



# VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

## MEDIA RELEASE

*18 February 2004*

*Ref:2/04*

### **VETERAN BACKLASH AT GOVERNMENT**

The National President of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (VVAA), Brian McKenzie said today; that the Government faced a backlash of mammoth proportions in marginal seats at the next Federal election, unless they addressed the issues of fair and proper compensation to veterans and their families.

Mr McKenzie was commenting on the apparent last minute revolt by Liberal backbenchers against the Government's response to the Clarke review into Veterans entitlements that was to have been tabled in Parliament yesterday by the Minister for Veterans Affairs, Hon Danna Vale.

Mr McKenzie said that the frustration and anger felt by veterans and their families would significantly dissipate if the Government addressed their concerns. It appears that what was proposed yesterday fell far short of achieving that, he said.

Mr McKenzie also said; the length of time that has taken the Government to respond to Clarke has added to this frustration and anger.

The VVAA and other veteran groups have been advocating for a long time for these matters to be addressed, and yesterday events have made it clear that some in Government have heard our message at last, Mr McKenzie said.

Mr McKenzie said, there were real concerns in the veteran community that economic rationalist are attempting to make inroads into Government policy, by attempting to change a long standing ideological tradition, supported by the Australia people, in providing quality care and rightful compensation to those damaged by war.

Mr McKenzie called on the Government to quickly implement a fair and equitable indexing process that will see the value of compensation payments maintained. In addition many Vietnam veterans who are totally and permanently incapacitated have had their fortnightly payments eroded by up to \$67 since 1997, and an immediate increase is warranted, he said.

Mr McKenzie said, that traditionally, the Australian community has always held its servicemen and women, who put their lives at risk, in high regard, and this is substantiated by the willingness of the Australia people, through its elected politicians, to ensure rightful health care and compensation, nothing more, nothing less.

Mr McKenzie said the Government needs to read the signs. Veterans and their families have simply had enough, and want to be treated in a fair and reasonable way, he said.