



Ex-Service Organisations Round Table June 2025

Ex-Service Organisations Round Table Meeting

The Ex-Service Organisations Round Table (ESORT) met on Tuesday, 17 June 2025. Members of the ESORT made thoughtful and considered contributions throughout the meeting.

DVA update – Secretary [Alison Frame, DVA]

The DVA Secretary provided an update on a number of Departmental initiatives including:

- work to progress the Government's response to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.
- the system changes involved in implementing the *Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025* (VETS Act).
- the extensive consultation and co-design activities that have taken place with the veteran community in recent months to inform the work for the establishment of a new agency focused on veteran wellbeing and a national peak body for ex-service organisations (ESOs).
- The Department's continuing objective to implement process improvements and efficiencies in DVA systems.
- Discussions with Canadian Veterans' Affairs counterparts on areas of common interest.
- the successful inclusion of veteran and veteran families in the overseas delivery teams for Anzac Day and plans to increase the number of veteran and veteran family members in the delivery teams next year.

ESORT members raised a number of issues with the Secretary and discussed topics, including DVA's priorities over the next year, advocacy, the definition of a veteran and the ease of contacting and lodging claims with DVA.

ESORT Member Submissions

Broadening of the Criteria for Qualifying Service (Australian Special Air Service Association)

The member submission from the Australian Special Air Service Association calls for the broadening of the criteria for qualifying service to include veterans who have performed Counter Terrorism / Special Recovery (CT/SR) duty. A response was provided from the Department of Defence.

Vetaffairs Vol 40 No. 2 August DFRBD Scheme (Defence Force Welfare Association)

The member submission from the Defence Welfare Association relates to an article published in *Vetaffairs* regarding the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits (DFRDB) Scheme. As the agency responsible for Australian Defence Force (ADF) superannuation, the Department of Defence advised that there are no plans to make further changes or conduct further reviews of the scheme at this time. ESORT members agreed to involve the CSC and Defence in further discussions.

The Style of ESORT Minutes (Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia)

The member submission from the Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia raises concerns that the current format and style of ESORT meeting minutes do not always reflect the discussion and the full range of views expressed. ESORT members agreed that strengthening the visibility of issues raised and recording differing views should be pursued, with a continued focus on maintaining the integrity of the Forum's collaborative and consultative process. DVA also encouraged members to provide more details about ESORT discussions to their respective memberships and offered to provide assistance if there were issues of particular interest.

The 35-Day Rule for Hospitalisation (Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia)

The member submission from the Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia seeks clarification regarding the nature of the "35 Day Rule for Hospitalisation". The Department advised that patients who must pay a daily patient contribution fee for hospitalisation, after 35 days, are prescribed in Commonwealth legislation (the *Health Insurance Act 1973*). ESORT members sought information on what support is available in the home once people are discharged. DVA undertook to circulate additional information on how it can assist veterans with in-house support.

National Monument on Anzac Parade to Honour ADF Personnel Who Have Died in Training (Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association Ltd)

The member submission from the Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association Ltd seeks endorsement from ESORT and DVA for the development of a national monument on Anzac Parade, Canberra, commemorating ADF members who have lost their lives during training activities. ESORT was supportive of the establishment of a Monument Steering Committee, to be chaired by APPVA. ESORT members unanimously supported the development of a national monument. DVA undertook to write to the National Capital Authority and advised that an application for a Saluting their Service grant may be an appropriate avenue to seek funding support.

MRCA SRDP (TPI) Eligible Dependant Partner (Australian War Widows Inc)

The member submission from Australian War Widows Inc seeks to confirm the differences between the auto-grant eligibility for dependant partners of deceased veterans under the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* (VEA) and the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004* (MRCA). DVA outlined the process for the eligibility of dependant partners to be assessed and to receive compensation under the MRCA, noting in most cases, there is minimal additional steps or information required to grant benefits to dependants, compared to the VEA.

DVA Critical Initiatives

Legislative Reform Update

DVA provided ESORT Members with an update on the implementation activities associated with the passing of the VETS Act in February. Numerous activities are underway to support the smooth transition to the new system, including communicating with veterans about the changes contained in the Act.

Advocacy Update

ESORT members were briefed on the progress of the Institute of Veterans Advocacy by Deputy Secretary Andrew Kefford PSM and Mike von Berg MC OAM. The Institute, and establishing governance for veteran advocacy services, is a key enabler to addressing concerning behaviour in the sector. DVA also advised it has provided the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee with a submission in support of its inquiry into income and compensation support for veterans. The Committee will report by 5 August. The Institute hopes to launch on 1 August and General Sir Peter Cosgrove AK CVO MC has agreed to be the Institute's patron. ESORT members engaged actively in the discussion and asked a number of questions, including DVA plans to increase the number of women advocates.

