MINUTES

# Attendees

|  |
| --- |
| Members  |
| The Hon Darren Chester MP | Minister for Veterans’ Affairs |
| Ms Liz Cosson AM CSC (Chair)  | President, Repatriation Commission and Chair, Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (MRCC) |
| Ms Kate Pope PSM | Deputy President, Repatriation Commission and Member, MRCC  |
| Mr Don Spinks AM | Repatriation Commissioner and Member, MRCC  |
| Ms Gwen Cherne | Veteran Family Advocate |
| Mr Stuart Smith AO DSC | Defence Engagement Commissioner |
| COL James Burns (Proxy) | Member, MRCC  |
| BRIG Craig Schramm (Proxy) | Member, MRCC |
| GPCAPT Carl Schiller OAM CSM (Retd) | Air Force Association |
| Mr Martin Hamilton-Smith (Proxy) | Australian Special Air Service Association |
| Ms Rhondda Vanzella OAM | Australian War Widows Inc |
| Mrs Maree Sirois | Defence Families Australia |
| Mr Kerry Mellor (Proxy) | Defence Force Welfare Association |
| Mr Alf Jaugietis (Proxy) | Defence Force Welfare Association |
| MAJGEN Paul Irving AM PSM RFD (Retd) | Defence Reserves Association |
| Mr Rick Cranna OAM | Legacy Australia Inc |
| LCDR David Manolas RAN Rtd | Naval Association of Australia |
| Ms Narelle Bromhead OAM (Proxy) | Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc |
| MAJGEN Greg Melick AO RFD SC | Returned and Services League of Australia |
| Mr John King | Returned and Services League of Australia |
| Mr Michael von Berg MC OAM | Royal Australian Regiment Corporation |
| Ms Pat McCabe OAM | TPI Federation Australia |
| Mr Max Ball  | Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia |
| Mr William Roberts OAM | Vietnam Veterans’ Federation of Australia |
| Other Attendees |
| Ms Natasha Cole | Acting Deputy Secretary, Veterans and Families Services |
| Ms Liane Pettitt | Assistant Secretary, Parliamentary and Governance Branch  |
| Ms Maureen Evans | Director, Governance and Ministerial Events Section |
| Mr Mark Garrity | Acting First Assistant Secretary, Client Engagement & Support Services |
| Ms Leanne Cameron | First Assistant Secretary |
| Ms Trish Batchelor | Deputy Chief Health Officer |
| Dr Stephanie Hodson CSC | National Manager, Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling |
| Mr Mark Harrigan | Chief Operating Officer |
| Presenters |  |
| Ms Veronica Hancock | First Assistant Secretary, Veterans’ Services Design |
| Ms Alison Hale | Assistant Secretary, Veterans’ Services Design |
| Ms Danielle Cunningham | Assistant Secretary, Veterans’ Services Design |
| Ms Bronwyn Worswick | General Counsel, Legal Services and Audit |
| Ms Sharon Bown | Air Force Association |
| Ms Bliss Jensen | Director, Gallery Development, Australian War Memorial  |
| Mr Matt Anderson PSM | Director, Australian War Memorial |
| Observers |  |
| Mr Scott Warr | Legacy Australia Inc |
| Ms Olivia Mahn | Director, Pharmacy Programs and Operations |
| Mr Neville McCreath | Senior Pharmacy Adviser |
| Ms Kylie Robinson | Acting Assistant Director, Governance Policy |
| Secretariat  |  |
| Ms Tiki Stephens  | Secretariat, Governance and Ministerial Events  |
| Ms Tamsen Gregory | Secretariat, Governance and Ministerial Events |
| Ms Leesa Holyland | Secretariat, Governance and Ministerial Events |
| Ms Kellie-Ann Marsh | Secretariat, Governance and Ministerial Events |
| Apologies  |  |
| Mr Peter Fitzpatrick AO AM | Australian Special Air Service Association |
| Mr Robert Woods | Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans’ Association |
| Mr Kel Ryan | Defence Force Welfare Association |
| Ms Heather Evans | Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc |
| Ms Sue Weston PSM | Member, MRCC |
| RADM Sarah Sharkey CSC | Member, MRCC |
| MAJGEN Natasha Fox AM CSC  | Member, MRCC  |

# 1. Closed Session

# 2. Welcome, Minutes and actions arising

The Chair welcomed members and official observers. The following apologies were noted;

Peter Fitzpatrick **Australian Special Air Services Association**

Robert Woods **Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans’ Association**

Kel Ryan **Defence Force Welfare Association**

Heather Evans **Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc**

Sue Weston **Comcare**, **MRCC**

RADM Sarah Sharkey **Defence**, **MRCC**

MAJGEN Natasha Fox **Defence**, **MRCC**

And the following Proxies were welcomed;

Martin Hamilton-Smith **Australian Special Air Services Association**

Kerry Mellor and Alf Jaugietis **Defence Force Welfare Association**

Narelle Bromhead **Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc**

COL James Burns **Defence**, **MRCC**

The Chair advised members that the Department of Veterans’ Affairs (DVA or Department) has this week met with both the Interim National Commissioner Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention (National Commissioner or NCDVSP), as well as representatives from the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT).

