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| **Meeting 2 with ESO Round Table Members on BEST** | |
|  | **RECORD OF MEETING** |

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| ***Venue*: Conference Room**  **Level 9, Lovett Tower**  ***Date:* Tuesday, 24 January 2012** | **Meeting No. 16** |

**Meeting Attendees**

**Minister Snowdon’s Office**

Ms Catherine Bergin Minister’s Veterans’ Affairs Advisor

**Commission Members**

Mr Ian Campbell  Secretary, Department of Veterans’ Affairs

President, Repatriation Commission

Chairman, Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission

**ESO Round Table Members**

Mrs Audrey Blood OAM War Widows’ Guild of Australia

Mr Greg Blyth Australian Federation of Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Ex-Servicemen and Women

Mrs Narelle Bromhead Partners of Veterans Association of Australia

Mr Ron Coxon OAM Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia

RADM Ken Doolan AO RAN (Retd) Returned and Services League of Australia

COL David Jamison AM (Retd) Defence Force Welfare Association

LTCOL David Lewis AM (Retd) Australian Special Air Services Association

Mr Tim McCombe OAM Vietnam Veterans’ Federation of Australia

AVM Roxley McLennan AO Royal Australian Air Force Association

Mr Allan Thomas JP Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans’ Association

Mr Michael von Berg MC Royal Australian Regiment Corporation

**Proxies**

Mr Colin Doust Australian Veterans and Defence Services Council

Mr Les Dwyer Naval Association of Australia

CDRE Nick Helyer MBE RANR Legacy Australia Council

**Other ESO representatives**

Ms Pat Cleggett Partners of Veterans Association of Australia

Mr John Hodges Returned and Services League of Australia

Mr Graham Walker Vietnam Veterans’ Federation of Australia

**DVA Participants**

Mr Sean Farrelly General Manager, Support Division

Ms Peta Stevenson National Manager, Research, Grants & Consultation Coordination Group

Ms Danielle Cunningham Acting Director, Grants Review and TIP

**Secretariat**

Mr David Hollaway Director, National Consultation Secretariat

Ms Brooke Ellis National Consultation Secretariat

**Observer**

Ms Cindy Osborne Acting Assistant Director, Grants Review and TIP

Mr Bill Clisby Executive Officer, Repatriation Commission

**Apologies**

RADM Ian Crawford AO AM (Mil) RAN (Retd) Australian Veterans and Defence Services Council

Mr Russell Pettis FAIM Naval Association of Australia

Mr Charles Wright Legacy Australia Council

**Item 1: Opening and Introduction**

Mr Farrelly opened the meeting at 9:00am and welcomed members. He noted apologies from

RADM Ian Crawford, Mr Russell Pettis and Mr Charles Wright.

**Item 2****: Minutes and Action Items**

The minutes were accepted without amendment.

It was noted by Mr Farrelly that all action items from the 9 December 2011 meeting were completed.

**Item 3.1: BEST – Assessment of Round 13 Data**

Mr Farrelly advised that the manner in which DVA collects BEST application data is manually intensive. The accuracy of the data is entirely dependent on the information provided by applicants in their application forms. DVA has no means of verifying the data being submitted.

Members noted the information contained in the BEST Round 13 assessment sheets that were provided in Members’ papers prior to the meeting. It was agreed that DVA will need to develop appropriate computer systems to facilitate some checking of the data supplied in BEST applications.

**Item 3.2: BEST – Funding Formula Options**

The matter of how to measure workload attributed to assisting veterans that reside outside Australia was raised. Members agreed that the focus of the meeting should be on BEST Round 14 and Australian veterans.

There was discussion on a paper entitled “*BEST Funding Formula Options*” with the following aspects that requiring consideration for BEST Round 14:

1. the differences in the way that applicants count their workload. Some count the number of claims submitted and others count the number of conditions for all Acts;
2. the different cost structures within ESOs and the concern over using a cost per claim model for the allocation of BEST funds;
3. whether workload should be the method for assessing applications and allocating funds;
4. whether the model for allocating funds should remain unchanged, be modelled on the Victorian Veterans Centre model or become a national model where State/Territory boundaries, and hence State/Territory allocations, be removed; and
5. which funding formula option presented in the paper is preferred and why.

