



Minutes

Agenda Item 1 Welcome, apologies and conflicts of interest

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.

The Chair welcomed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans Association (ATSIVA) and Women veterans Australia Ltd members as newly joined organisations of ESORT. The Chair also welcomed new members for RSL Australia, Legacy Australia, and Australian Special Air Service Association.

Agenda Item 2 Action items

Members **NOTED** the minutes from the previous meeting on 23 September 2025 were endorsed out-of-session. Members **AGREED** to close action items 2024ESORT/A37, 2025/A08, A12, A13, A15, A16, A17, A18, A19, A20, A21, A22 and A23. Members **NOTED** that the action items 2020ESORT/A27 and 2025ESORT/A09 remain in progress.

Agenda Item 3 DVS Strategic Update

Members **NOTED** the updates provided by the Chair on recent activity on key DVA initiatives and programs. Members **DISCUSSED** the progress on implementing recommendations relating to Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. Members **DISCUSSED** accessing information relating to the status of recommendations, particularly those agreed in principle. The Chair advised 32 recommendations are expected to be implemented by the end of 2025, and 89 are in progress or under consideration, and when government releases an update on the status of recommendations from the Royal Commission, a copy of the report will be sent to ESORT members.

The Chair introduced Nick Booth MVO, CEO True Patriot Love, to provide an update on the ESO Peak Body. Members **DISCUSSED** priorities that should be addressed in the establishment of a Peak Body, and the scope of work the Peak Body could be responsible for. Members **NOTED** this consultation would take time to progress, and if a Peak Body was established, it would not be expected prior to 2027.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2025ESORT/A24	Update ESORT on the status of Royal Commission recommendations when available.	Ministerial, Engagement and Communications Division

MEMBER SUBMISSIONS

Agenda Item 4 Update on DVA Evaluation of Wellbeing Hubs (RSL Australia)

Members **NOTED** the submission submitted by RSL Australia regarding updates on DVA's evaluation on Veterans' and Families' Wellbeing Hubs. Phase one research was recently completed, and findings collected through targeted discussions with individuals is informing the approach to Phase two data collection, which will commence in early 2026. Phase one went smoothly with more expressions of interest received than expected and Phase two commenced with some early emerging themes including: integration across government and non-government supports, case coordination needs, and barriers affecting access, participation and engagement. The evaluation is expected to be finalised by mid-2026, and DVA will report back to ESORT once the evaluation is complete. Members **DISCUSSED** the concerns and barriers for this project and the need to consolidate the surveys to reduce the impost on the veteran community.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2025ESORT/A25	DVA advise outcomes of the evaluation of Wellbeing Hubs once completed.	Veteran Experience and Transition Division

Agenda Item 5 Extension of GST concessions to Extreme Disablement Adjustment (EDA) and Additional Disablement Amount (ADA) recipients

Members **NOTED** the update. First Assistant Secretary, Policy and Research Division thanked the member for their thorough submission and provided an update on the current programs that provide assistance to veterans with vehicle costs. Members **NOTED** any extension of the eligibility criteria for a GST vehicle concession is a matter for the Australian Taxation Office.

Agenda Item 6 Update on Medicinal Cannabis prescribing behaviours

Members **NOTED** the update provided by the Chair and Chief Psychiatrist that DVA is currently working with Department of Health, the Therapeutic Goods Administration and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (TGA) in relation to concerns identified with the regulatory environment for Medicinal Cannabis prescribing behaviours.

DVA has made a submission to the TGA consultation on medicinal cannabis regulatory reform and will align with any changes that the TGA makes to the management of medicinal cannabis. The DVA Medicinal Cannabis Framework has been updated to better align with the available safety evidence. This Framework, which will be implemented shortly, continues to state that medicinal cannabis for the treatment of any mental health condition will not be funded by DVA. Members **NOTED** that each State and Territory has their own policy and regulation of medicinal cannabis. Members were assured that any changes made on regulations and funding arrangements will not affect veterans' appropriate use of medicinal cannabis.

