**MINUTES**

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting of the Operational Working Party (OWP) and noted apologies.

# Agenda Item 1. Opening Remarks

The Chair opened the meeting with welcome to country and acknowledged all who are serving and those who have served in the Australian Defence Force.

# Agenda Item 2. Minutes & Actions Arising

The minutes of the 10 July 2019 meeting were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Members agreed that the following actions can be closed: 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 53, and 54.

Members agreed that the following actions would remain open or in progress: 37, 50, and 55.

# Agenda Item 3. Member Submissions – TPI Association

**3.1 DVA Policy on the provision of statistics**

The Chair responded to this member submission, which asked DVA to confirm the exact policy on the provision of statistics to ESOs. The members reviewed a spreadsheet of the breakdown of Gold Card costs by a number of different categories and years. It was noted that various requests for data have not been met and this information is being sought, so Ms McCabe is able to complete the remainder of the table.

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| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| 2019/56 | Data and Insights Branch to be provided a copy of the spreadsheet for completion. | Dr Paul Nicolarakis |

**3.2 DVA Organisational Chart**

The Chair responded to this member submission, which asked DVA to provide a departmental diagram that can be utilised by ESOs. Members were provided with a current organisational chart, along with a detailed explanation on each of the two business groups and a detailed description on the functions of the Veterans’ Services Design Division. The Chair advised members that there are always minor movements occurring within the Department. After some discussion members agreed that, a detailed list on what roles each state Deputy Commissioner is responsible for would be useful.

Deputy Chair, Ms Cole agreed to provide members with a detailed list from her Division (Clients’ Benefits Division) before the end of the meeting[[1]](#footnote-1), she also asked that members compile a list of the keys areas they are after to ensure all areas are covered.

# Agenda Item 4. Member Submission – Partners of Veterans Association

**How does DVA recognise a de-facto relationship**

Members noted the paper provided in response to DVA’s requirements in considering a de facto relationship are broadly consistent across the MRCA, DRCA and VEA. It was noted that there is no difference in how DVA considers a de facto relationship across States and Territories. Ms Rona Lunney advised the Chair that the response is exactly what she was after to provide her members.

# Agenda Item 5. Member Submission – Air Force Association

**BEST Grants**

Mr Graeme Bland advised the Chair the response provided adequately answered his questions.

Members expressed frustration around the time taken to receive 2018/19 BEST grant agreements and DVA agreed the process is taking longer than desired. Members also briefly discussed the information required to be submitted on workload data as part of the BEST application. It was noted that details like the number of welfare/mentoring hours is hard to quantify.

Members noted the Robert Cornall *Veterans’ Advocacy and Support Services Scoping Study Report*, which will be considered in a broader strategic review of grants as part of the Productivity Commission recommendations. Members did seek clarification around how liability claims are counted under each Act.

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| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| 2019/57 | Grants Policy Section to provide clarification on how liability claims are counted under each Act for the purpose of BEST grant applications. | Bill Bowe |

# Agenda Item 6. Productivity Commission (PC) Update

Mr Neil Bayles, Special Advisor, Productivity Commission Taskforce presented this item. Mr Bayles explained that the Department is working with the Government to provide comments and feedback on recommendations, especially in relation to those that have impact on the veteran community.

The Government will finalise its response to the PC report in conjunction with the Transition Inquiry review and the Advocacy Study review.

A number of the issues raised in the PC report are very complex and will require significant investment and investigation. There are also a number of recommendations that cross a broad range of issues and will take time for the Government to formulate a position and take into account costs.

Government has been consulting with the veteran community to obtain its views and there is general support for the reform of the veteran system. Opposition to particular recommendations includes the proposed Veterans Services Commission and restrictions on future Gold Card eligibility.

