MINUTES

# Attendees

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Members | | Attending via |
| The Hon Darren Chester MP | Minister for Veterans’ Affairs | GovTeams |
| Ms Liz Cosson AM CSC (Chair) | Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (MRCC) | Office |
| Mr Don Spinks AM | Member, Repatriation Commission and MRCC | Office |
| Ms Kate Pope PSM | A/g Deputy President, Repatriation Commission | Office |
| Ms Gwen Cherne | Commissioner for Veteran Family Advocacy | GovTeams |
| Mr Stuart Smith AO DSC | Commissioner for Defence Engagement | GovTeams |
| MAJGEN Natasha Fox AM CSC | Member, MRCC | GovTeams |
| GPCAPT Carl Schiller OAM CSM (Retd) | Air Force Association | Office |
| Mr Peter Fitzpatrick AO AM (Mil) | Australian Special Air Service Association | Office |
| Mr Robert Woods | Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans’ Association | GovTeams |
| Ms Maree Sirois | Defence Families Australia | Office |
| Mr Kel Ryan | Defence Force Welfare Association | Office |
| MAJGEN Ian Flawith AO CSC (Retd) (proxy) | Defence Reserves Association | Office |
| Mr Rick Cranna OAM | Legacy Australia Inc | Office |
| Mr David Manolas | Naval Association of Australia | Office |
| Ms Narelle Bromhead | Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc | GovTeams |
| MAJGEN Greg Melick AO RFD SC | Returned and Services League of Australia | Office |
| Mr John King | Returned and Services League of Australia | Office |
| Mr Michael von Berg MC OAM | Royal Australian Regiment Corporation | Office |
| Ms Pat McCabe OAM | TPI Federation Australia | Office |
| Mr Max Ball | Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia | Office |
| Mr William Roberts OAM | Vietnam Veterans’ Federation of Australia | Office |
| Ms Rhondda Vanzella AM | Australian War Widows Inc | Office |
| Ms Narelle Bromhead (proxy) | Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc | GovTeams |
| Other Attendees | |  |
| Ms Liane Pettitt | Assistant Secretary, Parliamentary and Governance Branch | Office |
| Ms Maureen Schultz | Director, Governance and Ministerial Events Section | Office |
| Ms Vicki Rundle PSM | Deputy Secretary, Veterans and Families Services | Office |
| Presenters |  |  |
| Ms Heather MacDonald | Executive Director, Transform Engage Design | Office |
| LTGEN Rick Burr AO DSC MVO | Chief of Army, Department of Defence | GovTeams |
| Ms Alison Hale | Assistant Secretary, Community Policy | Office |
| Ms Veronica Hancock | First Assistant Secretary, Veterans’ Services Design | Office |
| Ms Bronwyn Worswick | Assistant Secretary, Legal Services and Audit | Office |
| Observers |  |  |
| Ms Traci-Ann Byrnes | First Assistant Secretary, Department of Defence | Office |
| Ms Danielle Cunningham | Director, Advocacy Policy Section | GovTeams |
| Mr Scott Warr | Legacy Australia Inc | GovTeams |
| Ms Sharon Bown | Air Force Association | Office |
| Ms Sophie Covell | DVA Graduate | GovTeams |
| Ms Jessy Summerhill | DVA Graduate | GovTeams |
| Secretariat |  |  |
| Ms Tiki Stephens | Secretariat, Governance and Ministerial Events | Office |
| Ms Tamsen Gregory | Secretariat, Governance and Ministerial Events | Office |
| Ms Leesa Holyland | Secretariat, Governance and Ministerial Events | Office |
| Ms Kellie-Ann Marsh | Secretariat, Governance and Ministerial Events | Office |
| Apologies |  |  |
| MAJGEN Paul Irving AM PSM RFD (Retd) | Defence Reserves Association |  |
| RADM Sarah Sharkey CSC | Member, MRCC |  |
| Ms Sue Weston PSM | Member, MRCC |  |
| Ms Heather Evans | Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc |  |

# 1. Welcome and Meeting Administration

The Chair welcomed members and official observers, and noted apologies from RADM Sarah Sharkey and Sue Weston. Apologies from Paul Irving and Heather Evans were also noted. MAJGEN Ian Flawith (Retd) was welcomed as the proxy for the **Defence Reserves Association** and Narelle Bromhead was welcomed as the proxy for the **Partners of Veterans Association of Australia Inc**

The Chair welcomed new members, Rhondda Vanzella newly elected President of **Australian War Widows Inc**, and David Manolas, recently confirmed as President of the **Naval Association of Australia**.

The Chair also welcomed Heather MacDonald and the Transformation, Engagement and Design Team, to facilitate the workshops as listed in the Agenda.

