

Tuesday, 28 July 2009

CALL TO ABORIGINAL VETERANS AND DEPENDANTS

Veterans' Affairs Minister Michael Atkinson is encouraging Aboriginal veterans who have served in the Army, Navy or Air Force, or their dependants, to make themselves known as part of an Aboriginal Members and Dependants Project.

The Project is being conducted by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal veterans and hopes to locate all Aboriginal veterans, men and women, and their dependants, to inform them of their rights under Commonwealth Government legislation.

The Project Committee, Chaired by ex-service woman Marj Trip, will also assist needy veterans and dependants to pursue entitlements through the Commonwealth Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Mr Atkinson says the project is the first of its type to be undertaken and will create an important database that will assist all serving and past Aboriginal veterans.

“Veterans do not necessarily need to have seen active service, participation within any of the services in peace or at war may give rise to an entitlement,” Mr Atkinson says.

“Many Aboriginal veterans returned from military service and no longer saw themselves as part of the military family. Some left the services and moved to remote localities where they could not get support from any ex-service organisation or from the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

“Those are the ones we are especially keen to make contact with.”

The Aboriginal Members and Dependants Project is managed by a committee comprising representatives of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, R.S.L. (S.A.) Inc., the Council of Aboriginal Elders, Reconciliation S.A., Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation and Veterans S.A.

Mr Atkinson says the response has been positive so far and many veterans and dependants had come forward to apply for their entitlements.

“We do believe that there are more in the community who simply don't know that they may have an entitlement, especially dependants,” Mr Atkinson says.

“We are forever grateful to all the men and women who offer to serve in our armed forces and it is only appropriate that we strive to see that those who may have suffered some injury during their service are properly treated.”

Aboriginal veterans are encouraged to contact the Project Committee on 8226 8881 or email robb.andy@dpc.sa.gov.au.