Members agreed that they are supportive of her work to date.

The Chair summarised the agenda and moved on to the action items and Minutes from the previous meeting.

Members **endorsed** the Minutes of the meeting held 26 November 2020, and **agreed** to close Action Items as listed below;

E2020/23

E2020/0048

E2020/0051

E2020/0052

E2020/0053

E2020/0054

E2020/0055

E2020/0056

E2020/0057

E2020/0058

E2020/0001

Members **noted** that the following items remain open;

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Item***  | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to***  |
| E2020/27 | The Defence Reserves Association (DRA) is undertaking further research on the matter with a view to providing advice to DVA and that the matter should be kept Open. | Deputy President’s Group |
| E2020/37 | Out of session working group – Booked Car With Driver. Working Group has been established and has met twice. Further meeting has been scheduled and Report Back will be placed on agenda for next meeting.  | Leanne Cameron / Jenny CottonSecretariat |
| E2020/0049 | Multi – Act Claims. Working Group to meet and report back to next ESORT meeting on ways to assist DVA to define and refine processes for determination of multi-Act Claims | Secretariat  |
| E2020/0059 | Grants In Aid. Report back to next ESORT meeting on work being done to review the program. Can be included in further report back on Grants | Mark Garrity  |
| E2020/0060 | Privacy Provisions – Report back on investigations undertaken to seek client consent to use their contact information to provide them information on behalf of ex-service organisations. | DVA Legal |
| E2021/001 | Productivity Commission Report to remain a standing Agenda Item, with continued updates from the Department on the status of responses to the Recommendations | Secretariat |

# 3. Secretary’s Strategic Update to ESORT

The Chair advised members that DVA will continue to change in response to Veteran Centric Reform, the Productivity Commission (PC) Report andmany reviews and inquiries. The operating model will continue to evolve to deliver efficiencies for DVA and better outcomes for veterans and their families.

### Changes to Veterans Affairs Pharmaceutical Advisory Service (VAPAC)

Acting First Assistant Secretary, Client Engagement and Support Services, Mr Mark Garrity, addressed this item, clarifying the changes to VAPAC.

Members were advised that the change of administration for the VAPAC was not widely communicated to the ex-service community as it simply represented the finalisation of an existing service delivery contract – with no change to service provided. There will be no impact to veterans and their families.

Members thanked Mr Garrity for the advice.

### Chief Health Officer Update – Changes to provision of Clinical Adviser services

DVA Deputy Chief Health Officer, Ms Trish Batchelor, spoke to this item. Ms Batchelor advised that a contract for Bupa to provide the Medical and Health Clinical Advice Services was signed in December 2020. Under the contract, Bupa will be providing a workforce; they have not been contracted to provide health services - veterans will continue to access services from their choice of provider.

Members asked if this process was part of a Tender process. Ms Batchelor confirmed that the contract has been established under the Defence Head contract with Bupa, so no tender was required.

### Open Arms Update

National Manager Open Arms, Dr Stephanie Hodson, addressed this item. Dr Hodson noted that Open Arms has been proactive in identifying and reaching out to those most at risk, and in doing so has been able to assist many more clients. Dr Hodson highlighted that Open Arms provides more than counselling, and has provided assistance ranging from linking clients to appropriate DVA business areas, to assisting them to find housing.

### Strategic workforce planning – DVA Organisational changes

The Chair advised that there would be a departmental re-alignment and summarised the major changes.

# 4. Minister address to ESORT and Q&A

The Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, the Hon Darren Chester MP, addressed Members via GovTeams videoconference, thanking them for their continued advocacy on behalf of the veteran community.

The Minister expressed his continued support for the work of Open Arms in supporting veterans and their families and provided members an update on the Veteran Wellbeing Centres.

The Minister also expressed his support for the Interim NCDVSP; noting that Dr Boss has all the powers of a Royal Commission, with the benefit of being an enduring office.

The Minister also reflected on his relationship with the Secretary and DVA, commenting that more needs to be done to promote the stories of the good work the Department does.

Ms Rhondda Vanzella, **Australian War Widows Inc**, suggested that DVA provide ESOs with talking points as a mechanism to assist them to promote the work of the Department. The Minister acknowledged this suggestion, noting that strategic communication remains a challenge.

The Minister again thanked ESORT members and left the meeting.

