

Sixty just got sweeter

Official retirement age for Reservists set to rise to 65

Reservists approaching their 60th year will no longer have to apply for an extension beyond compulsory retirement age from July 1 when the official retirement age for all Reservists will be 65.

This follows from an announcement by the Minister for Defence, Dr Brendan Nelson, on April 2 of increases in the compulsory retirement age for permanent members of the ADF from 55 to 60.

The move to later compulsory retirement for Reservists, in line with greater life expectancy projections, was foreshadowed by the Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence, Mr Bruce Billson, at the Naval Reserve Corporate Leadership Forum on February 28.

Mr Billson said he 'could not understand' why senior Reservists 'with incredible skill sets' were being told 'other than for some numeric value that you are no longer valued'.

"We're trying to grow the ADF right now at a time when the economy is going well, the labour market is tight and it is a sellers' market, and we crap people off on the way through," he said. "Thank goodness some people persevere."

"But why don't we try to make it a little more welcoming?"

On the increase in permanent ADF retirement age, Dr Nelson said: "A retirement age of 60 better reflects community standards and allows the ADF to retain the skills and experience of its highly trained people longer."

"It also recognises that age can be an unreliable predictor of ability to perform and that ADF members are remaining fit, motivated and capable of serving beyond the current general retirement age of 55 years."

"Setting retirement at age 60 is a significant and beneficial change, particularly when the ADF is facing the challenge of recruiting more people and reducing its separation rate."

He said also that, as a result of this change for permanent ADF members, reservists will now have a compulsory retirement age of 65.

"Increasing the retirement age for the Reserves recognis-

es the need to maintain their specialist skills and also allows retiring permanent force members to undertake further military service for up to another five years in the reserve elements," he said.

"Continued military service remains subject to ADF members maintaining their health and physical fitness standards irrespective of age."

It's understood that, from July 1, Reservists who reach the new compulsory retirement age will be allowed to seek extensions and serve beyond the age of 65 if they can satisfy authorities that they are mentally and physically fit enough for the duties for which they seek an extension.

Included also in the changes to retirement ages is alignment of the chaplaincy with the retirement age of 65 set for reservists.

On the same day as Dr Nelson announced the change in retirement ages that will affect all PN and Naval Reserves, the Treasurer, Mr Peter Costello, said in a doorstep in Adelaide that he had been saying for a long time that the Government had been trying to keep older workers engaged in the workforce, particularly people post-55.

"We have a very high rate of retirement post-55, when people get their superannuation," he said.

"We are trying to encourage people who have got their superannuation at 55, or entitled to get it, to remain in the workforce and work through to retirement at age 65."

"And then, if they have the capacity to work after that, we would like to encourage them, even if only part-time, to work part-time and draw down on their superannuation."

"The older workers are really good. They turn up on time. They haven't been in the nightclub until 3 am the night before. They're not racing off to the next date with the next young, hot thing that's coming along, and they can be quite good. People are finding they're reliable workers."



Defence Minister Dr Brendan Nelson



Left: Treasurer Peter Costello and right, Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence, Bruce Billson, both men keen to bring changes to retirement age.



Protection check for Reserves



Head of Reserve Policy MAGJEN Neil Willson

The Head of Reserve Policy, MAJGEN Neil Wilson, is to review legislation designed to protect reservists' jobs and tertiary studies.

And the Government expects Reservists and others with information or an opinion on how the legislation works to write to the review committee.

The review will be of the Defence Reserve Service (Protection) Act introduced by the Government in 2001 in recognition of the changing role of the Reserves.

The Act makes it an offence to dismiss, disadvantage or discriminate against a Reservist in civilian employment. It provides protection for partners, contractors and students undertaking Defence service and places obligations on employers to release Reservists for Defence service when required.

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence, Mr Peter Lindsay, announced the review while visiting a campus of Southern Cross University in Coffs Harbour on April 17.

"A high number of Reservists have and continue to come from the student bodies of universities across Australia," he said. "This relationship provides much needed income to students and had provided some of Australia's most distinguished soldiers."

"I congratulate Southern Cross University for leading the way to develop a set of defence leave guidelines which represents best practice."

Mr Lindsay described support provided to Reservists under the Reserve Service (Protection) Act as 'unique in the world'.

"None of our major allies provide a level of support and protection equal to that provided to Australia's Defence Reservists," he said.

"While I am confident that this unique and groundbreaking legislation is working to protect the rights of Australian Reservists in their civilian occupations, we need to make sure that it achieves these

objectives without placing an excessive burden on employers, business or universities. The Government wants to make sure that the Act is meeting its goals."

The Parliamentary Secretary said, while MAJGEN Wilson will oversee the review, he expects Defence to seek comments on the operation of the Act from all interested parties.

"I urge everyone to have input into the review by writing to the review committee," he said.

Further information on the review is at www.defence.gov.au/reserves/



Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence, Mr Peter Lindsay