



Minutes

Agenda Item 1 Meeting Open

The Chair opened the meeting acknowledging country, veterans, current serving Australian Defence Force Personnel and welcomed observers. Members **NOTED** apologies as listed at Annexure A and no conflicts of interest were raised.

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

Members **NOTED** the minutes from the previous meeting on 9 December 2025 were endorsed out-of-session on and published on the DVA Website.

Members **AGREED** to close action items 2025ESORT/A26

Members **NOTED** the action items 2020ESORT/A27, 2025ESORT/A09, A24, A25, and A27 remain in progress.

Members **NOTED** the strategic update provided by the Secretary.

Members **NOTED** Mike von Berg's last ESORT meeting, and recognised his work in ESORT over the last 18 years.

Agenda Item 2 Presentation from Minister Keogh

Members **NOTED** the Minister's update.

ESORT members were briefed by the Minister 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.

MEMBER SUBMISSIONS

Agenda Item 3 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

Members **DISCUSSED** the disinclusion of the presumptive conditions for the crews and passengers of those who worked on the HMA ships to cover conditions attributable to Agent Orange exposure, and the lack of scientific evidence of "30 days rule". DVA provided an initial response and it was agreed the department conduct further work and respond formally in the next ESORT meeting. It was raised that the 30 days rule is unique, and the department will seek information from the Repatriation Medical Authority (RMA).

No.	Action	Assigned to
2026ESORT/A01	The Department will provide further advice on the formulation of the factors in the Statements of Principles that are formulated to include: being: (a) on land in Vietnam; or (b) at sea in Vietnamese waters; or (c) on board a vessel and consuming potable water supplied on that vessel, when the water supply had been produced by evaporative distillation of estuarine Vietnamese waters, for a cumulative period of at least 30 days, at least 5 years before the clinical onset of [condition]; VVAA has indicated it can provide related correspondence on this matter for the development of DVA's advice.	Policy and Research Division

UPDATES ON DVA INIATIVES

Agenda Item 4 Brief on US trip and MTBI

Members **NOTED** the update provided by Kahlil Fegan, Repatriation Commissioner, on his recent trip to the United States, meeting with stakeholders for consultation on mild traumatic brain injuries (MTBI). Members **NOTED** the US has further developed study on MTBI than Australia. A report is being developed that will include but not limited to recommendations relating to prevention, clinical care, research, and families.

Agenda Item 5 Enhanced access to Treatments (including Medicinal Cannabis and MDMA)

Luke Brown, First Assistant Secretary, Policy and Research Division, provided an update on overview of the renewed focus on ensuring that treatment, rehabilitation and compensation work together to achieve better wellbeing outcomes for veterans and families of veterans, the latest changes to the Medicinal Cannabis Framework and recent DVA approvals for psilocybin and MDMA Psychedelic assisted Psychotherapy (PAP).

The Government is providing \$739.2 million over four years from 2025-26 to Enhancing Access to Treatment, which includes a national PTSD study. In addition of existing services, there will be more modern treatments available now and will be rolled out to cover more conditions.

Members **NOTED** the department is working with indigenous and rural and remote area research centre to promote the services in these regions.

Members raised that treatment waiting time is too long for receiving an MRI after an eyebrow tattoo. This was noted and DVA will report back to ESORT with more information.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2026ESORT/A02	Provide an update on treatment options and wait times for MRIs after an eyebrow tattoo to ESORT.	Chief Health Officer

Agenda Item 6 ESO Peak Body

Nicholas Booth, Special Advisor, National Peak Body Project, provided an update on current and planned engagement with the ESO community and other stakeholders to develop a preferred model for the proposed peak body. Members **NOTED** that there have been responses in favour of and against the establishment of an ESO peak body.

Members **DISCUSSED** the role of the existing steering committee is to bring ideas together and collaborate on the finding consensus in feedback of the proposed peak body. It was raised that any consultation should be made to reach all ESO's regardless of size, as the perception is that smaller organisations are not consistently connected with rounds of consultation.