Claims Processing Update

DVA provided ESORT members with an update on recent claims reporting data and key metrics relating to the claims process. May was a record month for determinations. These figures can be accessed on the DVA website: <https://www.dva.gov.au/claim-processing>. Members raised the issue of medical timeframes and GP availability in some markets. DVA undertook to provide some further information around MLCOA.

Aged and Community Care Update

The Department briefed ESORT members on the work it is progressing to improve support to ageing veterans and their families. This includes promoting information about aged care services and supports available to the veteran community and stakeholders across the industry through a variety of channels. In particular, two new information guides for DVA clients living in residential aged care and their care teams were recently published to the DVA website and can be accessed at www.dva.gov.au/ACresources or www.dva.gov.au/RACresources, respectively. It was noted that the guides were developed as a result of ESORT advocacy. Members noted that hard copies were particularly useful for the older cohorts.

Open Arms Model of Care

ESORT members were advised of the latest updates to the Open Arms Model of Care and briefed on further planned improvements. ESORT members raised a number of issues, including eligibility for Open Arms services, noting that access is only available to those who have completed at least one day of continuous full-time service (CFTS), and that individuals who have not met this threshold, including some reservists, are not eligible. Reservists without at least one day of CFTS but who have rendered border protection or disaster relief service or been involved in or witnessed a serious training accident, and their immediate families are eligible. Members also discussed the potential to put a paper to the Open Arms National Advisory Committee (NAC) in relation to membership of the NAC and the focus areas of the Committee.

Update on the Defence and Veterans' Services Commission (DVSC)

The Interim Head of the DVSC, Mr Michael Manthorpe PSM, advised ESORT members that that he has provided a submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, as part of the review of Schedule 9 of the VETS Act 2025. He said that the submission is publicly available. It recommends it would be preferable if the entity had its own legislation and makes other recommendations relating to ensuring the entity's independence, including that the Commissioner has not served in the military in the last 5

years. Submissions to the Senate Inquiry have been extended to the end of June 2025. Mr Manthorpe said he will continue to engage with the veteran community to guide the important work of the Commission.

Operational Working Party (OWP)

The Operational Working Party (OWP) is the forum under the National Consultation Framework (NCF) through which DVA engages with the veteran and ex-service community on technical and/or operational policy matters. ESORT members noted that the informed engagement of the ex-services community throughout the implementation of the VETS Act will continue to be essential. Members endorsed a review and update of the OWP Terms of Reference to focus this group on the implementation of the VETS Act to ensure the effectiveness of the operational activity underpinning the delivery of this significant legislative reform. They also agreed that the membership for the renewed OWP be finalised through an Expression of Interest process.

Taskforce on Wellbeing Agency and Peak Body Update

ESORT Members received a written update on the work of the Taskforce on the Agency for Veteran Wellbeing and ESO Peak Body.

Research Partnerships

ESORT Members received a written update on DVA Research Partnerships.

Handling of Personal Information Project

ESORT Members received a written update in relation to the Handling of Personal Information Project.

Gardens of Remembrance Redevelopment – Western Australia and Tasmania

ESORT Members received a written update in relation to redevelopment works at the Gardens of Remembrance (GRM) in Perth and Hobart. Community consultation in relation to the design for the Perth GRM will be held 23–27 June.

Other Business

The following items were discussed under Other Business:

- Gwen Cherne – thanked ESORT members as she prepares to leave the role of Veteran Family Advocate (VFA). ESORT members thanked Gwen for the outstanding contribution she has made as the inaugural VFA and the difference she has made to the veteran and veteran family community.
- Proactive media and correcting misinformation – ESORT members sought permission to share photos and outcomes from ESORT meetings and this was agreed by DVA.

ESORT Members in attendance:
Chair, Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs, President, Repatriation Commission and Chair, Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (MRCC)
Deputy President, Repatriation Commission and MRCC Member
Repatriation Commissioner and MRCC Member
Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, MRCC Member
Air Force Association
Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association Ltd
Australian Special Air Service Association (proxy)
Australian War Widows Inc
Defence Force Welfare Association
Defence Reserves Association
Department of Defence (proxy)
Legacy Australia Inc
Returned and Services League of Australia (proxy)
Royal Australian Regiment Corporation
Solider On
The Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc
TPI Federation Australia
Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia Inc
Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia

Apologies:

Naval Association of Australia
Defence Families Australia
MRCC Member, Comcare
MRCC Member, Department of Defence