



## Minutes

### Agenda Item 1 Welcome, apologies and conflicts of interest

The Chair opened the meeting, welcoming attendees, noting membership changes and representation arrangements for the meeting, as well as apologies received. Details are listed at **Annexure A**. 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 resignation of GCAPT Carl Schiller OAM CSM (Retd) from the Ex-Service Organisation Round Table (ESORT) and the Chair thanked GCAPT Schiller for his contribution to the forum.

### Agenda Item 2 Action Items

Members **NOTED** that the 28 February 2024 ESORT Minutes were endorsed out of session on 27 March 2024 and published on the DVA website on 7 May 2024.

Members **AGREED** to close Action Items 2023ESORT/A27, A29, A32 and A33, 2024ESORT/A01, A03, A04, A05, A06 and A08.

Members **NOTED** E2020/27, 2022 ESORT/A36, 2023ESORT/A28, A39, A47, 2024ESORT/A02, A07 and A09 remain in progress.

Members **AGREED** that wording of 2023ESORT/A47 would be amended to refer to a progress report on advocacy rather than final report

Members **DISCUSSED** 2023ESORT/A28 and a current state issue where certain companies not recognising widows and their entitlements. Members **NOTED** that DC Queensland (QLD) is aware of the issue and the Chair would write to Veteran Affairs in QLD to further investigate the issue.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2024ESORT/A10	Relating to 2023ESORT/A28 – DVA Secretary to write to Veteran Affairs in Queensland to further investigate the use of wholly dependent partner and 'widow' to ensure entitlements can be accessed.	Legislative Reform

### Agenda Item 3 Secretary's Update

Members received an update on from the Secretary on DVA priorities. Members **NOTED** the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide will be presented to Government in September 2024. Members **DISCUSSED** the potential for an extraordinary Ex-Service Organisation Round Table (ESORT) to be held to discuss the recommendations. Members **NOTED** the Senior Executive leadership were being engaged across the Department on how to best position to respond to recommendations with a short turnaround.

Members **NOTED** the update on claims processing and the shift in the claims focus from the unallocated backlog to ensuring claims are determined in a timely manner.

Members **NOTED** the incoming Governor General and the opportunities to engage on veteran issues.

The Chair reminded members of the importance of Chatham House rules to enable the sharing of information and allow for robust and open discussions during ESORT meetings. Members **AGREED** to honour these rules to ensure the Terms of Reference of ESORT are upheld. Members also **NOTED** that the Communique will be shared with members in the meeting, and cleared as a group for distribution immediately following the meeting to ensure members can share the key outcomes from ESORT with their members as soon as possible following the meeting.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2024ESORT/A11	Hard copies of the final Royal Commission Report to be provided to ESORT members when available.	Royal Commission Reviews & Inquiries
2024ESORT/A12	Extraordinary ESORT to be convened to discuss the Royal Commission recommendations once released in September, with an open letter from ESORT to the Royal Commission to be developed.	Secretariat

#### Agenda Item 4 Legislative Reform Update

Members **NOTED** at the 28 February 2024 meeting that the Exposure Draft Bill had just been released, with the second round of consultation finishing on 28 April 2024. Members **DISCUSSED** the extensive engagement during the consultation period and the feedback received, with 26 face to face and virtual meetings held. Members **NOTED** broad support for the bill and moving to a single ongoing Act was received, with issues raised on the operation of current Acts.

#### Agenda Item 5 Advocacy Update

Members **NOTED** the update on Advocacy and the current work underway with the Advocacy Working Group. Members **DISCUSSED** the Working Group's view of a company structure as the preferred option and **NOTED** the focus on how they can ensure proper training of advocates and set standards for behaviour and training. Members **NOTED** there is still work to finalise the approach being recommended to the Government by ESORT, including the potential constitution and by-laws. Members also **NOTED** that it is a decision for Government on the potential adoption and funding of advocacy reform.

Members **NOTED** the importance to align with Legislative Reform to ensure advocates are supported with the change to a single ongoing Act.

Members **NOTED** a detailed implementation plan would be developed and provided to ESORT.

