

Terms of Reference

Independent review of Victoria Cross (VC) and Victoria Cross for Australia (VCfA) Supported Travel Entitlements and Guidelines

1. Purpose

- 1.1. On 21 May 2026, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel announced a review into the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) Victoria Cross (VC) and Victoria Cross for Australia (VCfA) Travel Entitlements and Guidelines (the Guidelines).

2. Scope of Review

- 2.1 These terms of reference provide guidance on the scope by which the Reviewer will formulate advice and recommendations relating to VC and VCfA Travel Entitlements and Guidelines.
- 2.2 In conducting the review, the Review should ensure DVA continues to provide VC/VCfA recipients with the opportunity to share their first-hand experience with the community in an impactful way.
- 2.3 In assessing the current Guidelines, the Reviewer should consider:
- 2.3.1 The entitlement including class of travel, components of travel (accommodation, flights, transfers) the current number of trips, and associated processes.
- 2.3.2 The purpose of the travel e.g. Domestic and international travel including VC/GC reunion in London every two years.
- 2.3.3 The delegations and circumstances which apply to determine requests for travel, for the administration of travel requests, and for the refusal of travel.
- 2.3.4 The application and limitation of exceptional circumstances.
- 2.3.5 Travel including:
- a companion (including spouse or de facto) and dependants while the VC recipient is alive; and
 - entitlements for spouses, dependants and other family members who wish to travel to represent the deceased VC recipient, whether the VC recipient was alive when awarded the VC or, if awarded posthumously, proximately to recent conflict or retrospectively/historically.
- 2.3.6 Provisions for ensuring the health and safety of recipients.

2.3.7 Administration and operation of the Guidelines including:

- Public interest.
- Eligibility to receive travel entitlements from alternative sources.
- Definitions throughout.

2.4 In conducting the Review, the Reviewer should also have regard to similar travel entitlements or subsidies administered by Defence and the Department of Social Services.

3. Timing of the review

3.1 The following is an indicative timeframe for review and associated activities:

7 June 2026	Mr Griggs' engagement commences Review commences
June – July 2026	Consultations and review of relevant materials
31 July 2026	Draft report submitted to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs
25 August 2026	Final report submitted to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs
30 August 2026	Mr Griggs' engagement concludes
September 2026	Minister for Veterans' Affairs to respond to the review recommendations
TBC	Public communication about the outcome of the report and recommendations
TBC	Timing and plan to implement recommendations developed and submitted to Minister for Veterans' Affairs for endorsement

4. Background

4.1 Victoria Cross (VC) and Victoria Cross for Australia (VCfA)

4.1.1 The Victoria Cross for Australia is the highest decoration for according recognition to persons who, in the presence of the enemy, perform acts of the most conspicuous gallantry, or daring or pre-eminent acts of valour or self-sacrifice or display extreme devotion to duty¹. It is Australia's highest award for gallantry. In total, 102 Australian service personnel have been awarded the VC or VCfA, all referred to as the VC, to date. As at 26 May 2026, there are 4 living VC recipients.

¹ Victoria Cross for Australia Letters Patent 15 January 1991

4.2 History of travel entitlements for VC recipients

- 4.2.1 DVA has supported travel entitlements for VC recipients since 1995. Prior to this time, travel entitlements were managed by the Department of Transport. The first specific travel entitlement for VC holders was offered as a lifetime rail pass in 1944, with the expectation that VC recipients would be in demand as speakers at functions and ceremonies 'of national importance'. In 1980, the then Prime Minister (the Hon Malcolm Fraser MP) granted Gold Passes for air and associated ground travel to surviving VC and surviving George Cross (GC) recipients. This entitlement was for six (6) free domestic trips per year. In 1982, this entitlement was extended to include spouses and was in addition to the existing entitlement for rail travel.
- 4.2.2 In 1995, DVA developed a proposal to issue surviving VC recipient's partners with an entitlement of 25 domestic trips per year for non-commercial purposes. The number of trips was based on the 1995 Life Gold Pass for former parliamentarians. The proposal was approved until 1999 and provided approximately \$30,000 per year for the then three VC recipients (approx. \$10,000 per pass holder). At this time there was no requirement under the program for the trips to be for commemorative purposes. The scope of VC/VCfA travel entitlements has remained largely unchanged under the administration by DVA, whereas changes have been made to parliamentarian allowances reflected in Life Gold Pass, which was the basis for the funding under the 1995 proposal.
- 4.2.3 Since 1995, the Life Gold Pass for parliamentarians has changed three times (reducing the scope and amount of travel each time a change was made) but the VC/VCfA travel entitlements have remained unchanged. The Life Gold Pass was abolished for new parliamentarians from 2012.
- 4.2.4 In 2008, the Guidelines were updated to include travel entitlements for widows of VC recipients to utilise 25 domestic trips per annum in the first 12 months following the death of the VC recipient. This was reduced to 15 trips in the first 12 months from 2017.
- 4.2.5 The Guidelines were further extended in 2011 to include business class domestic travel for the spouse and dependants of the VC recipient when accompanying the recipient. The entitlement to business class travel for dependents was removed in 2017.
- 4.2.6 Following a review of VC/VCfA travel entitlements carried out in late 2016, a number of proposals were put forward to the then Minister to increase the level of VC travel entitlements during the Anzac Centenary period from 25 to 30 domestic trips and one international trip every second year. International trips prior to this review were approved by the Minister on a case-by-case basis.