# Agenda Item 7. Member Submissions – Australian Special Air Service Association

**7.1 Provision of financial advice under MRCA**

Mr John Burrows expressed his disappointment in not being able to provide all the information as part of his submission. The Chair explained to members that as a Government Department there is a legal obligation under the Privacy Act and are unable to provide certain information.

It was acknowledged that understanding available entitlements and the interactions with compensation from other sources can be complicated and for veterans needing to make a decision it is very complex. The issues raised by Mr Burrows aligned with one of the Productivity Commission’s considerations to streamline benefits.

The Chair welcomed AIRCDRE Robert Brown from the Australian Defence Force Financial Services Consumer Centre (ADF Consumer). ADF Consumer is an independent financial and consumer education service for ADF members and access to educational resources, and links to information on military superannuation, saving, budgeting, and investing can be found on the ADF Consumer [website](https://adfconsumer.gov.au/).

Members noted that DVA and ADF Consumer are actively considering how these services could be expanded into DVA. Members also noted the legal framework around financial advice and liabilities associated the intent and ability to inadvertently provide advice.

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| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| 2019/58 | DVA to provide update to members on the expansion of the work into DVA of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) Financial Services Consumer Centre (ADF Consumer). | Mark Cormack  AIRCDRE Robert Brown |

**7.2 DVA client issues when moving interstate**

Members were advised that when clients move interstate there is a requirement to obtain a new card and number. However, new applications will now only have a number, not a state prefix. It was noted that training with the states and territories will have to occur to ensure concessions are met.

Regarding the provision of household services, when a client changes address either in the same state or interstate, the change of address could affect the level of service the client receives.

It was noted that mobility services can move from one location to another, although it may not always be possible, including when entering Residential Aged Care.

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| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| 2019/59 | Tim Evans to look into the capacity for a bridging approval from a previous GP, when building a relationship with a new GP after a location move. | Tim Evans |

**7.3 Development of an effective and efficient Transition system**

Mr John Burrows advised the Chair he was happy with the response provided.

Members noted that a significant amount of work is already underway to improve the transition experience for ADF members and their families. This includes the expansion of Veteran Support Officers, MyService, White Card on Transition, Early Engagement Model, the Wellbeing and Support Program and the Prime Minister’s Veterans’ Employment Program. It was also noted that transition is a big part of the PC report and is under active consideration with Defence. Collaboration between the agencies is vital to better support veterans and their families through transition.

Ms Tara Hatzismalis, A/g Assistant Secretary Client Channels Branch provided members with an update on the Veteran Support Officers, which is enhancing our on base service offer. Staff are now present on a number of Defence bases around the country providing advice to ADF members and work closely with the Commanding Officer of the base to ensure information is distributed. It was also noted that presentations are now occurring at recruit and initial training level.

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| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| 2019/60 | Members to be provided with a copy of the slide that details the Veteran Support Officers rollout for the next 6 months. | Tara Hatzismalis |
| 2019/61 | Members to be updated at the next meeting on the Transition Pilot. | Tara Hatzismalis |

**7.4 Implementation of the Productivity Commission’s recommendations – an alternative view**

Members noted the paper provided in response to the member submission. The Chair acknowledged Mr Burrows views and assured members the Government is listening to the views of the veteran community and is considering the report.

**7.5 Productivity Commission’s recommendations – DVA’s intentions**

Members noted the paper provided in response to the member submission. Members asked if it is at all possible that recommendations are tracked, where they are at and when they are completed. This would assist ESOs in updating their members on the work of the PC.The Chair advised members that this would be a given once the Government has made a decision on the PC Report.

# Agenda Item 8. Veteran (Client) Support Framework

Ms Leonie Nowland, Assistant Secretary, Client Coordination and Support Branch presented this item.

The purpose of the Client Support Framework is to provide a single point of contact for case management. Triage and Connect Team is able to provide short-term case management if required, with 66% of referrals being resolved in the first instance. Veterans requiring longer-term support are referred to the Coordinated Client Support for tailored case management. Members did ask what support is available after hours and were advised that Open Arms is available 24 hours/7 days a week.