Updates on this issue will be reported to ESORT on a regular basis.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2025ESORT/A26	To provide updates on regulations and funding arrangements regarding Medicinal Cannabis prescribing behaviours to ESORT member on a regular basis.	Chief Health Officer

UPDATES ON DVA INITIATIVES

Agenda Item 7.1 Update from Office of Australian War Graves

The newly appointed Director Office of Australian War Graves, Wade Stothart was introduced to ESORT and provided an introduction on the role and responsibilities of the Office of Australian War Graves (OAWG). Members **NOTED** the update on cemetery renewal, re-use and re-development and tenure policy impacts, and updates on Western Australian and Hobart Gardens of Remembrance.

Members **DISCUSSED** damage to Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemeteries in Gaza. The Director War Graves reported that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission is in discussions to have damage repaired when it is safe to do so.

Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association sought advice on use of flags in cemeteries on the Western Front in Europe, which will be followed up by Office of Australian War Graves and reported back TO ESORT.

No.	Action	Assigned to
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2025ESORT/A27	To provide update on damaged flag issues in cemeteries on the Western Front.	OAWG
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Agenda Item 7.2 Update and discussion on Commemorations program and associated Activities

Members **NOTED** the update provided by Assistant Secretary, Commemorations, on events held in 2025. Members **DISCUSSED** the Commemorations Strategy for 2026, noting that it generally only includes quarter century milestones as part of the strategy, and anniversaries that are not 25/50/75/100 years may still be recognised, but done via separate communications.

Agenda Item 7.3 MDMA / Psilocybin

Members **NOTED** the update provided by a/g First Assistant Secretary, Program Delivery Division, on the recent approval of MDMA for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Delivery of the treatment is required to occur under strict clinical protocols and conform with clinical advice from the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, and have requests assessed by DVA clinical advisers and DVA's Chief Psychiatrist. DVA began accepting requests from 3 November 2025 and have received 2 applications. Members **DISCUSSED** the requirements for approval of the treatment.

Agenda Item 7.4 Suicide Prevention Framework

Members **NOTED** the update provided by Senior Director, Suicide Prevention. DVA's Suicide Prevention Framework and Implementation Plan have been published on the DVA Website. DVA has partnered with Mental Health First Aid International to offer Suicide Prevention Training across Australia, and DVA will continue to work with ESOs to explore training opportunities and upskill providers. Members **DISCUSSED** the approach to including at risk population groups within the Framework and Implementation Strategy. DVA consulted with The National Suicide Prevention Office in the development of the framework and this aligns with their advice and the National Suicide Prevention Strategy.

Agenda Item 7.5 Integrity of the Veteran Support System

Members **NOTED** the update provided by the Chair. DVA continues to ensure government funds allocated for the veteran community are not misappropriated by the private sector, and that veterans are not taken advantage of. Members **DISCUSSED** some of the difficult circumstances veterans face when service providers do not have the veterans' interests at the forefront. Members **DISCUSSED** some of the strategies used by fee for service organisations when promoting their advocacy services, and the importance of the newly established Institute of Veterans Advocacy.

Members **NOTED** the establishment of the Provider Integrity Division within DVA to continue to develop this work.

Agenda Item 7.6 Volunteer Work

Members **NOTED** the paper update provided. DVA provided members with information on what DVA considers volunteer work and how participating in volunteer work might impact on entitlements where work capacity forms part of the eligibility considerations.

Agenda Item 8.1 Claims Processing Update

Members **NOTED** updates provided by the Chair on DVA claims processing; that DVA continues to reduce processing time and clear backlogs. The most recent claims reporting data as of 31 October 2025 can be accessed through the DVA Claims Processing Webpage which encompasses all key metrics relating to the claims process.

Agenda Item 8.2 MLCOA – Complaints Data and Process

In response to Action Item 2025ESORT/A12, members **NOTED** statistics on complaints regarding the quality of MedHealth (MLCOA) assessments and reports and the process for addressing complaints is administered under DVA's contract with MLCOA.

Agenda Item 8.3 Update on Veterans Advocacy

Members **NOTED** the paper update provided on Veterans Advocacy, noting the announcement of Commonwealth funding to support the operation of the Institute of Veterans Advocacy. The Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee has conducted an inquiry into a range of matters relevant to veteran advocacy services. The committee tabled its report on 4 November 2025.

