



## Minutes

### Agenda Item 1 Welcome, apologies and conflicts of interest

The Chair opened the meeting, welcoming attendees, noting membership changes and representation arrangements for the meeting, as well as apologies received. Details are listed at [Annexure A](#). No conflicts of interest were declared.

The Ode was recited, and members acknowledged the service and sacrifice of all veterans and families.

The Chair welcomed the new representatives from TPI Federation of Australia and the Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association Ltd and thanked Pat McCabe and Ian Lindgren for their dedicated service.

#### DVA Update – Secretary Alison Frame

Secretary Frame updated members on current departmental priorities:

- Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) staffing numbers to support processing veterans' claims and the overall positive impact this has had
- DVAs technology integration challenges and the possible options and solutions
- Recent legislative changes aimed at simplifying and harmonising the veterans' legislation framework
- Arrangements for the upcoming overseas Anzac Day Commemorations which includes selected veterans and their families who will join the delivery teams on the ground, for the first time

### Agenda Item 2 Action Items

Members **NOTED** the 3 December 2024 ESORT Minutes were endorsed out of session on 23 January 2025.

Members **AGREED** to close Action Items 2024ESORT/A27, A28, A30, A31, A33, A36 and A38.

Members **NOTED** 2020ESORT/A27, 2024ESORT/ A14, A17, A29, A32, A34, A35 and A37 remain in progress.

## MEMBER SUBMISSIONS

Members **DISCUSSED** the importance of reciprocal information exchange between ESORT and DVA and **NOTED** concerns regarding the balance of information shared and the inclusion of significant agenda items from member submissions. Members **AGREED** to discuss, at the June 2025 meeting, member submissions that refer to matters that Defence have responsibility for and how to best respond.

Members **NOTED** that decisions regarding qualifying service are determined by Defence, with implications for veterans' benefits and **AGREED** to extend an invitation to Defence representatives to discuss qualifying service issues at a future meeting.

### Agenda Item 3.1 Australia's Involvement in the Vietnam War (Air Force Association)

Members **NOTED** the member submission from the Air Force Association seeking Ex-Service Organisation Round Table (ESORT) members' support in recognising Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War through to 1975 by adding this date to the National Vietnam Memorial in Anzac Parade, Canberra.

Members **NOTED** DVA formally recognises the dates of Australian Involvement in the Vietnam War as spanning from 2 July 1962 to 29 April 1975.

Members **AGREED** for DVA to forward the member submission to the National Capital Authority with a letter of support and DVA's formal recognition of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War up until 1975.

Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** the Saluting Their Service Grants Program (STS Program), could be a possible source of funding for the National Capital Authority should they agree to amend the date on the memorial.

<b>2025ESORT/A01</b>	DVA to forward the member submission on Australia's Involvement in the Vietnam war, with a letter of support and DVA's formal recognition to the National Capital Authority.	Veteran Experience and Transition

### Agenda Item 3.2 Measuring the success of the Wellbeing Hubs (Returned and Services League of Australia)

Members **NOTED** the member submission from the Returned and Services League of Australia regarding measuring the success of the Wellbeing Hubs. Members **NOTED** the engagement of La Trobe University to conduct an evaluation of the Veterans' and Families' Hubs (Hubs) program and **NOTED** the evaluation will focus on two of the initial six hubs – Nowra and Darwin – selected based on their differing demographics, service types, post-service nature, and service providers.

Members **DISCUSSED** the comprehensive service delivery model of the Wellbeing Hubs. Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** that service delivery models are tailored to local veteran community needs at each hub and **NOTED** the evaluation framework will adopt a community centred approach, assess user expectations and satisfaction levels, examine stakeholder perspectives and identify potential barriers to access.

Members **DISCUSSED** challenges faced by some hubs in fulfilling obligations and the potential need for additional support and **NOTED** the relationship between sustainable funding for hubs and the proposed veteran wellbeing agency.

Members **DISCUSSED** opportunities for collaboration between hubs and ESOs, noting challenges related to geographic footprint and **DISCUSSED** hub longevity, consistency of service delivery, and community perceptions of veteran support initiatives. Members **NOTED** ongoing efforts to balance unique community needs with consistent service delivery across hubs.

Members **AGREED** the evaluation findings will inform the broader national hubs network and **NOTED** the evaluation timeline, with completion scheduled for late 2025.

Members **NOTED** the invitation for an ESORT representative on the Evaluation Advisory Group.

## UPDATES ON DVA INITIATIVES

### Agenda Item 4.1 DVA Website Enhancement Project

Members were provided an overview of the structure of DVA's new website and **NOTED** the Website Enhancement Project scope and key highlights. Members **DISCUSSED** the Website Enhancement Project next steps and delivery timeframes.

No.	Action	Assigned to
<b>2025ESORT/A02</b>	Secretariat to share the 'DVA Website Enhancement Project;' PowerPoint presentation with members.	Secretariat

## Agenda Item 4.2 Claims Lodgement Support Model

Members **NOTED** the progress of the roll-out of the Claims Lodgement Support Model and **NOTED** the ongoing consultations with states and territories.

Members **DISCUSSED** the strategic initiatives underway, including claims lodgement, the establishment of an advocacy institute, and the rollout of business process changes to improve claims processing efficiency.

Members **NOTED** the record number of lodgements and determination of claims in recent weeks and **DISCUSSED** the importance of streamlining processes to support the functioning of the advocacy institute.

Members **AGREED** on the need for transparency in claims processing, including publishing processing times.

Members **DISCUSSED** the importance of screening claims for vulnerability to ensure veterans are not disadvantaged by commercial advocacy practices and **AGREED** to continue offering assistance to those lodging claims on behalf of family members.

Members **NOTED** an update on the medical information for claims optimisation (MICRO) pilot, aimed at reducing unnecessary tests and streamlining decision-making processes.

Members **DISCUSSED** the role of accredited advocates and the advocacy institute in providing seamless support to veterans, emphasising the importance of trust and collaboration in achieving positive outcomes. Members **NOTED** the upcoming planning meeting to address operational and implementation plans for accrediting advocates and establishing a code of conduct. Members highlighted the importance of face-to-face training and ensuring input into training materials.

Members **AGREED** on the need for direct communication and media outreach to inform veterans who do not access email or social media, about available support and encourage them to seek advice from approved advocates and **AGREED** on Defence's offer to support engagement and communication activities.

## Agenda Item 4.3 Update on the consultation and co-design process for the establishment of a new agency to focus on veteran wellbeing and an ESO peak body

Members **NOTED** the appointment, for the next six months, of Teena Blewitt PSM as the lead overseeing the establishment of the Agency for Wellbeing and Peak Body Taskforce and **NOTED** the engagement of Professor Mark Evans to support the department's consultation and co-design initiatives for the agency.

Members **NOTED** the consultation and co-design process for the establishment of a new agency to focus on veteran wellbeing and national peak body. Members **DISCUSSED** the government's response to the Royal Commission's final report, particularly the recommendations related to veteran support and agency design.

Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** the engagement of external expertise and the inclusion of diverse inputs to inform the proposals for government consideration and **AGREED** on the importance of continued consultation and co-design forums to ensure comprehensive and effective outcomes for veteran services.

Members **NOTED** that CEO Nick Booth from True Patriot Love Canada would be visiting Australia at the request of Secretary Frame and there will be an opportunity for engagement and to share perspectives whilst he is here in mid-May.

Members **DISCUSSED** the co-design process, highlighting the integration of international insights and the importance of diverse input from surveys and focus groups. Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** the need for clear metrics to measure the agency's success, focusing on veteran wellbeing and transition outcomes.

Members **DISCUSSED** the importance of avoiding duplication of existing services and ensuring the new agency acts as a connector and integrator.

Members **DISCUSSED** the role of the peak body and the importance of coordination within the sector to enhance veteran services and **AGREED** to continue exploring ways to refine and implement recommendations from the Royal Commission, ensuring alignment with government commitments.

<b>2025ESORT/A03</b>	Circulate the Nous Report commissioned to provide options on the role of an ESO peak body to ESORT members for their information.	Secretariat and Agency for Wellbeing and Peak Body Taskforce
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#### Agenda Item 4.4      Psychiatric Assistance Dog (PAD) Pilot

Members **NOTED** the launch of the Public Access Information Card pilot initiative. Members **DISCUSSED** the consultation efforts with state and territory colleagues to enhance the recognition and acceptance of assistance dogs, including the development of identification patches and cards for supported dogs.