Members sought reassurance that the Below the Line papers provided were not the final response, citing the report back on grants as an example of an issue that requires further discussion particularly around Grants In Aid. The Secretary confirmed that feedback and comment from members on the papers is welcomed. Max Ball, **Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia**, advised that he would like to provide further comments on the report back from the Grants Working Group.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| E2020/0048 | VVAA to provide further comment on For Information Paper – ESORT Working Group - Grants | Mr Max Ball |

# 2. Minutes and actions arising

Members **endorsed** the Minutes of the meeting held 20 August 2020, and **agreed** to close Action Items as listed below;

E2019/97,

E2020/1,

E2020/2,

E2020/3,

E2020/0042,

E2020/0044,

E2020/0046,

E2020/0047,

E2020/25,

E2020/26,

E2020/28,

E2020/29,

E2020/30,

E2020/31,

E2020/32,

E2020/33,

E2020/34,

E2020/35,

E2020/36,

E2020/38,

E2020/39,

E2020/40,

E2020/41.

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

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| E2020/9 | The response to the Productivity Commission Report to remain a standing Agenda Item, with continued updates from the Department on the status of responses to the Recommendations. | Deputy President’s Group  Secretariat |
| E2020/0043 | Secretariat to confirm use of post-nominal with members | Secretariat |
| E2020/23 | Action raised at 14 August extraordinary ESORT meeting. Open Arms asked to advise what measures in place to address increase in demand, and to provide historical KPIs as a way of identifying potential gaps in Open Arms performance/services. – Information to be circulated out of session to members. | Open Arms Secretariat |
| E2020/24 | Once the, new National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention is appointed an extraordinary ESORT meeting will be convened to introduce the Commissioner to ESORT members and then arrange for contact details to be provided so that follow up meetings can occur. | Secretariat in consultation with Deputy President's Group who lead engagement with AGD on the NCDVSP |
| E2020/27 | Reservists and NLHC - DVA to explore avenue NLHC for those who volunteer as a reservist and are exposed to potential hazards and report back by 27 August to Mr Paul Irving. | Deputy President’s Group |
| E2020/37 | Booked Car With Driver working group. Working Group met 20 October 2020, with second meeting scheduled for 27 November 2020. Item to remain open for Working Group to report back. | Leanne Cameron Jenny Cotton Secretariat |

# 3. Secretary’s Strategic Update to ESORT

The Chair updated members on DVA activities towards its strategic priorities.

The Chair began by reviewing 2020 achievements and the strategic priorities identified prior to COVID-19.

* Deliver for Government
* Continue to transform the Department
* Focus on Wellbeing

The Chair reviewed the Five Waves of Veterans as referenced in her Budget presentation to ESORT members, reiterating the message that the contemporary cohort has changed, and the effects of the ‘5th wave’ are already being felt.

The Chair reflected on a number of known and emerging influences that will shape the future of DVA.

Of particular note the Chair asked members to reflect on what the 2020 Defence Strategic Update will mean for DVA - particularly the changing nature of service as identified in that report.

### IGADF Report

The Chair advised members that this is an ongoing process that must be allowed to run. Members noted that DVA and Defence are working together to ensure that support is provided to all who need it.

Members were provided with social media templates and concept drawings that DVA will be using to spread information on services and support available to those affected by the report.

### Responding to the Productivity Commission, including Advocacy

The Chair summarised the Government’s interim response to the Productivity Commission and expanded on some of the issues that need to be considered in relation to the final response to the recommendations.

### Claims

The Chair acknowledged that waiting for a claim to be processed can exacerbate mental health conditions. In response, DVA has implemented a triage system to prioritise claims for those most vulnerable, and the Chair asked ex-service organisations to please advise DVA if they are aware of anyone who needs urgent assistance. The Chair acknowledged that the complexity of claims, specifically around multi-Act eligibility is a contributing factor delaying some claims.

The Chair advised that DVA is seeking assistance to look at multi-Act claims and asked members to nominate Advocates who can assist DVA.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| E2020/0049 | ESORT Secretariat to seek, from ESORT members, nominations for advocates with appropriate experience to assist DVA to define and refine processes for determination of multi-Act Claims. | ESORT Secretariat |

Deputy Secretary Veterans and Families Services, Vicki Rundle, gave members a summary of the claims backlog, acknowledging that one of the consequences of prioritisation and triage is that some claims are delayed further.

Ms Rundle advised members that DVA had been trialling Combined Benefits Processing in a team in Western Australia earlier, with indication of benefits to the veteran experience and time taken to process the claim. Further examination and analysis of the benefits and unintended consequences is required before this initiative can be rolled out further.