Members agreed that:

1. there should be clear definitions for all types of practitioners and activities that form the basis of a BEST application (see also discussion at Agenda Item 3.5 – Statement of Definitions);
2. while the cost per claim data is meaningful, it may not be usable for the purposes of allocating funds;
3. while workload is a sensible measure for the purposes of assessing BEST applications, it is not the only measure to be used;
4. when considering a future model, “one size may not fit all” and that while the future model could become a national model based on workload for BEST Round 14 funds will continue to initially be allocated at a State/Territory level; and
5. they would consider the funding formula options contained in the paper and advise their preferred option and reasons.

**Item 3.3: BEST – Weightings**

Ms Stevenson spoke about the potential use of weightings to be applied against each type of workload. Members discussed the merits of a weightings approach and agreed that this would be a sensible way to determine a common measure for workload across all ESOs. She acknowledged the proposed weightings were based on a proposal received from the Vietnam Veterans’ Association of Australia, NSW branch.

Members discussed the weightings provided in the paper and agreed the following weightings were appropriate if a funding formula approach was to be adopted:

* SRCA primary claim – 1.0
* VEA primary claim – 2.0 (includes single or multiple conditions)
* MRCA primary claim – 3.0 (includes single or multiple conditions)
* Multi-Act claims – 4.0 (must include MRCA)
* MRCA Internal Reviews – 3.0
* VRB Appeals – 15.0
* AAT Appeals – 20.0
* Service Pensions – 3.0
* Applications For Increase (AFI) – 1.0

It was noted that the weighting for VRB Appeals included all the work up to and including the appearance at the VRB hearing, and associated Section 31 Review workload.

**Item 3.4: BEST – Role of ESOs**

There was considerable discussion about the current roles of some State branches in the application lodgement process e.g. in Victoria, the RSL and VVAA State branches review all Regional Veteran Centres Project (RVCP) applications with applicants prior to the applications being lodged. It was noted that this does not happen in all States/Territories. It was suggested that the State/Territory Consultative Forums, hosted by the Deputy Commissioners, could be a good place to consider grant assessments. It was noted that State and Territory branches should have an understanding of the business operations of their sub-branches and, where appropriate, ESOs at the State/Territory level should play a role in ensuring that applications are justified.

Members agreed it would be useful if they reviewed the BEST Round 14 assessments prior to them being submitted to the Minister and provide comments for the consideration of the Minister.

The need for beneficiary based State/Territory based allocations was raised if a funding formula was introduced. It was agreed that more analysis on the funding formula approach needed to be undertaken before it could be fully implemented. It as also agreed that State/Territory funding allocations would remain for BEST Round 14 until there was greater confidence in the data included in BEST applications.

**Item 3.5: BEST – Statement of Definitions**

Members discussed the definitions attached to the BEST application form and assessment processes. The definitions as revised and agreed are at Attachment A.

**Item 3.6: BEST – Round 14**

Members raised the issue of whether new applicants should be considered in BEST Round 14. It was noted that under a formula-based approach, all applicants workload would be assessed. It was agreed that, subject to availability of funds, new applications from new BEST applicants would be included in the assessment for BEST Round 14 funding subject to justification.

It was noted the draft BEST Round 14 timeline as presented in papers allowed for one additional week for applicants to discuss their applications with State/Territory branch representatives.

**Item 3.2: BEST – Communication with Stakeholders**

It was agreed that a communiqué would be sent to stakeholders advising them that DVA and national ESOs are continuing to work together on an approach for future BEST funding. The communiqué would also provide stakeholders with details of what was agreed at this meeting.

**Action Items**

The following action items were recorded:

Action Item 1: DVA will update the Statement of Definitions for BEST Round 14.

Action Item 2: Members will review the Funding Formula Options Paper and provide comments on their preferred option by cob Wednesday, 1 February 2012, to Ms Cunningham.

Action Item 3: DVA will provide feedback to members on the preferred options.

