

Peak Body 2025 consultation | Stakeholder insights

Thank you for your participation in the recent consultations on an ex-service organisation¹ Peak Body (the Peak Body). During these consultations, we learnt more about what is important to the veteran and family community and ESO sector.

The purpose of this document is to share back what we heard during these sessions.

The outcomes, together with insights on best practice and advice from subject matter experts, will be taken forward into series of co-design workshops to continue the design of option of the Peak Body.

1.1 Background

In 2024, consultation occurred with the ESO sector which included research into best practice peak bodies. This was used to develop 4 high-level draft options for a Peak Body design. The final 2024 report is available on the DVA website.

As part of this work, it was identified what veterans and families, the ESO sector, and DVA need from a Peak Body. These needs are described in Figure .

Figure 1 | Key needs identified by sector stakeholders

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| <p>Veterans and families have voiced they need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A higher quality of service delivery through member organisations.• Easier systems for veterans and families to understand what organisations exist, and where they may receive benefit from membership.• Ways and opportunities to connect with other veterans and families through social forums and other avenues. | <p>The ESO sector has voiced it needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A united voice to DVA and the government more broadly.• Balanced representation in consultative fora.• More effective collaboration between ESOs, specifically those who are delivering similar services to their members.• Guidance and standardisation of service expectations and delivery.• Better connectivity to veterans, particularly those not already affiliated with an ESO. | <p>DVA has voiced it needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A streamlined way to communicate with the sector.• Stronger collaboration efforts between the Department and the sector.• A way to improve service standards across the ESO sector.• A more productive relationship between the Department and the sector. |
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1.2 Insights from 2025 consultations

In April 2025, consultations occurred with over 120 stakeholders from ESOs, the veteran community, peak bodies, and DVA around Australia. This section identifies key insights from these consultations and how they build upon what we learnt in 2024.

¹ While we use the term ex-service organisations (ESO) in alignment with the Royal Commission recommendations, this is considered inclusive of veteran and family support organisations that provide a voice to Government for the veteran community, and support needs of families of current and former ADF personnel. We know that many in the veteran community view the term ESO as not representative of all the organisations that may or should be members of the Peak Body. The final name of the Peak Body name is to be determined.

Vision

The vision is the long term aspiration of the Peak Body.

Stakeholders broadly aligned on the Peak Body's vision including that it should be an independent and collective voice for the ESO sector, and represent the diversity of ESOs and the veteran and family community.

Many stakeholders said fragmentation was a key challenge for the sector.

Consultations highlighted four distinct elements of what the vision for the Peak Body should include:

- be trusted and independent
- unify the sector around a common purpose
- reflect the diversity of ESOs, veterans and families
- be 'more than a talkfest' and demonstrate real outcomes for the veteran and family community

What we heard in 2025 consultations re-emphasised the 2024 consultation outcomes and the draft Peak Body options, providing clarity on what is important to stakeholders.

Purpose

Purpose defines why the Peak Body exists and articulates its role and the value it delivers.

The **majority of stakeholders** said the following were core for the Peak Body:

- advocate with a collective voice to government
- set service standards and drive accountability
- support collaboration and uplift sector capability
- identify and address current and future challenges

Discussions on service standards and capability commonly raised concerns about the absence of a verification process for what qualifies as an ESO, and varying definitions for what is an ESO.

Other purposes identified included to:

- enhance coordination among ESOs to reduce barriers to services
- evaluate the effectiveness of existing initiatives
- simplify pathways for veterans and families to find the right support. Several stakeholders said service navigation resources already exist in the sector and the Peak Body should leverage these resources if it is to play a role in simplifying pathways.

A wide range of stakeholders said the Peak Body **should not:**

- act as a regulatory authority over ESOs
- act as a gatekeeper for ESO legitimacy without transparency
- undertake claims advocacy
- deliver services to individual veterans or family members.

What we heard in 2025 consultations on purpose closely aligns with what we heard in 2024 and the draft Peak Body options. The main difference was service navigation, which was previously considered a core purpose.

Key functions

Stakeholders said the Peak Body's functions should include to:

- advocate on policy
- set service standards to influence sector quality and reform
- facilitate communication between ESOs and government
- build trust and collaboration in the sector
- support accreditation or evaluation of ESOs, services or programs.

Stakeholders broadly agreed that the Peak Body should take a lead role in coordinating input from across the ESO landscape and to facilitate an environment where all voices are heard, including minority voices such as smaller ESOs and those representing minority groups.

Stakeholders had mixed views on the Peak Body supporting accreditation of ESOs. Some stakeholders said this was valuable to increase the quality of veteran services and ESO governance and administration, while others said this would be extra "red tape" and create a burden for the sector.

What we heard in 2025 consultations on functions closely aligns with what we heard in 2024 and the draft Peak Body options. The main difference was less support for an accreditation function. In 2025 consultations, this was only supported by some stakeholders, some stakeholders said it was not appropriate and others said it should be replaced with an evaluation function.

User experience

Stakeholders broadly agreed that ESOs (and other veteran community support organisations) should be the main users of the Peak Body. They said other key users would be government and the broader veteran community.