- 4.2.7 In 2017, the entitlement of dependents to business class travel while accompanying the VC/VCfA recipient was removed and replaced with economy travel. The number of trips a widow could take following the death of the VC/VCfA recipient was reduced from 25 to 15 in the first 12 months post death.

4.3 Parents of posthumously awarded VC

- 4.3.1 In 2014, a travel entitlement (5 return domestic trips per annum), separate to the Guidelines but largely based on them, was provided to the parents of CPL Cameron Baird VC of the Afghanistan War who was posthumously awarded a VC in 2014. This decision was made at the discretion of the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, initially for a two-year period.
- 4.3.2 The Minister for Veterans' Affairs subsequently extended the Bairds' access to travel entitlements to include the Centenary of Anzac period and to allow for a review of such entitlements in 2019. The Bairds were granted 15 domestic trips per year and one international trip every two years. This was less than the entitlements for the VC recipients at that time who were granted 30 domestic trips during the Anzac Centenary and one international trip every two years.

4.4 2019 Guidelines review

- 4.4.1 A further review was carried out in 2019 by Synergy Group and Sir Angus Houston to inform the current guidelines. The recommendations included:
- Domestic and international trip numbers return to the level they were prior to the Anzac Centenary.
 - Travel which is considered 'in the public interest' be more specifically defined and non-commercial.
 - Allow travel for the recipient, one other adult and dependent children in business class.
 - Require a medical fitness for travel check, at DVA's discretion and provision for a medical or personal carer.
 - Travel only be provided to VC/VCfA recipients, their spouse, dependant and any required medical assistance, not parents.
 - Add an Exceptional Circumstances provision that would allow the Secretary or Minister to approve travel arrangements outside the standard guidelines on a case-by-case basis.

5. Legislative Authority

- 5.1 None of the legislation administered by DVA provides expressly for travel by VC/VCfA recipients. However, Item 430.011 (Veterans' commemorative activities) of the *Financial Framework (Supplementary Powers) Regulations*

1997 (FF(SP) Regulations²) provides legislative authority for the expenditure of the Australian Government funds as follows:

Objective: To provide for the acknowledgement and commemoration of the service and sacrifice of the men and women who served Australia and its allies in wars, conflicts and peace operations

- 5.2 .It is understood that this Item provides sufficient authority for the funds appropriated to DVA under Outcome 3 of the Budget:

Acknowledgement and commemoration of those who served Australia and its allies in wars, conflicts and peace operations through promoting recognition of service and sacrifice, preservation of Australia's wartime heritage, and official commemorations.

- 5.3 To date, it has been the view of DVA that this provides sufficient authority when interpreted beneficially for the payment of travel entitlements provided consistent with the Guidelines as they presently stand provided such travel is for a commemorative purpose.

5.4 Exceptional arrangements

- 5.4.1 The arrangement to support VC parents was considered on an exceptional basis and was not initially intended by the then Minister to be provided in perpetuity.
- 5.4.2 In considering the legislative authority and the Outcome 3 appropriation, a beneficial interpretation may be applied given the link to commemorative activity, to enable DVA support of VC parents.

6. Stakeholder Engagement

- 6.1 The reviewer is expected to engage with key stakeholders to obtain feedback on their experience. Key stakeholders include but should not be limited to:
- VC recipients and immediate families
 - Immediate families of deceased and posthumously awarded VC recipients
 - Department of Veterans' Affairs
 - Department of Defence
 - Department of Social Services (DSS)
 - Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
 - Ex-service organisations

² At that time, they were the *Financial Management and Accountability Regulations 1997*)

7. Deliverables

7.1 A draft report and final report for consideration by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, which includes:

- key findings from stakeholder engagement and the assessment;
- proposed new Guidelines and, if appropriate, proposed changes to DSS and Defence policies;
- any changes required to legislative, policy or budget authority; and
- suggested timing for implementing the report recommendations.