

Hon Rick Barker

Minister of Veterans' Affairs



16 April 2008

Media Statement

One point of contact for veterans services

Cabinet has agreed to a proposal that will see the provision of services to veterans improved and made more efficient, Veterans' Affairs Minister, Rick Barker has announced.

"Currently the responsibility for War Disablement Pensions is split between Veterans Affairs New Zealand (VANZ) and the Ministry of Social Development. From 1 July 2008 the policy relating to, and delivery of, War Disablement Pensions will be transferred to VANZ. This is good news for the veterans community," Mr Barker said.

"This decision makes VANZ the sole agency responsible for the delivery of War Disablement Pensions and recognises the lifetime responsibility of the Chief of Defence Force to veterans. VANZ will continue to sit within the New Zealand Defence Force and will lose its semi-autonomous status.

"The men and women who are put in harm's way defending our country rightly occupy a special place in New Zealand society. This is why this government is committed to ensuring the services delivered to them are of the highest standard and that our duty of care to them is maintained.

"Two reviews of the current arrangements found that there were inefficiencies in the delivery of War Disablement Pensions, and whilst staff in both organisations work professionally to give as good a service as possible, the whole system needed to be re-engineered so that one agency had responsibility for policy and practice and facilitating the provision of services and support to veterans who are in receipt of War Disablement Pensions.

"The changes will mean that Veterans will be able to deal directly with one organisation for all enquires about entitlements and services. This is a significant change which will improve outcomes and support for our veterans. Put simply they will have a single 0800 number to contact rather than two. Improved efficiency and clearer lines of responsibility will also enable improvements to be made in the time taken to process War Disablement Pensions.

"All veterans are different in terms of the level and kind of support they require and providing them with one point of contact when accessing service is an important step. VANZ will now also be able to broaden its role in brokering services for veterans and case manage their claims for any state assistance."

Throughout the review of VANZ, veterans' groups such as the Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Association have been fully consulted.

"I would like to thank all the staff involved and the veterans themselves for their patience and understanding while this process has been going on. Ensuring that we came to the right conclusions and did our best by the veterans' community has always been the paramount concern. I believe we now have a system to put in place that will make access to assistance for veterans simpler and more efficient," Mr Barker said.

Veterans with questions or concerns about the process will be able to contact War Pension Services or their Veterans' Affairs New Zealand Case Manager in the usual way.

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Copies of all Rick Barker's press statements and speeches are posted at www.beehive.govt.nz