Ms Rundle acknowledged that MRCA Initial Liability claims are an issue, noting that the number of claims on hand is very high in this cohort.

## National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention

The Chair advised members of the status of the appointment of the National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention (NCDVSP).

Kel Ryan, **Defence Force Welfare Association**, sought confirmation that the legislation underpinning the appointment and the Commissioner’s powers has not yet passed. The Chair confirmed that this is the case, and advised that DVA is nevertheless currently responding to requests for information from the Interim Commissioner.

Members noted the status of the appointment.

# 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.

Minister Chester noted that with the release of the IGADF Report, these are challenging times and reiterated that those involved do not need judgement, they need support. He asked members and the veteran community to take responsibility for looking after their mates and checking in to see if they are OK, and directing them to assistance if they need it.

Minister Chester went on to thank the Chair and members of ESORT, noting that it has been a privilege to work with them, and expressing his hope that he will continue that work after the expected Ministerial re-shuffle in December 2020.

Some members raised concerns with the language around the IGADF Report and an implied presumption of guilt. Concern was also expressed around the repeal of the Meritorious Unit Citation (MUC). The Minister acknowledged these concerns and the importance of the process that must take its course, and the important role of ESORT members in supporting those affected by this process.

Minister Chester again thanked the Secretary and ESORT members.

# 5. Shaping the Future – Workshop Sessions

ESORT members broke into three workshop groups to discuss specific strategic issues. Each group was facilitated by a relevant member of the DVA Executive, with a nominated ESORT representative to report back on the outcomes of the discussions.

# Lunch

During the lunch break, members were invited to view two pre-recorded presentations on;

* Benefits to veterans available through the Australian Partners of Defence (APOD) program, and;
* The new features made available in the latest update to DVA’s online portal – MyService.

Links to the presentations were provided after the meeting, and members were encouraged to submit any comments or queries on the material presented.

# 6. Address by Chief of Army – LTGEN Rick Burr

Chief of Army, LTGEN Rick Burr addressed ESORT members via GovTeams videoconference. LTGEN Burr was accompanied by Brigadier Spalding and MAJGEN Natasha Fox, as well RSMA Warrant Officer Grant McFarlane.

LTGEN Burr thanked ESORT members for their support in the lead up to the Inquiry and the release of the report. He acknowledged the impact and emotional strain the IGADF Report has had on current and serving members.

LTGEN Burr outlined Defence’s approach to the Report, noting that it was commissioned by Defence, and Defence is taking ownership of the results in order to learn from them and ensure that it will never happen again.

Members raised some concerns with the use of language leading to a presumption of guilt and the impact on families in Australia and Afghanistan. LTGEN Burr acknowledged the concerns raised and advised due process will occur.

# 7. Shaping the Future – Report Back and Discussions

Nominated ESORT members reported back to the full meeting on the outcomes of the workshop discussions.

### Advocacy

The purpose of the workshop was to seek the view of ESORT members on different options for veterans’ advocacy services, and to provide advice on the future governance arrangements for the Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP).

Michael von Berg, **Royal Australian Regiment Corporation**, reported back on the discussions.

After discussion, the group recommended that the ESORT working Group structure be utilised to co-design a new advocacy model and an associated governance structure.

The group also recommended that DVA investigate insurance products for Advocates.

ESORT Members agreed to the following action items;

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| E2020/0051 | DVA to contact insurance underwriters to discuss viable and effective insurance for advocates. | Deputy President’s Group |
| E2020/0052 | Secretariat to seek nominations, from ESORT members, for members or representatives to participate in a working group to discuss potential models of advocacy. | ESORT Secretariat |
| E2020/0053 | DVA to provide ESORT members with information on potential advocacy options – to inform discussion by the working group. | Deputy President’s Group |
| E2020/0054 | DVA to convene working group to discuss and inform advocacy models. | ESORT Secretariat / Deputy President’s Group |

### Legislative Reform

The purpose of this workshop was to seek the view of ESORT members on options for legislative reform, in response to the Productivity Commission Report.

Peter Fitzpatrick, **Australian Special Air Service Association**, reported back on the outcomes of this group’s discussion.

The group felt that fundamental reform should be the goal. Recognising that the current budgetary environment will constrain how quickly DVA can move towards that outcome, the group agreed that an Administrative Act as a vehicle to begin the process of simplifying and harmonising legislation is a viable option.

Members of the working group agreed that further information and discussion is required and sought further information from DVA in the form of an issues paper that explores the challenges and outlines the benefits and losses of harmonisation across DVA Acts.

