

[10/02/1999 Senate Meeting about Defence Review Extract from FAD & T 74 SENATE Legislation](#)

Senator SCHACHT – This question come out of the discussion this morning with Veterans' Affairs concerning the eligibility of those Navy people who served in the Malayan emergency who do not get the same entitlements as those who served in the Air Force and the Army when in a war zone or being endangered.

The veterans said that this is an issue that goes to Navy for the determination of what you call the allotment. You obviously have been through this several times. The veterans said today that they thought there might be 6,000 people who served on ships during the Malayan emergency who have not served elsewhere and, therefore, do not have eligibility by being in the Korean war or Vietnam war. Do those figures roughly equate with your knowledge?

Rear Adm. Oxenbould – I am not sure of the specifics there. I understood from the general discussion at the start of these hearings today that that would be addressed under program 8, Personnel.

Senator SCHACHT – I know it is under program 8, but I do not want to get down to program 8 and find the Navy has left.

Rear Adm. Oxenbould – The Navy will still be here. It is the last to leave, always; first in, last out.

Senator SCHACHT – Admiral Mike Hudson, who is now the President of the Naval Association of Australia, came to see me about this issue to support the case that the naval service people have been hard done by. I got the impression that this is a matter of considerable discussion not only inside the Department of Defence Science and Personnel, but also in Navy itself. Before I ask them the question, I want to ask this: what involvement has the Navy had in giving advice about whether these sailors were actually in danger?

Rear Adm. Oxenbould – There has been considerable interaction between Navy Headquarters and the Defence Personnel Executive on this issue. There has been an exchange of minutes from the Chief of Defence Force. So we have been actively engaged in the process.

Senator SCHACHT – What irks the Navy veterans is that the Air Force and the Army got the allotment, when some of those service people through no fault of their own may not have been in any great danger. You will never know; a bomb might fall through a window or a ship might sink. You can never actually predict. They got the allotment with a level of service that was in no more danger than the navy.

Is there any evidence back at the time of the Malayan emergency that the government of the day took a decision to save money by saying, 'We can make up a good excuse here that Navy was not really eligible'? This means that 6,000 or 7,000 people - although it was probably a lot more in those days because some have unfortunately died since - would not be eligible for the benefit.

Senator Newman – I do not think they are able to answer that.

Senator SCHACHT – There are records available in the system and I want to get to the bottom of what it is that the navy missed out on. They also missed out in the Indonesian confrontation when they were actually engaged in shelling and were in close coastal waters. I am interested to find out if Navy has a view inside the system, or was a decision taken for other reasons about saving money? What do the records show?

Major Gen. Dunn – Could I Firstly say that the figures proffered by the Department of Veterans' Affairs this morning were worked in conjunction with the Department of Defence, and we agree absolutely with the figure given to you this morning. We have a very close relationship with Veterans' Affairs on such matters.

We also have the attitude that, if people have experienced hazard, danger and operational service - whatever label we like to put on it - and indeed qualifying service, which is the key term in this, then we would wish to provide the appropriate recognition for that. We are not conducting and never do conduct an exercise of trying to deny people their proper compensation for going in harm's way. I think you would understand that, as we wear uniforms, we have a vested interest in making sure that this is the case.

Having said that, we have to look at every claim, look at it in detail and assess the historical circumstances, and the further back we go, sometimes the more difficult it is to get to the bottom of particular instances. Furthermore, sometimes forces are deployed with very broad responsibilities, and anomalies, as we call them, do occur and we

need to get into those anomalies.

I can advise you that we are about to commence an entire re-review of operations in South-East Asia which covers the period of the FESR, and the focus of that review will be to identify some of the anomalies which you have correctly identified - that is, the naval gunfire support that was afforded - and also any people who were involved in riverine patrols who have not yet been recognised, and other areas as well, to make absolutely certain that any service person who has not been recognised for hazardous service or qualifying service is so recognised.

