



The Hon Darren Chester MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs

Minister for Defence Personnel

Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC

MC18-002540

- 3 DEC 2018

Mr James Brown
President
RSL NSW
ANZAC House
245 Castlereagh Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Brown

Thank you for your correspondence of 2 August 2018 concerning motions resolved by delegates, at the NSW State Congress of the Returned and Services League of Australia (RSL).

I note the motions on a range of matters from the State Congress that you have forwarded. I have asked the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the Department of Defence to fully consider these proposals and respond as appropriate. I have enclosed these responses for your information.

Thank you for taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely

DARREN CHESTER

Encl

Motion:

That RSL NSW make representation to the Australian Government for a Gold Card to be issued to All Australian Active Service Medal (AASM) holders on discharge from the ADF.

Response:

DVA notes the RSL's motion that the Gold Card be provided on discharge to all members who have become eligible for the Australian Active Service Medal (AASM).

DVA acknowledges that the RSL recognises in its submission that such a measure would have significant cost implications. While this is undoubtedly true, there are a number of other points which I should clarify.

Where provision has previously been made under the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* (VEA) for the automatic issue of the Gold Card, it has been connected with rendering qualifying service. This generally means service on active operations in a war or conflict, as well as reaching the age of 70. There is no precedent for issuing the Gold Card to veterans under this age on the basis of their service alone.

The VEA does allow for the grant of qualifying service on the basis of eligibility for a certain medal. However, this applies only in limited circumstances, and where there is no alternative means of easily establishing that a veteran has rendered the relevant service. Other than these few exceptions, medallic recognition and veterans' entitlements have been seen as entirely separate. Medal eligibility is administered by the Directorate of Honours and Awards within the Department of Defence.

As noted in the submission, the motivation for the proposed change is to improve long-term health outcomes for veterans. This is an important goal. DVA has been working hard in recent years to implement targeted measures towards improving treatment pathways for veterans, and important measures taken in this regard have included the extension of existing non-liability healthcare arrangements to cover all mental health conditions for all members who have rendered any period of full-time service. A number of other measures which aim to streamline the liability process and access to treatment continue to be the focus of the Department's efforts. While there are no plans to widen access to the Gold Card at this time, these are areas where the need for reform is recognised and which are prominent in DVA's transformation strategy.