Stakeholders agreed that the typical and ideal user experience should ensure the Peak Body:

- can be a **trusted** organisation that provides a **sense of unity**
- is a **go to source** of **tailored** and **timely** information
- **supports and guides** member organisations to serve the veteran community
- supports a **collaborative** culture among members
- supports access to **subject matter expertise**
- provides a **conduit** between the government and members
- demonstrates **value for money** to obtain buy-in from the ESO sector and veteran community

Previous design efforts on the Peak Body did not explore user experience in depth, however across 2024 and 2025 consultations stakeholders identified some persisting themes including the desire for a collaborative environment through a trusted organisation that supports and guides the sector.

Funding options

Stakeholders said that funding options could include government funding, membership fees, fees for appropriate services (e.g. any capability building services), and philanthropic funding, though stakeholders had varying views on which funding sources were most appropriate. Some stakeholders raised concerns that Government funding would impact, or be perceived to impact, independence of the Peak Body; that membership fees could be burdensome for small ESOs and need to demonstrate value for money; and that philanthropic funding might create competition between ESOs and the Peak Body.

What we heard in 2025 consultations on funding options closely aligns with what we heard in 2024. However there was more emphasis placed on the risks of using each source of funding.

Governance

While governance models were not a specific topic of discussion during 2025 consultations, stakeholders shared **diverse opinions** on Peak Body membership, board membership and supporting committees and other fora.

Stakeholders broadly agreed there is a need for **diverse representation, transparency** in membership and decisions, as well as a need to **avoid bureaucracy**. This included:

- Stakeholders consistently emphasised **the Peak Body must be genuinely representative of the breadth and diversity of the veteran community** – not just a platform for dominant voices or established ESOs. This also included diversity across the ESO community and diversity in the expertise to be reflected in the Peak Body board.
- It was widely indicated that **elected representation should be diverse but not bureaucratic** and enable input from experts on veteran and family community support. Stakeholders shared differing views on the inclusion of for-profit organisations, with many ESO and veteran community members suggesting exclusion, while others saying the expertise and contributions of all ESOs is valuable regardless of their business model.

What we heard in 2025 consultations on governance broadly aligns with what we heard in 2024 and the draft Peak Body options. However, some key themes were more persistent in 2025. In particular that governance structures must represent the diversity, depth and breadth of the sector, as well as ensuring the governance structures and processes are transparent and fair. The main persisting concern was that unfair structures will allow larger and more dominant voices to retain power without reflecting the needs of the rest of the sector.

Risks

Stakeholders consistently identified many risks. We have categorised these into three categories: representation, validity, and operational risks.

Representation risks include:

- Dominance of influential players in the sector.
- A lack of representation where the diversity of sector is not reflected in the Peak Body.
- Duplication of existing forums leading to further inefficiencies in the sector.
- Not seen as value for money by the sector and therefore leading to reduced buy in.

Risks

Validity risks include:

- There is a risk that the Peak Body could be or be seen to be overly influenced by Government.
- A lack of transparency in all elements of decision making – from how the Board is appointed to how decisions are made on what issues to advocate on.
- Competition and mistrust between groups and organisations prevent effective collaboration and further fragments the sector.
- Being a ‘talkfest’ and not leading to tangible outcomes for the community.
- Standard setting causes regulatory burden or duplication.
- Actual or perceived conduct of non-Peak Body functions where some stakeholders flagged a concern with potential ‘scope creep’ in the Peak Body taking on the role of other organisations.

Operational risks include:

- Bureaucratic inefficiency where the Peak Body could add an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy.
- The long-term funding model and financial sustainability of the Peak Body.
- Resourcing risks for sufficient staff to realistically meet operational requirements typical of a Peak Body.
- Overextension of the Peak Body relative to its resources if multiple government departments and teams that might seek the Peak Body’s advice on a range of issues.
- Ability to manage concerns and complaints about ESOs which was seen as important but resource intensive.

The draft Peak Body options identified some risks but most of these were developed based on research and expertise, not through 2024 consultations. In 2025 consultations, stakeholders confirmed many of the previously identified risks and identified additional risks.

Other observations

The following observations were not related directly to one section of the operating model but are important for the future design of the Peak Body.

There is some **misunderstanding of the scope of Peak Body**.

- The Peak Body, in line with the nature of peak bodies as sector representatives, is intended to represent ex-services and veteran and family support organisations. **Individuals engage with peak bodies but are not members of this type of peak body.**
- The veteran community is generally unaware of the **National Institute for Advocacy (NIA)**, which could influence the expectations of the Peak Body in relation to advocates for compensation and accreditation of ESOs.
- There is concern that the Peak Body, an industry-led organisation, is a substitute for non-industry led National Consultative Framework (NCF) Forums.
- The Peak Body is not intended to be a voice for current serving Australian Defence Force personnel on industrial relations matters.

Other observations

Stakeholders also said that:

- The Peak Body will need to evolve over time, as some purposes and functions become more relevant.
- There needs to be a clear delineation between the roles and functions of Government and the Peak Body. For instance, DVA should retain decision making powers on how it responds to Peak Body recommendations, and DVA and other government agencies will need to make their own decisions about how they engage with the Peak Body.

What we heard in 2025 consultations aligns with what we heard in 2024 and the draft Peak Body options. However, there was more emphasis placed on the need for the Peak Body to be a clearly distinguishable organisation whose role, scope and purpose is clearly communicated to the sector.