Senator SCHACHT – Back in the fifties or sixties we did not have anywhere near the integrated defence structure with an ADF. We had a separate Minister for the Navy and Army, a Minister for Supply and a Minister for Defence. In those days was it left to the individual service to make a judgment about whether the service people were in danger, without particular reference to the Army or Air Force, because in each case it varied?

If it turns out that Navy made the judgment, for whatever reason, and that Air Force and Army took slightly different parameters, you might say that Navy people actually missed out because you might have had a harder test on the whole thing. Because there was not the integration that there now is in the Defence Force with an ADF, it might have fallen between two stools.

Mr Tokin – These outcomes will be identified in the process of the study and we would not want to prejudge or speculate on that at this moment.

Senator SCHACHT – That is the reason why I want to put it on the record. Those are the sorts of things you will go and look at.

Major Gen. Dunn – Can I correct one aspect of that? It is always the government of the day that decides.

Senator SCHACHT – There were separate ministers, right?

Major Gen. Dunn – Yes.

Senator SCHACHT – I would like you to check one thing - and this may come out in your report: did the Minister for the Navy makes the final decision of the allotment for Navy? Did the Minister for the Air Force make the allotment for the Air Force? Did the Minister for the Army make the decision on the allotment for the Army, vis-à-vis the Malayan emergency?

Major Gen. Dunn – We will examine all of those aspects, but the key elements are the anomalies where, regardless of the broad categorisation of the tasking for the FESR, it would appear that there are certainly grounds worth investigating to see what actions they actually carried out.

Senator SCHACHT – That review is under way now, is it?

Major Gen. Dunn – It is about to commence and it covers more than the FESR.

Senator SCHACHT – Will you seek submissions from the broader veterans' community who will be able to put a submission into this review?

Major Gen. Dunn - We can certainly do that. We have a very large number of submissions already from the previous reviews. We are seeking the authority to conduct that review. I can see no reason why we would not wish to get those submissions.

Senator SCHACHT – If you do not ask them, they will send them in anyway, and every Member of Parliament will be flooded with them and we will drive you nuts. Please agree now to receive their submission and it will save time for everybody. Even though you have truckloads of submission already and correspondence from these various groups, that would be very wise. Finally, what time scale roughly are you looking at to complete it?

Major Gen. Dunn – At this stage I have not put a time frame on it. It does take a while to go through these things, but we will be talking in the order of perhaps six months or so. I would like to stress the point again that we are as interested as are the veterans in securing the proper amount of recognition.

Senator SCHACHT – What will be the composition of the review, that is, the appointment of people to actually do it? Will one person do it? Will someone be brought in from outside or someone from the various services? Will it be a mixture, a committee of five or a committee of one?

Major Gen. Dunn – This will be determined once we get the final approval to go ahead with the review. It will

certainly cross over a number of departments. There will be more than one person there. I cannot describe exactly.

Senator SCHACHT – You can take this question on notice. Would the government consider that a representative of one of the veterans' communities be a part of the review? You might think that is going to be too hard to handle, but I suspect they will ask for it anyway, and that when conducting the review a representative of the veterans' community is involved.

Senator Newman – It is an internal review. Also your government had one, too.

Senator SCHACHT – I am not trying to make this a partisan thing.

Senator Newman – I know you are not.

Senator SCHACHT – I accept the history. If you do not get them, they will come back again and again, as they keep doing. It is like Lyndon Johnson's old saying; it is better to have them inside the tent than outside the tent trying to do something inside it.

CHAIR – thank you. We will break now for dinner and reconvene at 7.30 p.m.

Proceedings suspended from 6.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.

CHAIR – The Minister will be returning in approximately five minutes and indicated that she was happy for proceedings to continue in her absence. We are proceeding with questions on program 2, Navy.

Senator Quirke – I want to turn to the FFG upgrade. Can you give us some details about that particular contract?.....

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