The Chair agreed that the Department can do more to assist ESOs with regards to DVA messaging, and advised members that DVA will use the ESORT Secretariat to distribute information and/or talking points regarding impending changes. The Chair undertook to share key messaging from the Audit Performance Report, which will be released prior to the scheduled Senate Additional Estimates hearings in March 2021.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Item***  | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to***  |
| E2021/002 | Secretary to remind DVA business areas to use ESORT Secretariat to distribute communications regarding changes to policies, arrangements and other business matters, to ESORT Members.  | ESORT Secretariat |
| E2021/003 | ESORT Secretariat to distribute key messaging in relation to the release of the Department of Finance Audit Performance Report to ESORT members.  | ESORT Secretariat |

# 5. Shaping the Future – Future Consultative Framework (NCF) – Report back on discussions of Working Group

Repatriation Commissioner, Don Spinks, introduced this item. Members were asked to note the presentations from Working Group members and provide feedback directly to the Chair of the Working Group Chair, GPCAPT Carl Shiller (**Air Force Association**).

Working Group members each presented on their proposed model and the Chair requested that the Working Group reconvene to consider feedback from ESORT members, with a view to providing three proposed models for a consultative framework at the next ESORT meeting in May 2021. After consideration, these models will be presented to the Minister for decision.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Item***  | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to***  |
| E2021/004 | NCF Review Working Group to consider feedback from ESORT members and provide three consultative framework models to the May ESORT meeting.  | Carl Schiller/NCF Review team |

Members sought clarification regarding the scope of the proposed framework, and whether its focus is to be consultative or governance. The Chair advised that the Working Group should be looking at both, in order to address the relevant recommendation in the PC recommendations.

The Chair acknowledged the comments.

# 6. Shaping the Future – Advocacy – Report back on discussions of Working Group

Assistant Secretary, Veterans’ Services Design, Alison Hale addressed this item, recapping the Advocacy Models discussed by the Working Group.

Mr Max Ball, **Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia**, expressed his support for Option One, with the addition that it should encompass all claims, and not just those that required review.

The Chair acknowledged the comment and agreed that Advocacy has been a long standing concern for both DVA and ESOs. The Chair advised that the Interim NCDVSP had asked why Advocates were required, and was advised the complexity of the legislation required skilled advocates to assist veterans.

Members discussed the recent development of Advocates charging for services.

The Chair noted that any new model would require funding and the associated offsets and members agreed that there was no way to value the altruistic benefits of veterans helping other veterans.

Members also queried the rationale for looking at new models, and the Chair agreed, noting a preference to strengthen the grants process for Advocates, while moving away from the Building Excellence in Supporting and Training grants (BEST) model.

# 7. Shaping the Future – Legislative Reform – Report back on discussions of Working Group

The Chair clarified the implications of the Productivity Commission’s recommendation that DVA move to two Acts. Noting that this, in effect, meant removing the Service Differential between war-like and non war-like service, and the different eligibility criteria associated with each.

The Chair thanked the **Defence Force Welfare Association** for their work to illuminate the detail of the Recommendation, and their instructive description of the different aims of Operational and non-Operational Service and its impact on casualties.

General Counsel, Bronwyn Worswick, then spoke to this item, summarising the discussion of the Working Group.

Members agreed that moving forward with an Administrative Act would detract from harmonisation of the existing Acts, noting that any changes to legislation would need to consider, and have contingency for, future deployments.

The Chair acknowledged the comments and noted that this highlighted the importance of the role of the Commissioner for Defence Engagement, to inform government of the full cost of deployment – including the long tail.

# 8. Australian War Memorial Redevelopment update

Director of the Australian War Memorial (AWM), Mr Matt Anderson, and Director Gallery Development, Ms Bliss Jensen, addressed members and provided an update on the status of the Redevelopment Project.

Permission from members was sought for Memorial staff to be provided mail addresses in order to distribute hard copies of information booklets. No member raised any objection.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Item***  | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to***  |
| E2021/005 | ESORT Secretariat to provide ESORT member address details to AWM to facilitate the provision of information booklets and other materials related to the AWM Redevelopment, and information regarding online community forums.  | ESORT Secretariat |
| E2021/006 | Secretariat to include further AWM Redevelopment update on agenda for next ESORT.  | ESORT Secretariat |

# 9. Open Session – Below the Line Items

Members were provided the opportunity for further discussion on papers provided for items Below the Line.

### Member Submissions - Claims Processing and staffing

The Chair advised that DVA will continue to go back to government for supplementary funding to address concerns around staffing levels, noting the steady increase in demand for DVA services as result of more awareness and early intervention/treatment.

The Chair acknowledged ESOs frustration and undertook to provide an updated breakdown of staffing.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Item***  | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to***  |
| E2021/007 | ESORT Secretariat to distribute updated breakdown of DVA staffing categories to members.  | ESORT Secretariat |

# 9. Other Business

Ms Narelle Bromhead, **Partners of Veterans Association of Australia**, requested a comprehensive list of claimable items through BEST for Wellbeing Advocates.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Item***  | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to***  |
| E2021/008 | ESORT Secretariat distribute a list of items able to be claimed under BEST for Wellbeing Advocates.  | ESORT Secretariat |
| E2021/009 | ESORT Secretariat to distribute information on future Budget Measure – Superannuation Stapling | ESORT Secretariat |

# Meeting Close

The Chair thanked members, and the meeting closed at 1:45pm.