ESORT Members agreed to the following action items;

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| E2020/0055 | DVA to provide ESORT members with issues paper exploring the challenges and outlining the benefits and losses of harmonisation across DVA Acts | Deputy President’s Group |
| E2020/0056 | Secretariat to seek nominations, from ESORT members, for members or representatives to participate in a working group to discuss approaches to legislative reform. | ESORT Secretariat |

### Future Consultative Framework

The purpose of this workshop was to seek the view of ESORT members on the results of the survey conducted as part of the Review of the National Consultation Framework (NCF).

Carl Schiller, **Air Force Association**, reported back on the outcomes of this group’s discussion.

Mr Schiller advised that the group was unanimous in its agreement that the current NCF structure is outdated and requires refreshment.

Members agreed that a working group should be established to further discuss consultation models and structural amendments that can be made to the NCF to ensure the veteran community and their families are being fully represented in all areas of need - whether they are members of ex-service organisations or not.

ESORT Members agreed to the following action items;

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| E2020/0057 | DVA to convene Working Group to further discuss models and structural amendments that can be made to ensure the veteran community and their families are being fully represented in all areas of need whether they are members of ESO organisations or not. | ESORT Secretariat/NCF Review team |
| E2020/0058 | Secretariat to seek nomination, from ESORT members, for members or representatives to participate in a working group to discuss consultation models. | ESORT Secretariat/NCF Review team |

# 8. Open Session – Below the Line Items

Members were provided the opportunity for further discussion on the prioritised list of Below the Line items as advised by Max Ball, **Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia**.

### ESORT Working Group – Grants: Update on Activities

Deputy President Repatriation Commission, Kate Pope, advised that there is still further work to be done with the Working Group, particularly in relation to BEST grants. Ms Pope acknowledged that the update provided did not include information around Grants in Aid and undertook to provide a further update to ESORT members via an Out of Session information paper.

Assistant Secretary Community Policy, Alison Hale, summarised the work undertaken by the Working Group thus far, and the Chair advised members that the Department is investigating to see what aspects of grants related services currently being undertaken by the Grants Hub can be brought back under DVA control.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| E2020/0059 | DVA to provide ESORT members with Out of Session information paper on work being done to review the Grants in Aid program. | Deputy President’s Group |

### ESO MyService Online Claims System

John King, **Returned and Services League of Australia**, took the opportunity to describe how the COVID related shutdown of public services such as libraries highlighted a lack of access to IT equipment for some veterans. Mr King described the impact that the loss of these services had on veterans, and noted that his advocates were placed in a difficult situation, potentially breaking social distancing protocols in order to assist veterans to make a claim. The Chair acknowledged that responding to the pandemic was challenging for everyone.

### Medical Regulations on Opioid Prescriptions Changes as at 1 October 2020

Pat McCabe, **TPI Federation of Australia**, sought DVA’s support of the TPI Federation’s request for TPI veterans to be exempt from the new regulations. The Chair advised that DVA could not support the TPI Federation’s request. Michael von Berg, **Royal Australian Regiment Corporation**, supported the Chair’s position.

### Entitlements under Veterans’ Home Care

Members did not raise any further items for discussion on this matter.

### Rent Assistance – TPI Federation Member Submission

The Chair acknowledged that Pat McCabe, **TPI Federation of Australia** had raised issues with the current Rent Assistance Budget Measure that had not been considered, with particular reference to the way in which TPI payments were considered by some State and Territory jurisdictions. The Chair assured members that DVA would continue to look into this.

### Operational Working Party Working Group – Letters Project

Members did not raise any further items for discussion on this matter.

# 9. Other Business

Max Ball, **Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia**, requested the Chair provide a timeframe for ex-service organisations to provide Budget Submissions to DVA. The Chair advised that preparations for the next Budget process were well underway, and advised that ex-service organisations should have their submissions to DVA by mid-January 2021.

Rick Cranna and Scott Warr, **Legacy Australia Inc**, sought an update on DVA progress to include a mechanism in MyService which would allow DVA client’s agreement for DVA to share information with ex-service organisations.

MAJGEN Natasha Fox, **MRCC Member**, advised that the Joint Transition Authority is dealing with similar privacy issues, and is investigating mechanisms to seek similar consent from ADF members at enlistment.

The Chair advised that as per the Below the Line paper provided, DVA Legal would be in a position to report back to ESORT on this matter at the next meeting.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| E2020/0060 | DVA Legal to report back to ESORT, at first meeting of 20201, on investigations undertaken to seek client consent to use their contact information to provide them information on behalf of ex-service organisations. | DVA Legal |

# 10. Meeting Close

The Chair thanked members, and the meeting closed at 2.45pm.