yet we say to our troops: 'You are substandard. You do not deserve the same arrangements as other pensioners. You do not deserve the arrangements we in this Parliament enjoy.'

"Our remuneration is tied to average weekly earnings, and our pensions are tied to whichever is the better deal out of average weekly earnings and the CPI.

"But these men who risk their lives for their country are confined to the CPI. Don't you think that they are being told that we do not care about them—that they are expendable? Could there be a worse message to send to the parents and relatives of Ben Chuck and all the other Ben Chucks?

"We are moving today that our service men and women get the same deal as everyone else in Australia. I cannot see how anyone on either side of this Parliament can hold their head up straight or look a soldier or an ex-soldier in the eye unless they support this proposal.

"We do not do this to blow our own trumpet. We would have been most happy for the Government or the Opposition to have moved this.

"I am quite sure the crossbenchers will very strongly support this bill. It will be voted upon and we hope that everyone votes for it. We very strongly commend the bill to the House."

The Bill stipulates that indexation of the Defence Force Retirement Benefit Scheme (DFRDBS), the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefit Scheme (DFRDBS) and the Military Superannuation and Benefits Scheme (MSBS) be calculated using the same methodology as the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index under the Social Security Act 1991.

This method of indexation is the same as the Australian Age and Service Pensions, which are currently based on the greatest of Consumer Price Index (CPI), the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index (PBLCI) or the wages-based measure of Male Total Average Weekly Earning (MTAWE).

But in response to veterans' concerns regarding potential misperceptions with other aspects of the Social Security Act, Mr Katter today added that the Bill would be amended for greater clarification as it progressed through the Parliament.

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