The Chair advised members that if there is an emergency after hours, clients should be going to a hospital and not waiting for DVA to approve.

# Agenda Item 9. Portfolio Reviews

Ms Carly Partridge, Assistant Secretary, External Scrutiny and Policy Performance Branch presented this item. Members were advised that the focus is four key reviews that have been conducted since 2016 into mental health and support available to veterans. There are a number of common themes across all four reports. DVA continues to monitor progress of all recommendations to determine what can be closed. Responses to other reviews are ongoing and DVA will look at publishing reports on the key portfolio reviews in due course.

Members were provided with a summary of initiatives in response to recommendations as the document was classified *for official use only*. However, Ms Partridge will reclassify the document and make it available to members. Members also sought further advice on a point in the summary under improving family support, and in particular, *DVA has implemented a web-based information tool providing links to support services for veterans and families in need.* Members briefly discussed other Reviews that are currently occurring, including ANAO audits as well as the National Consultation Framework (NCF) Review.

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| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| 2019/62 | The summary of initiatives in response to recommendations from Portfolio Reviews to be re-classified and provided to members. | Carly Partridge |
| 2019/63 | Members sought further advice on a point included in the summary of initiatives document *DVA has implemented a web-based information tool providing links to support services for veterans and families in need.* | Carly Partridge |
| 2019/64 | Members to be updated on status of the National Consultation Framework (NCF) Review. | Don Spinks |
| 2019/65 | Members to be updated on current ANAO audits occurring in the Department, including cross-portfolio reviews. | Bronwyn Worswick |

# Agenda Item 10. Royal Commissions into Aged Care and Disability

Ms Carly Partridge, Assistant Secretary, External Scrutiny and Policy Performance Branch updated members on the Royal Commission into Aged Care & Safety.

Members noted that the Secretary appeared as a witness at a hearing in October, which was focussed on diversity in aged care. A transcript of the Secretary’s evidence is publicly available on the [website](https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/hearings/Documents/exhibits-2019/8-october/WIT.0219.0001.0001.pdf). Members noted that the Secretary’s evidence referenced a matrix and members asked for a copy. The Royal Commission released its [interim report](https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/Pages/interim-report.aspx) on 31 October 2019 and is required to provide a final report by 12 November 2020. To date the focus has been on service providers, however it is not clear what the focus will be for 2020.

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| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| 2019/66 | A copy of the Aged Care Eligibility Matrix to be provided to members. | Carly Partridge |

Royal Commission into Disability

Members noted this particular Royal Commission has just started, with the first public hearing occurring in October 2019. This Royal Commission is also taking a very different form by looking at systemic issues at a Commonwealth and State level. It is expected to run for three years. An interim report is due by 30 October 2020, with the final report due in April 2022.

Members requested the link to the final Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission as well as the Royal Commission webpage on submissions.

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| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| 2019/67 | Members to be provided with the link to:   * the final Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission into Disability, and * the Royal Commission webpage on submissions. | Carly Partridge |

# Agenda item 11. Update on the development of the Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Mr Aidan Bright, A/g Assistant Secretary, Wellbeing Policy Branch updated members on the Strategy.

In August, the Minster held a drop-in session at his MP Office encouraging MPs and Senators with ADF lived experience, to raise issues and ideas. DVA also had an online presence seeking input from interested stakeholders.

It was also noted that Ernst and Young undertook an environmental scan of current mental health policy settings and program developments both in Australia and internationally. The [Environmental Scan](https://www.dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing/mental-health/veteran-mental-health-and-wellbeing-online-survey) has been published on the DVA website.

Member noted that a co-design session was held with approximately 40 people, with the group considering a number of guiding principles. The day also confirmed the need to focus on the four critical priority areas: health care, transition, partnerships and communication and education. Suicide prevention was also added as a priority as it crosses all four-priority areas. Outcomes from this session will feed directly into the draft Strategy and National Action Plan. Once the Minister has reviewed and approved the Strategy and National Action Plan, it will be provided to members.