#### Agenda Item 6 Update on medical expense privately incurred (MEPI) processes

Members **NOTED** the paper provide on Medical Expense Privately Incurred (MEPI) processes and the options provided to improve the process. Members **DISCUSSED** the options and **AGREED** that more work would occur on option two to address urgency issues and exceptional circumstances, prior to a paper being provided to the Repatriation Commission/Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (RC/MRCC).

#### Agenda Item 7 Hearing Services

Members **NOTED** the DVA Hearing and Wellbeing Survey will be available online in late May 2024 and a print version in June 2024 to provide advice to the Department on how hearing and wellbeing has been improved since receiving a device.

Members **DISCUSSED** the review of hearing services administered by the Department of Health and Aged Care (DoHAC). Members **NOTED** that DoHAC have advised that veterans were a significant cohort in responding and providing feedback, with a second consultation phase to comment later in the year.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2024ESORT/A13	If privacy permits, ESORT members to be provided with a copy of the Hearing Services Program (HSP) Survey results.	Program Delivery

#### Agenda Item 8 Enhancing Access to Mental Health Services

Members **DISCUSSED** the limited access to mental health services in regional areas, and the lack of veteran identifiers makes it difficult to track. Members **NOTED** the pilot in Tasmania where a veteran identifier question has been established in state based mental health services, allowing wider access to Open Arms. Members **NOTED** this is a national first that is intended to be rolled out more broadly.

Members **DISCUSSED** making a fundamental change to the access to Open Arms by running a suite of courses based around trans-diagnostic interventions which will be peer and clinical led. Veterans will be able to go through a group program, after which they will have a better understanding of specific treatments they may need. Members **NOTED** that a separate set of programs will be offered for families, to assist in the development of a common language to discuss issues and treatments.

#### Agenda Item 9 Claims Processing Update

Members **DISCUSSED** the current claims processing status, and **NOTED** the shift in focus to claims being determined and reducing old claims is the focus for the remainder of the financial year. Members **NOTED** the record number of determinations for this financial year.

Members were **ADVISED** that MyService enhancements will allow for claims lodged post October 2023 to have a status update on MyService so veterans are able to access this at any time.

Members were assured that the time taken to process remains a focus and **NOTED** the work underway to contemplate if there is scope for prioritising claims based on severity of injury overall.

#### Agenda Item 10 Release of client information to Ex-Service Organisations

Members **DISCUSSED** the review made to the privacy legislation and **NOTED** that DVA are no longer able to provide partner information to Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs) when a veteran passes away due to privacy concerns. DVA has amended the approach to offering a list of organisations and contact details to assist partners and families of veterans. DVA **ACKNOWLEDGED** this is a sensitive issue and the constraints, however legislation must be abided.

Members **AGREED** options will be explored to help mitigate this issue, and provide alternative options in order to continue to advise of potential support services after a bereavement.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2024ESORT/A14	DC South Australia to follow up with Australian War Widows, Legacy and TPI Federation to discuss further options for release of client information to Ex-Service Organisations. Advice to be provided back to ESORT on further options.	Client Benefits
2024ESORT/A15	Solider On to be included in the list of organisations provided to partners when a veteran passes to provide services and support.	Client Benefits

#### Agenda Item 11 Research and Evaluation Update

Members were updated on a new Division within DVA to gather functions together and build strong links with the research sector. Members **NOTED** that DVA is looking to engage a partner through a tender process for research purposes and **DISCUSSED** the links to Five Eyes and research done by the Five Eyes partners. DVA **NOTED** the suggestion to engage the Operational Working Party (OWP) as a mechanism for determining priority areas.

#### Agenda Item 12 Other Business

Members were encouraged to raise any other business.

The Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia questioned the need for the current tender process for the Australian Veterans' Children Assistance Trust (AVCAT). DVA **ACKNOWLEDGED** this, **ADVISING** that the tender process was needed in order to ensure compliance with government procurement requirements going forward.

Lived Experience was raised by the Australian War Widows Association and members **AGREED** that an update would be provided at the August 2024 meeting on the work underway.

TPI Federation raised the issues of Veteran Liaison Officers (VLOs) in public hospitals. DVA **ACKNOWLEDGED** the concern and **NOTED** that the issue will be raised at the next Commonwealth State and Territory meeting. DVA **AGREED** to continue to provide updates to ESORT on progress with this.

