



## DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

Patron-in-Chief: His Excellency General The Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd)

NATIONAL OFFICE

PO Box 4166  
KINGSTON ACT 2020

1 June 2020

**The Hon Mr Darren Chester MP**

Minister for Veterans Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel

PO Box 6022

Parliament House

CANBERRA ACT 2601

### **Honours and Awards Tribunal Recommendation - Award of the Victoria Cross to Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheehan**

*Dear Minister,*

You will be aware from recent extensive media reports that there is a growing disquiet surrounding your Government's action to overrule the findings of a properly constituted inquiry by the Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal into Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheehan's most conspicuous gallantry on 1 December 1942.

On 23 July 2019 the Tribunal recommended that Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheehan be posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

By his acknowledged pre-eminent act of gallantry, Ordinary Seaman Sheehan saved the lives of many of his shipmates when his ship, HMAS Armidale, was sunk by Japanese aircraft. This was the unqualified finding of the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal.

Minister, the Tribunal not only recommended that a previous denial of the Victoria Cross to Ordinary Seaman Sheehan be set aside, it recommended that indeed he be posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his conspicuous gallantry on the day in question. Indeed, Admiral Noonan, Chief of the Navy in his submission to the Tribunal cited Sheehan's action as the, "*most conspicuous and most gallant we'd seen in our Navy*".

Ten months after the Tribunal handed down its final report Senator Reynolds, the Minister for Defence, in her address to the Senate on 13 May 2020 said the 'that there is no relevant new evidence for the original decision to be overturned'. Yet the Tribunal found that in going back to man the Oerlikon Gun, Ordinary Seaman Sheehan's actions showed, "*most conspicuous gallantry and was a pre-eminent act of valour in the presence of the enemy*"

Minister, you will appreciate that there is much scepticism across the veteran community about your Government's decision. The Prime Minister is being quoted the he will not intervene in the matter.

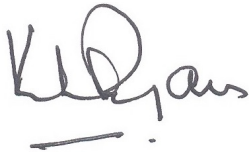
The Chief of the Defence Force is being quoted that he will not be party to embarrassing Her Majesty the Queen by seeking to reverse the original decision made in 1943. That comment alone does no justice to the memory of Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean and his actions on that fateful day.

Minister, I suggest the Government owes the Naval Association of Australia and the broad veteran community a detailed explanation of why it has rejected the recommendations of the Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal for the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross.

Where does an Australian hero fit into the Australian story of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kel Ryan', with a horizontal line underneath.

**Kel Ryan**  
National President  
**Defence Force Welfare Association**

**CC Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds** – Minister for Defence  
**Ms Liz Cosson AM, CSC** – Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs