



Ex-Service Organisations Round Table March 2026

Ex-Service Organisations Round Table Meeting

The Ex-Service Organisations Round Table (ESORT) met on Monday, 23 March 2026. Members of ESORT discussed and made contributions on the following topics:

Minister update – The Hon Matt Keogh, Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel

The Minister briefed ESORT members on funding announcements made in the Mid-Year Economic Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO), including the additional investment to enable a renewed focus on holistic wellbeing and enhancing access to modern up-to-date treatment to improve veterans' overall wellbeing, DVA's integrity activities, a new agency focused on wellbeing, and changes to the Building Excellence in Support and Training (BEST) Grants Program. An update was provided on the preparations for the introduction of *Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025* (VETS Act) and establishing a new Veterans' Ministerial Advisory Council. An overview on the implementation of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide's recommendations was provided, including the Defence and Veterans' Service Commissioner Bill 2025 currently before Parliament, and the consultations occurring around the ESO peak body.

DVA update – Secretary Alison Frame, DVA

The Secretary advised members that the significant funding for DVA in MYEFO will deliver improved outcomes for the veteran community. She outlined the expansion of emphasis on treatment and cited the new contract between DVA and Hearing Australia. The Secretary also updated ESORT members on the significant changes to the veteran support system that will come into effect on 1 July, including the establishment of the new Agency and the work underway

to recruit a CEO as well as the increasingly close partnership between DVA and Defence. The Secretary advised ESORT members that it was Mr Michael von Berg MC OAM's last ESORT meeting and she thanked him for the enormous contribution he has made to the forum over 18 years.

ESORT Member Submissions

Recommendation 95 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veterans' Suicide, the Expanded Application of Presumptive Liability and the Prompt Acceptance by July 2026 of Presumptive Liability in Respect to the Exposure to Agent Orange by Vietnam Veterans

DVA provided information to ESORT on the implementation of Recommendation 95 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. This recommendation relates to the implementation and expansion of presumptive arrangements. The initial tranche of presumption taking effect from 1 July 2026 will include over 150 medical conditions where relevant criteria are met. Any future expansion of presumption will require approval from Government. DVA undertook to do some further work on the specifics of the submission with a further update to be provided to ESORT.

DVA Critical Initiatives

Brief on US trip and MTBI

Repatriation Commissioner Kahlil Fegan informed ESORT members that in February he accompanied a representative from Defence to the US to engage with multiple organisations and stakeholders who focus on traumatic brain injuries. The purpose of these engagements was to learn further about brain health and trauma programs, treatments and care coordination for veterans and active service members. A comprehensive report is being developed which will include recommendations in the categories of: prevention, baselining/monitoring/surveillance, clinical care, research, and families.

Enhancing access to Treatment (including Medicinal Cannabis and MDMA)

DVA provided further information to ESORT members on the MYEFO measure Enhancing Access to Treatment, which includes a national PTSD study. The Department also outlined the changes to the Medicinal Cannabis Framework, which came into effect on 16 February 2026, and DVA-funded Psychedelic

Assisted Psychotherapy (PAP) using MDMA and psilocybin for PTSD and Treatment Resistant Depression.

ESO Peak Body

The Special Advisor on the National Peak Body Project, Nick Booth, advised members that he had commenced engaging across the ESO community and other key stakeholders to help develop a preferred model for the proposed peak body. He said that a national peak body presents an opportunity to strengthen collaboration across the sector, represent the needs of veterans and families of veterans, identify emerging needs and provide effective solutions, and support improved coordination of, and investment in, services and support.

Agency for Wellbeing of Veterans and Families

DVA informed ESORT members that the Government is investing \$78 million over 4 years from 2025–26 to establish the new agency focused on veteran and family wellbeing within DVA. The agency is expected to commence operations on 1 July 2026 and will initially prioritise effort on supporting at-risk ADF members transitioning out of service. Over time, the agency will develop capability to proactively support additional client cohort groups.

Building Excellence in Support and Training (BEST) Grants 2026–27

DVA updated members on the changes to the BEST Grants Program, which include a more than doubling of funding, 3-year funding agreements, a simplified application process and a streamlined funding model. These changes address Recommendation 99 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide and the findings of the Senate Standing Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee Inquiry.

Strengthening DVA's ability to prevent, detect and respond to service provider non-compliance and fraud

DVA informed members that the Government was investing \$203.1 million over 4 years from 2025–26 as part of the MYEFO measure Strengthening Program Integrity and Veterans' Advocacy. The funding includes enhancing provider integrity capability within DVA, expanding access to free advocacy services through the BEST Grants Program, action to address inappropriate practices in veteran health services, and support for the ongoing operation of the Institute of Veterans' Advocacy. The measures are designed to strengthen

confidence in the system, reduce fraud and non-compliance, and ensure support and services are delivered appropriately to those who need them.

Defence Estate Review

Defence provided ESORT members with an update on the implementation of the recommendations of the Defence Estate Audit. Defence has accepted the key findings of the Defence Estate Audit and is committed to implementing the Government response rapidly. The divestment of sites identified in the Defence Estate Audit will occur in a manner that is sensitive to those in Defence and their families as well as other stakeholders.

First Nations Veterans' Strategy

DVA advised ESORT members that it is developing a First Nations Veterans' Strategy, which will focus on greater recognition and improved health and wellbeing of First Nations veterans, as well as the improved cultural safety and accessibility of DVA's programs and services. Consultations are taking place over the next few months with relevant stakeholders.

Other Business

The following items were discussed under Other Business:

- Aged care veteran residency
- Younger Veterans Forum (YVF) ESORT representative

ESORT Members in attendance:
Chair, Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs
Deputy President, Repatriation Commission and MRCC Member
Repatriation Commissioner and MRCC Member
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans Association
Air Force Association
Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
Australian War Widows Inc
Australian Special Air Service Association
Defence Families Australia

Defence Force Welfare Association
Defence Reserves Association
The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc (Proxy)
MRCC Member, Department of Defence (Proxy)
MRCC Member, Department of Defence (Proxy)
MRCC Member, Comcare
Naval Association of Australia
Returned and Services League of Australia
Royal Australian Regiment Corporation
Soldier On
TPI Federation Australia
Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, MRCC Member
Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia
Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia
Women Veterans Australia Ltd
Apologies:
MRCC Member, Department of Defence
MRCC Member, Department of Defence
Legacy Australia Inc