Members **NOTED** the positive impact of these initiatives on the acceptance of assistance dogs on public transport and **AGREED** on the importance of continued collaboration with states to improve recognition. Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** the need to expand the pipeline supply of assistance dogs, acknowledging this is an ongoing challenge.

Members **NOTED** the program's popularity and high subscription rates, indicating its success and importance to veterans. Members **DISCUSSED** discrepancies in funding and support for veterans with assistance dogs, particularly regarding coverage of veterinary expenses, and **AGREED** to clarify the criteria for support. Members **NOTED** the distinction between psychiatric assistance dogs, which are highly trained and supported by the program, and general assistance dogs.

#### Agenda Item 4.5      Business Improvements

Members **NOTED** the ongoing business reform activities that are improving rehabilitation, health, and transport services for veterans.

Members were encouraged to provide any feedback to [PDD.REFORM.PROJECT@dva.gov.au](mailto:PDD.REFORM.PROJECT@dva.gov.au).

#### Agenda Item 4.6      Future of the Operational Working Party (OWP)

Members **DISCUSSED** the original establishment of the Operational Working Party (OWP) and its subsequent overlap with the National Aged and Community Care Forum (NACCF) and the ESORT.

Members **CONSIDERED** the proposal to disband the OWP, noting that its responsibilities could be integrated into existing forums to streamline efforts. Members **AGREED** to consider a detailed proposal or paper to inform the decision-making process regarding the future of the OWP at a future meeting.

Members **RECOGNISED** the OWP's significant role in simplifying DVA processes and facilitating feedback from ESOs and advocates, highlighting the need for continued dialogue and **DISCUSSED** the importance of maintaining advocate representation and practitioner expertise within the OWP to ensure effective collaboration with DVA experts.

<b>2025ESORT/A05</b>	A paper to be developed for the next ESORT meeting, outlining the value and potential restructuring of the Operational Working Party	OWP Chair
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#### Agenda Item 6      Other Business

Members received a brief update on the Younger Veterans – Contemporary Needs Forum (YVF).

Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** the team responsible for managing travel and accommodation logistics, highlighting the adaptability and support provided by the staff.

Members **ACKNOWLEDGED** DVA for its outstanding progress and effective governance, acknowledging the positive impact of recent changes.

Members **RECOGNISED** the importance of the meeting communique as a valuable document for ongoing collaboration.

#### THE FOLLOWING ITEMS WERE PROVIDED FOR INFORMATION AND WERE DISCUSSED BY EXCEPTION

##### Agenda Item 7      Legislation Reform Update

Members **NOTED** the update on legislation reform was provided for information.

##### Agenda Item 8      Advocacy Update and Claims Handling

Members **NOTED** the update on the Institute of Veterans' Advocates was provided for information.

##### Agenda Item 9      Claims Processing Update

Members **NOTED** the new standard claims processing update moving forward will be as per the paper circulated to members.

##### Agenda Item 10      Aged and Community Care Update

Members **NOTED** the important reforms delivered by the Aged Care and Community Care Taskforce and **NOTED** the taskforce has now been incorporated into the new Home and Community Branch.

Members **REQUESTED** the availability of hard copies of the Veteran's guide to living in an aged care home (veterans' guide) and the Guide for residential aged care teams supporting DVA clients (provider guide) which are accessible online.

Members **NOTED** that the production of hard copies is in process, with availability anticipated within the next one to two weeks and **REQUESTED** that copies be distributed to their local offices upon availability.

2025ESORT/A06	Provide ESORT members with hard copies of the Veteran's guide to living in an aged care home (veterans' guide) and the Guide for residential aged care teams supporting DVA clients (provider guide) once available to local Deputy Commissioner offices.	

##### Agenda Item 11      Veteran Hearing Services Framework Update

Members **NOTED** the update on the Veteran Hearing Services Framework was provided for information.

##### Agenda Item 12      Transport – Booked Car with Driver

Members **NOTED** the simplified BCWD access criteria for VEA clients aged 79 years or younger and updated infographic was provided for information.

