

Promise to NZ nuke vets may not lead to compo

UK ruling renews calls for Mururoa protest aid

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New Zealand veterans of the French nuclear testing at Mururoa Atoll hoping for compensation for their

exposure to radiation may find a prime ministerial promise made long ago carries little weight.

In 1973 the Labour government sent 500 New Zealand sailors on frigates Otago and Canterbury to Mururoa Atoll to draw attention to French atmospheric nuclear testing there.



Mururoa veteran and Taranaki Returned Services Association pension officer Philip Hare, 65, remembers well the departing words of then Prime Minister Norman Kirk.

"He said to us 'Don't worry, lads. If anything goes wrong we will look after you, but nothing is going to go wrong'.

"Well, there seems to be a lot of people on that trip who have died of cancer."

A recent High Court ruling in London that New Zealand, Australian, Fiji and British veterans could sue the

British Ministry of Defence for compensation for radiation exposure from British nuclear testing in the

1950s has led to renewed calls for the New Zealand government to compensate the 1973 veterans exposed on their watch.

While no complete database of the health of the 1973 veterans had been maintained there was a general feeling among them they were dying at an unusually high rate, Mr Hare said.

Pointing to a 1973 picture of a group of men on board the HMNZS Otago, he says half of them are dead from cancer- related illnesses.

He says he doubts the Government will award the veterans compensation.

"Basically what we got was a gold medal. That is our reward. That came out in 2002. That is almost 30 years later, before they would even accept it ... A lot of people fought very hard just to get that."

A Lepperton veteran of the 1957 Christmas Island nuclear testing by the British, Colin Moratti, 77, said the Mururoa veterans deserved compensation.

As a radar operator on board the HMNZS Rotoiti in 1957 he sat through three nuclear tests, one of a lucky group protected in an enclosed room.

Although Mr Moratti has not been affected by illnesses attributable to the tests, many of his fellow servicemen have died from cancers and some have passed those conditions on to their children.

"It wasn't until later on in years when the symptoms started coming out that we got angry because everyone started denying it.

"Even today the [British] Ministry of Defence will not admit it.

"They have accepted responsibility but it will still be a big fight to get compensation."

Sailors exposed to tests in Mururoa in the 1970s should be compensated by the New Zealand government, he said, to avoid the same situation as has happened to Christmas Island veterans who died part way through their battle for acknowledgement and compensation.

"What annoys me is that people who should have been compensated have died. It is too late for them ...

Our government should be made responsible. They were the ones that sanctioned the trip.

"If they put our personnel in danger, and by then they knew what the consequences were, they should just stand up and pay them, no matter what government is in."

A War Disablement Pension is available to veterans of New Zealand forces exposed to nuclear radiation if they suffer from one or more listed conditions.

Known as the Presumptive List, it acknowledges the disability is likely to be attributable to the veteran's service.

PRESUMPTIVE LIST

The following disabilities are presumed to be attributable to service if you are a veteran of the HMNZS

Otago on July 22, 1973 or the HMNZS Canterbury on 28 July, 1973 or a veteran of Operation Grapple service on HMNZS Rotoiti and HMNZS Pukaki between 1957 and 1958.

-All forms of leukaemia (except for chronic lymphocytic leukaemia).

-Cancer of the thyroid, breast, pharynx, oesophagus, stomach, small intestine, pancreas, bile ducts, gall

bladder, salivary gland, urinary tract (renal, pelvis, ureter, urinary bladder and urethra), brain, bone, lung, colon and ovary.

-Bronchiolo-alveolar carcinoma.

-Multiple myeloma.

-Lymphomas (other than Hodgkin's disease).

-Primary liver cancer (except if cirrhosis or hepatitis B is indicated)