**Item 4: Other Business**

Ms Stevenson raised the possibility of issuing Practitioner and ESO identifiers to assist in recording and reporting on workload. It was noted that DVA systems, as well as VPAD, would need to be enhanced to allow for this functionality and this would take some time. In general, members agreed with the concept.

Mr Lewis queried the role of On Base Advisory Service (OBAS) advisors. He advised that many serving members in Western Australia are attempting to complete their own claims without assistance from the ex-service community. Ms Stevenson advised that OBAS advisors are not assisting serving members to fill in claim forms. Their role is to explain entitlements, what the requirements are for lodging claims and who they may seek assistance from, including ESO practitioners.

**Item 5: Meeting Summary and close**

Mr Campbell thanked members for attending the meeting at short notice. Members expressed their continued support for this collaborative approach to solving a key issue for the ex-service community. In closing the meeting, Mr Campbell advised that the next ESO Round Table meeting would be on Wednesday, 21 March 2012.

**Attachment A**

**Building Excellence in Support and Training**

**(BEST) Grants Program**

**Statement of Definitions**

The Application Form for BEST grant funding requests statistical information on the workload of practitioners, both paid and voluntary.

To achieve consistency across all applications for workload statistics, the following definitions are provided to enable applicants to more clearly identify and categorise the work carried out by practitioners as required on the application form.

Definitions are also provided for those activities conducted by welfare officers that are eligible under BEST funding criteria.

Workload Statistics

Workload statistics are counted for the financial year as stated on the application form and/or on the six and twelve monthly reports.

Note: Claims statistics under the Commonwealth legislation below are for the number of primary claims and do **not** include counts of individual conditions.

Under the *Veterans’ Entitlements Act 1986*

1. Primary Claims – the number of VEA Disability Pension and War Widow(er)s Pension submitted to DVA during the reporting period.
2. Applications for Increase (AFI) – the number of AFIs submitted to DVA during the reporting period.
3. Veterans’ Review Board (VRB) Appeals – the number of appeals to the VRB lodged during the reporting period.
4. Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) – the number of AAT cases lodged during the reporting period.
5. Income Support claims, including Qualifying Service and Income Support Supplement.

Under the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004*

1. Primary Claims – the number of primary MRCA claims lodged with DVA during the reporting period.
2. Reviews – the number of MRCA reviews lodged during the reporting period.
3. Veterans’ Review Board Appeals – the number of MRCA appeals to the VRB lodged during the reporting period.

Under the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988*

1. Primary Claims – the number of primary SRCA claims open and lodged with DVA during the reporting period.

Welfare Activities

The number of hours to provide welfare support under the following categories:

* Visits - including the number of metropolitan and or country, home, hospital, aged care facility visits for emergencies, support and professional assistance.
* Bereavement/Funerals – including providing referral assistance, support for bereavement issues and assistance with funeral arrangements.
* Housing/Accommodation – including providing advice on issues related to rentals, ownership, care facilities, emergencies, income and assets.
* Problem/Crises – including providing referrals for medical, financial, legal and police matters and providing advice on simple resolutions.
* Transport – including providing advice on DVA eligibility, resources and benefits and community agencies, resources and benefits.

**Action Items – 9 December 2011**

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| **Action Item** | **Agenda Item** | **Action** | **Responsibility** | **Status** |
| **1** | **2 and 3** | DVA will provide a set of clear definitions for BEST Round 14. | Mr Farrelly | Completed. Emailed to members 22 December 2011. |
| **2** | **2 and 3** | DVA will advise the timeline for Round 14 applications. | Mr Hollaway | Completed. Emailed to members 22 December 2011. |
| **3** | **2 and 3** | DVA will advertise outcomes from the ‘collaborative way forward’ on the website. | Secretariat | Completed. Website updated on 15 December 2011. |
| **4** | **2 and 3** | DVA will provide BEST Round 13 information to members prior to the next meeting. | Mr Hollaway | Completed. Emailed to members 22 December 2011. |
| **5** | **2 and 3** | Minutes will be distributed prior to the Christmas break. | Secretariat | Completed. Emailed to members 22 December 2011. |