##### Agenda Item 13      Update on Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Members **NOTED** the update on Artificial Intelligence (AI) was provided for information and **NOTED** that the DVA AI Transparency Statement was published to the DVA Website on 28 February 2025.

##### Agenda Item 14      Joint Transition Authority Update

Members **NOTED** the Joint Transition Authority's update was provided for information.

## Agenda Item 15

Members **DISCUSSED** the progress of the Women Veterans' Strategy, with an emphasis on its development and anticipated completion by 30 June 2025.

Members **AGREED** on the importance of providing timely feedback on the strategy's foundational questions to ensure its effective progression and **ACKNOWLEDGED** the Strategy's success in generating interest and valuable feedback from various stakeholders. Members **DISCUSSED** the funding for the Strategy, noting that some initiatives will require a budget proposal.

Members **DISCUSSED** the need for more female advocates to support the increasing number of females veterans emphasising the importance of female representation in advocacy roles.

Members **DISCUSSED** opportunities for collaboration with the Australian Human Rights Commission on projects focused on the health and wellbeing of current female serving members.

**Meeting closed: 5:00pm**

### Annexure A

ESORT Members	
Alison Frame	Chair, Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs, President, Repatriation Commission and Chair, Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (MRCC)
Mark Brewer AM CSC and Bar	Deputy President, Repatriation Commission and MRCC Member
Kahlil Fegan DSC AM	Repatriation Commissioner and MRCC Member
Gwen Cherne	Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, MRCC Member
MAJGEN Greg Melick AO RFD FANZCN SC	Returned and Services League of Australia
Del Gaudry CSC	Defence Force Welfare Association
David Manolas	Naval Association of Australia
Max Ball	Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia Inc
BRIG Mike Annett CSC	Defence Reserves Association
Mike von Berg MC OAM	Royal Australian Regiment Corporation
Bill Roberts OAM JP	Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia
Beverley Benporath	The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc
Charlotte Webb	Defence Families Australia
Jenny Gregory OAM	Australian War Widows Inc
Scott Jeffrey	TPI Federation Australia
The Hon Martin Hamilton-Smith	Australian Special Air Service Association
Rod Henderson	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association Ltd
AIRCDRE Kaarin Kooij CSC	Department of Defence ( <b>proxy</b> )
CDRE Katherine Tindall	Department of Defence ( <b>proxy</b> )
Kristen Hayes-Charlton	Solider On ( <b>proxy</b> )
Peter Colliver OAM	Air Force Association ( <b>proxy</b> )
Other Attendees	
Andrew Kefford PSM	Deputy Secretary, Policy and Programs
Alison McLaren	Deputy Secretary Veteran, Family and Stakeholder Experience
Brenton Philp	Deputy Secretary, Chief Operating Officer



Presenters	
Teena Blewitt PSM	Deputy Secretary, Agency for Wellbeing and Peak Body Taskforce
Luke Brown	First Assistant Secretary, Policy
Anna Williams	Assistant Secretary, Health Programs and Services
Samantha Patuto	Assistant Secretary, Compensation Process and Payments
Ingrid Nagy	Assistant Secretary, Communications
Kirrily Magill	Assistant Secretary, Grants and Hubs
Professor Mark Evans	Consultant, Chief People Officer
Observers	
BRIG Phil Winter AM CSC ADC	Returned and Services League of Australia
Chris Lowis	Defence Force Welfare Association
Paula Goodwin	First Assistant Secretary, Ministerial Engagement and Communications
Sharon Mulligan	A/g Assistant Secretary, Ministerial, International and Stakeholder Relations
Sarah Kennedy	Assistant Secretary, Commemorations
Dylan Kurtz	Assistant Secretary, Home and Community Care
Apologies	
Wayne McNee	Legacy Australia Inc
Paul Singer CVO	Soldier On
Joe Iervasi AM CSC	Air Force Association
RADM Sonya Bennett AM	MRCC Member, Department of Defence
RADM Letitia van Stralen AM CSC RAN	Defence People Group
Michael Duke	MRCC Member, Comcare
James Dallas	Younger Veterans – Contemporary Needs Forum (YVF) Representative
Secretariat	
Morgan South	Assistant Director, International and Stakeholder Relations
Jessica Law	Senior Secretariat Support Officer, International and Stakeholder Relations