Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

Ex-Service Organisation Round Table
« ESORT»
Wednesday 23 September 2026

Minutes

Agenda Item 1 Welcome, apologies, conflicts of interest and Secretary's update

The Chair opened the meeting, acknowledged Country, veterans and currently serving Australian Defence Force personnel, and welcomed attendees and observers. Members NOTED apologies as listed in Annexure A and no conflicts of interest were declared.

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

Members **NOTED** the Secretary's update on trust in the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) and recent public commentary about the Department. Members heard that Australia provides a comprehensive veteran support system, with approximately $15 billion spent annually, and that DVA's performance should be assessed across treatment, rehabilitation, wellbeing as well as compensation outcomes.

Members **NOTED** that the median processing time for initial liability claims lodged in the previous 12 months was 99 days. This did not include an additional approximate 43 days spent obtaining medical information. DVA continues to improve its processes and increase its focus on timely access to treatment.

Members **NOTED** that approximately 3,000 veterans had been referred to the tinnitus treatment program. Of the 350 participants who had completed the Tier 1 program, 91% reported that it had made a difference or a significant difference.

Members **DISCUSSED** the importance of constructive communication between DVA, ex-service organisations and the veteran community. Members acknowledged that misinformation and abusive commentary affect staff and can discourage veterans from seeking support.

Agenda Item 2 Action items

Members **NOTED** that the minutes from the previous meeting on 23 March 2026 were endorsed out-of-session and published on the DVA website.

Members **AGREED** to close action items 2025/A09 and 2026/A02.

Members **NOTED** that action items 2020/A27, 2025/A24, A25, A27, and 2026/A01 remain in progress.

Agenda Item 3 Royal Commission Recommendation 89 Update (Peak Body)

Members **NOTED** an update on the proposed national veterans' peak body. Consultation had occurred across states and territories, and the final report was submitted to **DVA on 14 August 2026.**

Members heard that there was broad sector support for progressing the peak body. The proposed peak body would operate independently as a not-for-profit organisation? and support research, policy development and engagement between the veteran sector and federal or state or all levels? government.

Members **NOTED** that the peak body would likely require a mix of membership, government and philanthropic funding for long term sustainability. The proposed establishment process would include appointing an initial board and recruiting a Chief Executive Officer.

Agenda Item 4 Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency

Members **NOTED** an update on the Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency (the Agency) and its role in supporting veterans and families.

Members **DISCUSSED** the Agency's involvement in veteran and family hubs. Arrangements would reflect local circumstances, available facilities and existing services. Organisations can approach the Agency to discuss contributing specialist services without being required to deliver all identified areas of support.

Members heard that the Agency would support wellbeing before and during transition without replacing the existing Defence responsibilities and frameworks.

Members emphasised the importance of co-design, including the involvement of women veterans and their representative organisations. The Agency will coordinate and connect relevant organisations to support this engagement.

Members **AGREED** to include an update on the Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency as a standing agenda item for future meetings.

No.	*Action*	*Assigned to*
2026ESORT/A04	Include an update on the Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency as a standing item.	Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency

Agenda Item 5 Official Historian

Members **NOTED** an update on the Australian Official Histories program, including the status of the current series and challenges associated with the clearance and publication of completed volumes. Members reaffirmed the importance of official histories in documenting the experiences of Australian service personnel and supporting veterans and families to better understand Australia's involvement in military operations.

Members **DISCUSSED** ongoing delays in the clearance and publication process for the Australian Official Histories program. This includes opportunities for ex-service organisations to advocate for the continued publication of the current series and the development of future official histories, noting the importance of maintaining stakeholder interest and support for the program.

Members **AGREED** that correspondence be prepared expressing support for the release of the outstanding volumes and the importance of the Official Histories program to veterans for whom this is an important part of recognition of their service.

No.	*Action*	*Assigned to*
2026ESORT/A05	Draft correspondence expressing support for, and anticipation of, the release of the outstanding Official Histories volumes.	Repatriation Commissioner and Royal Australian Regiment Corporation

Agenda Item 6 Veterans' Review Board Appeals Update

Members **NOTED** a presentation on the role and operations of the Veterans' Review Board.

Members heard that the Board provides independent merit reviews of eligible veteran entitlement decisions and receives more than 4,500 applications annually. Matters may be resolved through alternative dispute resolution or proceed to a Board hearing.