Advocacy was discussed further in agenda item 7.5.

Agenda Item 9 Minister Update

Members **NOTED** the update provided by the Hon Matt Keogh MP, Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel.

Agenda Item 10 Other Business

Members **DISCUSSED** the various locations of definitions of within veteran related material – particularly what the definition of a 'veteran' is. Deputy Secretary, Veteran, Family, and Stakeholder Experience **NOTED** the comments to provide to DVAs Communications team.

Agenda Item 11 ESORT Communique

Members **NOTED** the Communique will be distributed after meeting.

THE FOLLOWING ITEMS WERE PROVIDED FOR INFORMATION

Agenda Item 12 Home and Community care Update

Agenda Item 13 Legislative Reform Update

Meeting closed at 3:45pm



ESORT Members	
Andrew Kefford PSM	A/g Chair, A/g Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs
Mark Brewer AM CSC / Bar	Deputy President, Repatriation Commission and MRCC Member
Kahlil Fegan DSC AM	Repatriation Commissioner and MRCC Member
Annabelle Wilson	Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, MRCC Member
Cheryl Neal (Proxy)	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans Association
Joe Iervasi AM CSC	Air Force Association
Rod Henderson	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
Bob Hunter	Australian Special Air Service Association
Robynne Mitchell (Proxy)	Australian War Widows Inc
Charlotte Webb	Defence Families Australia
Del Gaudry CSC	Defence Force Welfare Association
RADM Letitia van Stralen AM CSC RAN	Defence People Group
BRIG Michael Annett CSC	Defence Reserves Association
Legatee Mark Lax OAM CSC	Legacy Australia Inc
Isaac Seidi (Proxy)	MRCC Member, Department of Defence
Peter Tinley AM	Returned and Services League of Australia
Michael von Berg MC OAM	Royal Australian Regiment Corporation
Paul Singer CVO	Soldier On
Beverley Benporath	The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc
Scott Jeffrey (Virtual)	TPI Federation Australia
Maxwell Ball	Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia
William Roberts OAM	Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia
Llani Kennealy	Women Veterans Australia Ltd
Other Attendees	
Alison McLaren	Deputy Secretary Veteran, Family and Stakeholder Experience
Tara Cavanagh	A/g Deputy Secretary, Policy and Programs
Brenton Philp	Deputy Secretary, Chief Operating Officer
James Dallas	Younger Veterans – Contemporary Needs Forum (YVF) Representative
Simon Hill	Assistant Secretary, Health Program and Services
Wade Stothart	Director, Office of Australian War Graves
Sarah Kennedy	Assistant Secretary, Commemorations
Stephanie Foster	Senior Director, Mental Health programs
Luke Brown	First Assistant Secretary, Policy and Research
Michael Harper	Assistant Secretary, VEA Compensation and Support
Observers	
Debbie Arnold	First Assistant Secretary, Ministerial, Engagement and Communications
Amanda Conroy	Assistant Secretary, Ministerial, International and Stakeholder Relations

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Sophie Gribbin	Assistant Secretary, Benefits Policy
Rebecca Turner	Director, Commemorations
Keely Dreghorn	Policy and Government Relations, Returned and Services League of Australia
Dr Alison Kaine	Chair, Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
Chris Lowis	National Executive Director, Defence Force Welfare Association
AIRCDRE Kaarin Kooij	Director General, Joint Transition Authority
CDRE Belinda Greenwood	Director General, Joint Transition Authority
Secretariat	
Kristine Stephens	Director, Ministerial, International and Stakeholder Relations
Brad Clarke	Assistant Director, Ministerial, International and Stakeholder Relations
Brendan Corbett	Senior Secretariat Officer, Ministerial, International and Stakeholder Relations
Apologies	
Jenny Gregory OAM	Australian War Widows Inc
Dr Joseph West	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans Association
David Manolas	Naval Association of Australia
RADM Sonya Bennett AM	MRCC Member, Department of Defence
Alison Frame	Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs

Next Meeting – March 2026

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