



Ex-Service Organisations Round Table (ESORT) - December 2023

ESORT met on Thursday 7 December, 2023.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Update - The Hon Matt Keogh MP

Minister Keogh thanked all members for their efforts and contributions, not only through forums such as ESORT, but for the work they do in their respective organisations to support veterans and families. The Minister discussed key priorities including consultation on the legislation reform pathway to produce a better, simpler system of compensation, opening new Veterans' and Families' Hubs, and the importance of veterans and families having access to well-trained advocates as part of a broader eco-system of support. Members raised other key areas of interest with the Minister.

DVA Update – Secretary Alison Frame

Secretary Frame acknowledged the significant contribution of ESORT members, and noted the value of ongoing collaboration in everything we do to learn from experience and leverage expertise in ex-service organisations. She highlighted achievements in 2023 including a significant reduction in the compensation claims backlog, recruitment of 500 additional DVA staff and implementation of MyService upgrades. Emerging priorities include Aged Care, continuing to meet information requests of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, Transition, Legislation Reform, connecting with veterans who are currently not accessing DVA services and building on DVA's research and evaluation agenda, in collaboration with our Five Eyes partners across areas of common interest.

Veteran, Family and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

Members were updated on the draft Strategy noting it is based on best practice and is a living document. While the Strategy is focused on engagement, and designed to promote a structured and consistent approach for DVA staff to follow when engaging with the veteran community, members also flagged the importance of good communication. Several initiatives are underway in DVA to improve communications with veterans and families. An internal communications campaign to launch the Strategy is planned for early 2024. It will be publicly available once settled.

Veteran Journey Mapping

Members were given a presentation on efforts to map how veterans and families currently interact with government agencies responsible for providing services and programs. Mapping is about informing service planning across departments and to identify how the government can provide seamless, integrated and tailored services to improve experiences. Members discussed areas for improvement noting ESORT will continue to be consulted as journey mapping evolves.

Royal Commission and Legislation Reform Update

DVA is focused on implementing Recommendations 1 to 4, relating to legislation simplification, improving the compensation claims processing system and addressing the compensation claims backlog. Members were provided an update on the exposure draft legislation to simplify veterans' legislation, including expected timing for consultation. There was discussion on areas of interest to members, including grandparenting provisions, non-liability healthcare and terminology contained in the current legislation.

ATO implementation of the Douglas Decision

The Veteran Alliance Association provided a presentation to members on the impact of the Decision on affected veterans. Members discussed areas of interest. DVA is establishing a working group to further map out impacts and to inform ongoing consultation with the Australian Taxation Office. The importance of providing clear information to assist individuals to make well

informed choices for the future was acknowledged. An invitation to join the working group will be provided to Members.

Offsetting

The Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association provided a presentation to members on offsetting provisions over the years and their impact. Discussion focused on options under the current system, and ensuring individuals have the right information to make informed decisions. Noting overlaps with the Douglas Decision, the working group being established will also consider offsetting in its remit.

Advocacy Working Group

Recognising and endorsing well trained professional advocates and being clear about lines of work (claims processing, wellbeing and support in appeals) is critical. Members were updated on key pilots underway to improve training, mentoring and the support of advocates. Increasing the number of mentors available, continuing professional development, accreditation and improving the Advocacy Training and Development Program were areas of discussion. DVA thanked working group members for their active participation in bringing the key issues to the fore.

Aged Care and Hearing Services

DVA is continuing to work to improve support for veterans transitioning to, and living in, aged care facilities. DVA advised that it is establishing a dedicated focus on aged care to address fractures in service delivery and to provide a more seamless experience. Better educating providers about veteran entitlements under the goldcard arrangements and ensuring veteran needs are considered as part of broader health care initiatives was acknowledged as critical. This is particularly relevant for hearing services where DVA will continue to work with the Department of Health to ensure veteran needs are addressed in mainstream programs.

Commemorative Strategy

Members were informed that a review of the current Strategy is underway to inform the development of new Strategy for 2024-28. The focus is on

ensuring commemorative services remain relevant while maintaining their sanctity and dignity. Members were asked to provide feedback on activities they believe should be included in the new Strategy.