Members **NOTED** that more than 85% of matters were resolved through alternative dispute resolution, with fewer than 15% proceeding to a hearing. The Board set aside the Commission's decision in approximately 35% to 40% of reviewed matters although, this only makes up approximately 0.4% of the total possible reviewable decisions.

Members heard that the set-aside rate was not a direct measure of DVA's original decision-making because the Board could consider new evidence, legislative changes and updated medical information.

Members **AGREED** that the presentation would be distributed.

Agenda Item 7 Trust in DVA

Members **DISCUSSED** opportunities to strengthen trust between DVA, the veteran community and ex-service organisations, including the importance of timely communication, transparency and early engagement.

Members **NOTED** the important role of ESORT members and ex-service organisations in sharing accurate information with the veteran community and supporting constructive engagement with DVA.

Members **DISCUSSED** concerns relating to veterans' engagement with DVA, including inappropriate behaviour towards DVA staff, perceptions of independent medical assessments, the impact of misinformation within the veteran community, and opportunities to improve communication and consultation arrangements. Members emphasised the importance of respectful engagement with DVA staff, clearer communication regarding the roles of veteran's treating GP and DVA-appointed GPs (currently MLCOA), earlier consultation with ESORT on policy matters, and the provision of information that member organisations can share with their stakeholders. Members also **NOTED** that updated guidance regarding treating GPs is available on the DVA website.

Members **NOTED** that material provided to a Senate committee concerning provider profits would be shared with ESORT.

No.	*Action*	*Assigned to*
2026ESORT/A07	Provide members with material supplied to the Senate committee concerning provider profits.	Secretariat

Agenda Item 8 DVA AI Update

Members **NOTED** an update on DVA's pilot of the AI Claims Document Reader. Members heard that the tool supported staff to identify relevant information in large claim files but did not make claims decisions. Delegates remained responsible for reviewing the evidence and making all decisions.

Members **NOTED** the tool operated within DVA's secure environment, used de-identified information and did not retain material for training of the AI model.

Members **DISCUSSED** the need for human oversight, privacy safeguards, workforce consultation and clear public communication and DVA work to ensure this

Members **AGREED** that further engagement would occur as the evaluation progressed.

MEMBER SUBMISSIONS

Agenda Item 9 Allied Health Measure

Members **DISCUSSED** referral arrangements and the role of general practitioners in supporting access to allied health treatment.

Members were advised that the proposed Allied Health Measure had been withdrawn and existing treatment arrangements would continue. Members also **NOTED** the Government's commitment to implement allied health fee increases from 1 July 2027.

Agenda Item 10 Veteran Advocacy

Members **DISCUSSED** the Institute of Veterans' Advocates and the broader veteran advocacy environment.

Members raised concerns about the Institute's development, membership costs, organisational representation and the relationship between advocates and their employing organisations.

Members heard that the Institute was intended to support high-quality advocacy and improve practices across the sector. DVA is also developing a proposed legislative response following consultation associated with a Senate inquiry.

Members **NOTED** that membership arrangements would need to accommodate different organisational structures. Interested members could continue discussions with the Institute on what model best fits their needs.

Agenda Item 11 Unprocessed Claims

Members **NOTED** an update on claims processing, including improvements in initial liability timeframes.

Members heard that approximately 30,000 permanent impairment conditions were awaiting processing, representing approximately 6,500 individual veterans. The volume of claims received had increased by approximately 40%, consistent with expectations arising from legislative changes from 1 July 2026.

Members **DISCUSSED** concerns about older veterans passing before long-running claims were determined. DVA advised that age was considered when assessing vulnerability and that the relevant age threshold has been reduced from 90 to 75 years.

Members **DISCUSSED** the claims system's capacity to respond to a future increase in claims should a major deployment or conflict arise.

UPDATES ON DVA INIATIVES

Agenda Item 12 Prescribing Behaviours of Medicinal Cannabis

Members **NOTED** an update on the medicinal cannabis prescribing framework. The grandparenting arrangement has ended for those who had existing prescriptions, and all new prescriptions must meet the new legislative requirements.

Members **NOTED** that Australian guidelines for the safe and effective prescribing of medicinal cannabis had been published in August 2026 following development by an expert advisory panel in collaboration with the University of New South Wales.

Agenda Item 13 Veterans Chaplaincy

Members **NOTED** an update on the Veterans Chaplaincy Program. This included its role in providing highly trained, non-clinical support to veterans and their families. Members heard that chaplaincy support encompasses support for veterans' broader spiritual health, wellbeing, resilience and recovery. Members also noted the role of chaplaincy in supporting veterans experiencing moral injury. Members noted the ongoing development of this area of support, and the valuable contribution of ex-service organisations and community volunteers in strengthening veteran connections with chaplaincy services.

