**Veterans’ Affairs - Media release**

New Zealand service people have served three times in places where they could have been exposed to nuclear radiation – in Japan at the end of the Second World War, off Malden and Christmas Islands in the Pacific in the 1950s, and at Mururoa, observing French nuclear tests, in the 1970s. While the veterans themselves all have entitlements from Veterans’ Affairs, so they will be looked after if they have been affected by their service, until this week, not all of their children were treated equally.

“We know this has been a matter of real concern to the veterans themselves and their families” said Head of Veterans’ Affairs, Bernadine Mackenzie today.

Last year the independent Veterans’ Health Advisory Panel reviewed the most up-to-date information on the health impact of exposure to nuclear radiation on veterans and their descendants. All of the conditions known to be associated with exposure to nuclear radiation are already covered by Veterans’ Affairs entitlements. However, the Panel also noted that there was inequity in the treatment of these veterans’ children.

“The children of Operation Grapple veterans, those who served in the Pacific in the 1950s, have entitlements not available to the children of the veterans who served in Japan or at Mururoa. These include genetic counselling and genetic testing. The Panel saw no good reason for the difference, and recommended that consideration be given to extending the entitlements to cover the children of all nuclear veterans” Ms Mackenzie said.

That recommendation was taken to Cabinet, and it has now been agreed that the entitlements should be extended.

“Genetic counselling helps people make informed decisions about genetic testing, and how the results and their implications can be interpreted. This, followed by the testing itself, is a package that should address the concerns that veterans have raised” said Ms Mackenzie.

“The Panel also recommended that the situation should be reviewed every seven to ten years so that New Zealand is aware of the most up-to-date information on the impact of exposure to nuclear radiation. But in the meantime, it’s good to know that the children of nuclear veterans will all be treated equally from now on”.