Members **NOTED** the ESO peak body is a recommendation agreed in principle by government, but is for the ESO community to determine if the value of a peak body is there for establishment. The purpose of the proposed peak body is still being consulted on, and further consultation will help provide more direction and consensus from the ESO community.

Agenda Item 7 Agency for the Wellbeing of Veterans and Families

Mark Brewer updated members on the functions of the new wellbeing agency and reinforced the collaboration between the DVA and Defence, providing support for smooth transition for at-risk ADF members. Members **NOTED** the department is continuing the preparation work to finalise the structure and service-design and recruiting a chief executive officer before formally commencing on 1 July this year. The next stage is to engage regularly with ESOs to seek feedback and advice.

Members queried the best use of hubs in the development of the new agency, and **NOTED** connection to existing support within communities, especially those delivered by Hubs and ESOs will be critical for the success of the agency, reducing the burden that is currently in place with system navigation.

Agenda Item 8 Building Excellence in Support of Training (BEST) Grants 2026-27

Paula Goodwin, First Assistant Secretary, Veteran Experience and Transition Division, provided an update to Members on the recent updates to the BEST grants. The grant is now available for a multi-year period, and has received more than double the funding to support advocacy services and support to veterans. Members **NOTED** under the new grant structure, funding will be provided based on the number of advocates and trainees in the organisation.

Agenda Item 9 2025–26 MYEFO investment to strengthen DVA's ability to prevent, detect and respond to service provider non-compliance and fraud

Anthony Coles, First Assistant Secretary, Provider Integrity Division, provided an update on Government's MYEFO investment to strengthen provider integrity and veteran advocacy. Members **NOTED** the early success is achieved after the establishment of Provider Provider Integrity Division in December 2026. The background work is continuing to lift DVA's ability to detect, prevent and respond to fraud. It was acknowledged that with this measure, it is normal to receive adverse reactions from market participants and providers, but the department will keep taking initiative to emphasise the importance of integrity.

ESOs were encouraged to report any negative messages they capture on social media to DVA and work together to encounter the challenges.

Members enquired about the public disclosure about information of non-compliance providers, and **NOTED** the information of non-compliance providers will be available to public. Members asked about how the estimated savings through this measure will be re-deployed to veterans. It was confirmed the estimated savings will be returned to the DVA budget and ensures a sustainable veteran support system.

Agenda Item 10 First Nations Veterans Strategy

Andrew Kefford, Deputy Secretary, Policy and Programs Group provided an update on the development of First Nations Veterans Strategy, which will supersede the Indigenous Veterans Strategy. The new Strategy focuses on tailoring the services to align with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and will form part of a suite of DVA First Nations veteran resources, including the recently released Reconciliation Action Plan which sets out actions to further strengthen DVA's cultural capability. DVA's First Nations Veterans Strategy Section is working with the Chief Health Officer to ensure the medical providers are aware of the new Strategy to better serve first nations veterans. Extensive

consultations will be held with internal and external stakeholders across Australia, including consultation with the First Nations veteran community in the following few months.

Members stated the complexity and challenges faced dealing with First Nations Veterans, and suggested the department should work on building the trust first. DVA acknowledged the contribution of ATSIVA on establishing the First Nations Community Partnership with DVA, and will work together on engagement and feedback going forward.

Agenda Item 11 Defence Estate Review

Members were updated on the activity on the Defence Estate Review by CDRE Allison Norris, Department of Defence. In February the government agreed or agreed in principle to all 20 recommendations of the report from the Defence Estate Audit. 67 out of 68 sites were agreed for whole, or partial divestment. It is acknowledged defence personnel will be affected by these divestments, and any moving of personnel will be done with consultation.

Members expressed concern that those who are disadvantaged by alternative locations, may no longer wish to hold their role as serving becomes more difficult to access. The example of the barracks at Parramatta relocating to Holsworthy, whilst short in distance, may create more substantial time commitments as traffic during peak hour can elongate length of travel substantially.

Members **NOTED** consultation is being sought across the nation in all states and territories. Town Halls are being provided to seek community feedback in local areas that may be affected by the proposed changes in location.