Agenda Item 14 DVA Updates

Members **NOTED** an update on presumptive liability arrangements, including the process for assessing eligible claims and DVA's aim to determine relevant claims within 14 days.

Members **DISCUSSED** issues relating to Agent Orange exposure and the recognition of associated conditions, including the experiences of veterans who served in different locations.

Members **AGREED** that further discussion occur regarding a proposal relating to conditions associated with Agent Orange exposure.

Agenda Item 15 Other Business

Members **NOTED** progress towards establishing a memorial for personnel killed during training. The National Capital Authority had approved a location on Anzac Parade, and further information would be circulated seeking organisational support.

Members were invited to provide feedback on the rollout of the Building Excellence in Support and Training grants program.

Members also **NOTED** an update on the Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal.

Meeting closed: 3:19pm

ATTENDEE LIST

Annexure A

ESORT Members	
Alison Frame	Chair
Kahlil Fegan DSC AM	Repatriation Commissioner
Dr Joseph West	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans Association
Mr Peter Colliver	Air Force Association
Rod Henderson	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
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
Beverley Benporath	The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc
Mark Lax OAM CSM	Legacy Australia Inc
CAPT Chloe Ryan	JHC, Department of Defence
RADM Letitia Van Stralen AM CSC RAN	Department of Defence
David Manolas	Naval Association of Australia
Hon Peter Tinley AM	Returned and Services League of Australia
Stuart Smith AO DSC	Royal Australian Regiment Corporation
Paul Singer CVO	Soldier On
Colin Benporath	TPI Federation Australia
Max Ball	Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia
William (Bill) Roberts OAM	Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia
Llani Kennealy	Women Veterans Australia Ltd
Other Attendees	
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
Mark Brewer AM CSC and Bar	Department of Veterans' Affairs
James Dallas	Younger Veterans – Contemporary Needs Forum (YVF) Representative
Presenters	
Nick Booth MVO	Special Advisor, National Peak Body Project
Brendan Cox	Chief Executive, Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency
Jane Anderson	Principal Member, Veterans' Review Board
Luke Brown	First Assistant Secretary, Policy and Research Division
Alex Caroly	First Assistant Secretary, Technology, Digital and Data Division
Leonie Nowland	First Assistant Secretary, Open Arms
Samantha Patuto	A/g First Assistant Secretary, Client Benefits Division
Abby Whiting	A/g First Assistant Secretary, Veteran Experience and Commemorations Division
Simon Hill	Assistant Secretary, Health Programs and Services Branch
Kerrie Martain	Assistant Secretary, Program Delivery Division Reform

Alicja Mosbauer	Assistant Secretary, Chief Data and Chief AI Officer, Technology, Digital and Data Division
Donna Thomas	Assistant Secretary, Coordinated Client Support Branch
Cath Haffner	Assistant Secretary, Health and Wellbeing Policy Branch
Archdeacon Andrew Nixon	Director Veterans' Chaplaincy Program
Professor Craig Stockings	Official Historian
Observers	
Debbie Arnold	First Assistant Secretary, Ministerial Engagement and Communications Division
Tara Cavanagh	First Assistant Secretary, Program Delivery Division
Renee Wilson	Families and Veterans Guild
Phil Winter	Returned and Services League of Australia
Kirrily Rashford	Assistant Secretary, Peak Body Project
Noel Mc Laughlin OAM	Chairman, RAAC Corporation
Secretariat	
Tristan Rallings	A/g Director, International and Stakeholder Relations
Deanne Cobb	A/g Assistant Director, International and Stakeholder Relations
Brendan Corbett	Senior Secretariat Officer, International and Stakeholder Relations
Freya Doherty	Secretariat Officer, International and Stakeholder Relations
Shareen Singh	Assistant Director, International and Stakeholder Relations
Elspeth Forster	A/g Assistant Director, International and Stakeholder Relations
Suwanna Danaher	Assistant Director, International and Stakeholder Relations
Apologies	
Joe Iervasi	Air Force Association
Annabelle Wilson	Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner
RADM Sonya Bennett AM RAN	Department of Defence
Colin Radford	Repatriation Commission Member, Comcare
Amanda Conroy	Assistant Secretary, Ministerial International and Stakeholder Relations Branch