Members were provided an opportunity to review and discuss the communique, with members making slight amendments and **AGREEING** to the communique to be circulated immediately following the meeting.

No.	Action	Assigned to
2024ESORT/A16	Lived Experience item to be included for discussion at the 27 August 2024 ESORT meeting.	Secretariat

**BELOW THE LINE – To be discussed by exception**

**Agenda Item 13      Aged Care Update**

Members **NOTED** the information paper provided on Aged Care.

**Meeting closed: 5:45pm**

ESORT Members	
Ms Alison Frame	Chair, President, Repatriation Commission and Chair, Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (MRCC)
Mr Mark Brewer AM CSC and Bar	A/g Deputy President, Repatriation Commission and MRCC Member
Mr Kahlil Fegan DSC AM	Repatriation Commissioner and MRCC Member
Ms Gwen Cherne	Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, MRCC Member
DGJTA AIRCDRE Kaarin Kooij	MRCC, Department of Defence ( <b>proxy</b> )
Mr Rick Moor	Australian Special Air Service Association ( <b>proxy</b> )
Mr William (Bill) Roberts OAM JP	Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia
BRIG Michael Annett CSC	Defence Reserves Association
Ms Pat McCabe OAM	TPI Federation Australia
Ms Bev Benporath	The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc
Ms Jenny Gregory OAM	Australian War Widows Inc
Mr Max Ball	Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia
Mr David Manolas	Naval Association of Australia
Ms Amy Cooper	Soldier On
GCAPT Carl Schiller OAM CSM (Retd)	Air Force Association
Mr Mike von Berg MC OAM	Royal Australian Regiment Corporation
LT COL Chris Moss	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association ( <b>proxy</b> )
Mr (Legatee) Wayne McNee	Legacy Australia Inc
MAJGEN Greg Melick AO RFD SC	Returned and Services League of Australia
Ms Del Gaudry CSC	Defence Force Welfare Association
Other Attendees	
Mr Andrew Kefford PSM	Deputy Secretary Policy & Programs
Ms Teena Blewitt PSM	Deputy Secretary Client Benefits and Chief Operating Officer
Ms Alison McLaren	Deputy Secretary Veteran, Family & Stakeholder Experience
Mr James Dallas	Younger Veterans – Contemporary Needs Forum (YVF) Representative
Presenters	
Mr Luke Brown	First Assistant Secretary, Policy – <i>Item 4</i>
Ms Victoria Benz	Assistant Secretary, Health Program and Services – <i>Item 6</i>
Ms Moira Campbell	Assistant Secretary, Program Delivery – <i>Item 7</i>
Dr Jonathan Lane	Medical Advisor – <i>Item 8</i>
Ms Leonie Nowland	First Assistant Secretary, Open Arms – <i>Item 8</i>
Ms Natasha Cole	First Assistant Secretary, Client Benefits – <i>Items 9 &amp; 10</i>
Ms Janice Silby	Assistant Secretary, Income Support – <i>Item 10</i>
Ms Veronica Hancock	First Assistant Secretary, Research, Evaluation and Data – <i>Item 11</i>
Observers	
Mr Shane L	Senior Project Officer, Wellbeing Programs and Rehabilitation – <i>Item 6</i>
Ms Kristi L	Director, Care and Assistance Programs – <i>Item 7</i>
Ms Sarah A	Assistant Director, Care and Assistance Programs – <i>Item 7</i>
Ms Liane Pettitt	A/g First Assistant Secretary, Ministerial, Engagement & Communications
Apologies	

OFFICIAL

Defence Families Australia	No replacement
MAJGEN Wade Stothart DSC AM CSC	MRCC, Department of Defence
RADM Sonya Bennett	MRCC, Department of Defence
Mr Ian Lindgren	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association
The Hon Martin Hamilton-Smith	Australian Special Air Service Association
<b>Secretariat</b>	
Ms Morgan S	A/g Assistant Director, International & Stakeholder Relations
Ms Kaitlyn G	Secretariat Officer, International & Stakeholder Relations