Agenda Item 12 Other Business

Members raised the concern of Aged Care facilities not accepting veterans aged care applications due to the perceived additional costs of housing veterans.

Members **NOTED** the need for a new ESORT representative for the Younger Veterans' Forum. ESORT Secretariat will reach out to members for nominations.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2026ESORT/A03	A new ESORT representative to be nominated for the younger Veterans Forum	ESORT Secretariat

Agenda Item 13 ESORT Communique

Members **AGREED** to endorse the communique out of session.

Meeting closed: 3:50pm



ESORT Members	
Alison Frame	Chair
Mark Brewer AM CSC	Deputy President, Repatriation Commission and MRCC Member
Kahlil Fegan DSC AM	Repatriation Commissioner and MRCC Member
Dr Joseph West	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans Association
Joe Iervasi	Air Force Association
Rod Henderson	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
Jenny Gregory	Australian War Widows Inc
Winston (Bob) Hunter	Australian Special Air Service Association
Charlotte Webb	Defence Families Australia
Del Gaudry CSC	Defence Force Welfare Association
BRIG Mike Annett CSC	Defence Reserves Association
Lucinda Casey (Proxy)	The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc
AIRCDRE David Augustine (Proxy)	MRCC Member, Department of Defence
CDRE Kathrine Tindall (Proxy)	MRCC Member, Department of Defence
Colin Radford	MRCC Member, Comcare
David Manolas	Naval Association of Australia
Hon Peter Tinley AM	Returned and Services League of Australia
Michael Von Berg MC OAM	Royal Australian Regiment Corporation
Paul Singer CVO	Soldier On
Scott Jeffrey	TPI Federation Australia
Annabelle Wilson	Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, MRCC Member
Max Ball	Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia
William (Bill) Roberts OAM	Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia
Llani Kennealy	Women Veterans Australia Ltd
Other Attendees	
The Hon Matt Keogh MP	Minister for Veterans' Affairs
CDRE Belinda Greenwood CSM RAN	Director General, Joint Transition Authority
Andrew Kefford PSM	Deputy Secretary, Policy and Programs
Alison McLaren	Deputy Secretary Veteran, Family and Stakeholder Experience
Brenton Philp	Deputy Secretary, Chief Operating Officer
James Dallas	Younger Veterans – Contemporary Needs Forum (YVF) Representative
Presenters	
Nick Booth	Special Advisor, National Peak Body Project
CDRE Allison Norris CSC RAN	Department of Defence
Luke Brown	First Assistant Secretary, Policy and Research Division
Anthony Coles	First Assistant Secretary, Provider Integrity Division

OFFICIAL

Paula Goodwin	First Assistant Secretary, Veteran Experience and Transition Division
Maisi Ahuja	Director, Grants Operations
Observers	
Debbie Arnold	First Assistant Secretary, Ministerial Engagement and Communications
Tara Cavanagh	First Assistant Secretary, Program Delivery
Amanda Conroy	Assistant Secretary, Ministerial, International and Stakeholder Relations Branch
Kata Sowerby	Assistant Secretary, Rehabilitation and Families Branch
Kirrily Magill	Assistant Secretary, National Peak Body Project
Keely Dreghorn	Returned and Services League of Australia
Dr Sandi Laaksonen-Sherrin	Soldier On
Noel McLaughlin	RAAC Corporation
Secretariat	
Brad Clarke	Assistant Director, International and Stakeholder Relations
Suwanna Dannaher	Assistant Director, International and Stakeholder Relations
Brendan Corbett	Senior Secretariat Officer, International and Stakeholder Relations
Yangxue (Sunny) Sun	Senior Secretariat Officer, International and Stakeholder Relations
Freya Doherty	Secretariat Officer, International and Stakeholder Relations
Apologies	
RADM Sonia Bennett	MRCC Member, Department of Defence
RADM Letitia Van Stralen AM CSC RAN	MRCC Member, Department of Defence
Beverley Benporath	The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc
Mark Lax OAM CSM	Legacy Australia Inc