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| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| 2019/68 | Members to be provided with a copy of the Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy once it has been approved. | Moira Campbell |
| 2019/69 | Aidan Bright to discuss social media further with John McNeill | Aidan Bright |

# Agenda item 12. Improved Dental and Allied Health 2018-19 Budget Measure

Mr Aidan Bright, A/g Assistant Secretary, Wellbeing Policy Branch along with Ms Christine Reed, Director, Health Policy Section provided members with an update on the recent Government announcement regarding the changes to referrals from GPs to allied health services, known as the [Treatment Cycle](https://www.dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing/wellbeing/allied-health-treatment-cycle/allied-health-treatment-cycle-0), which commenced on 1 October 2019.

The Department consulted extensively with key stakeholders to ensure clients and allied health providers were prepared for the Treatment Cycle when it commenced. Members noted that clients with a Totally and Permanently Incapacitated (TPI) Gold Card are excluded from the Treatment Cycle for physiotherapy or exercise physiology only. For all other allied health services, TPI veterans will be subject to Treatment Cycle arrangements. Referrals from GPs to allied health providers will be valid for up to 12 sessions or one year, whichever ends first. This aims to improve the quality of care for DVA clients.

Members also noted that there are two more elements of the budget measure that will commence in 2021. It is anticipated that up to four funding trials will test alternative funding approaches to see if outcomes can be improved for clients. At this stage, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and psychology services have been identified to trial new funding approaches.

# Agenda item 13. Other Business

**Section 137 Reports**

Ms Natasha Cole, Deputy Chair, provided members with an update on section 137 reports.

Members were advised that a [decision](https://www.judgments.fedcourt.gov.au/judgments/Judgments/fca/single/2019/2019fca1833) was handed down on 8 November 2019, which related to the operation of section 137 of the VEA. It was noted that an extension of time is not granted by the VRB and has to be completed by the Commissions delegate and there is an implied reasonable test for any extension.

**Other Business**

The Chair agreed for Mr Clem Russell to raise his member submission and a copy was handed to members. Members noted that the submission raised the issue that seeking information and procedures on retrospective review of discharge classification is difficult. It was acknowledged that DVA does not have control with this matter and it is more a Defence and Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation issue, however DVA does manage the training of advocates.

Members noted that Mr Russell is seeking DVA’s support to approach Defence and CSC for a training module to be created that provides detailed advice, information and procedures on this process in order to assist advocates that are asked about this matter. It is anticipated that the number of queries will grow with respect to discharging younger veterans. It was noted that the ATDP is considering including another model to broaden the knowledge of this subject. The Chair agreed to a briefing across agencies to simplify things as this may be a growing issue.

Members also briefly discussed various topics in which a number of action items were raised.

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| ***Item*** | ***Action*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| 2019/70 | The Chair agreed to a briefing across agencies to simplify information on retrospective review of discharge classification. | Mark Cormack |
| 2019/71 | Member, Mr John McNeil to provide details on a client who is currently on Newstart, would she be better off going on the Veteran payment. Details to be provided to Natasha Cole. | Secretariat/  Natasha Cole |
| 2019/72 | AUSkey is ceasing in March 2020 and is DVA able to confirm who has this access. AUSkey be replaced by myGovID and Relationship Authorisation Manager (RAM). | Natasha Cole |

# Meeting Closed

The Chair thanked all members for their attendance and participation. There was a great range of issues discussed and it was great to have member submissions first up on the agenda.

The meeting closed at 3.45pm. The first meeting for the new year is 15 April 2020.

1. A detailed list was provided to members at the end of the meeting. Members also provided the list of keys areas they were after. Ms Cole emphasised that this list is not a substitute for talking to the delegate. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)