



AUSTRALIAN PEACEKEEPER & PEACEMAKER VETERANS' ASSOCIATION NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

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(INCORPORATED IN VICTORIA)

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Patron

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*Affiliated with the Soldiers of Peace
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Also assisting Veterans of Iraq, Afghanistan and Peacetime Service

**“Commemorating 70 Years of Australian Peacekeeping Operations
on 14th September 2017, help us build our National Peacekeeping
Memorial: <http://www.peacekeepingmemorial.org.au/>”**

6th October 2016

National Executive and NATCOM

National President Report for Annual General Meeting Townsville 15 October 2016

This year we have seen some significant changes within the way we operate as an association, we have taken on numerous roles far beyond our expectations with minimal support from other Ex-Service Organisations. But I can honestly say we have put veterans' issues first and foremost by supporting a Royal Commission into DVA, advocating on behalf of veterans at the highest levels in parliament with great success which has seen the emergence of Senate Inquiries into sexual abuse in the Australian Defence Force and Veterans' Suicide in the Australian Defence Force as well as inquiries into the internal operations of the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

This I must say could not have been achieved without the help of my trusted colleagues who I would like to acknowledge Michael Quinn (National Vice President), Rod Thompson (National Entitlements Officer) and Paul Copeland (Immediate Past President and National Advisor) and John McNeil (Assistant National Vice President).

These men at the bequest of our members at the last AGM continue to achieve high levels of success when consulting with Parliamentarians, departmental bodies at National, State and regional levels. I would also like to acknowledge the work of our National Executive Kevin Ryan (National Secretary and National Membership Officer) and Rhonda Copeland (National Treasurer) for their continued support in ensuring that the association was acting in accordance with firstly the National Constitution and more importantly maintaining high standards within the association as part of the National Executive.

Most of the members of the National Executive and State Executives became members of the Working Group seeking a Royal Commission into DVA, I would like to thank them for their commitment throughout various meetings held in states. We would like to acknowledge the additional funding which supported the Royal Commission and would to offer our appreciation to the Victorian President and his State Committee for their contribution towards the events that took place.

I would like to stress that this year's Annual General Meeting we will not be electing or appointing people into executive positions as this will happen in 2017 when all positions become vacant in Canberra in September 2017.

For those that weren't aware of my ambitions early in 2016 I took a leave of absence so I could pursue a career in politics at the last federal election. The outcome of the federal election did not favour me as I fell short with votes in NSW. After the election I resumed my appointment as the National President once again in July 2016.

“Looking After Our Own”

It was unfortunate that we lost one of our NATCOM members, State President and a Level 3 Advocate in Queensland who worked out of Zac's Place in Townsville Chris Dawson (Smokey). Chris will be sorely missed as he was an integral part of not only APPVA but he was well known within the compensation stream as well as in the veteran's community in which he lived, it was good to see a majority of the National Executive fly up to his funeral to farewell Chris and pay our condolences to Lorraine and his immediate and extended family on behalf of the APPVA.

I would also like to take this opportunity in welcoming Randall New in as the interim State President, for those that aren't aware Randall New is the Queensland State Vice President who resides in Brisbane. The Qld APPVA will be holding their AGM on Saturday 8 October 2016 at the Burpengary RSL in Queensland which I as the National President will be in attendance.

The NSW-ACT APPVA will be conducting their AGM on Tuesday, 15 November 2016 at the North Coast Outreach Centre in Alstonville, we are hoping that new members of the APPVA take that step forward and show an expression of interest for positions within the association.

I would also like to thank Michael Romalis for his efforts in his role as the past Tasmanian President of the APPVA; Michael leaves Tasmania to pursue a career in Western Australia. The National Executive and members of the APPVA wish Michael and his family all the best in his new endeavours.

Some of the transitions that are currently transforming within the DVA and Ex-Service Organisations is the introduction of a new training platform called the Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP). There has been a call from Ex-Service Organisations to introduce trained and qualified paid and volunteer practitioners that can be accredited to handle claims at all levels and also be accountable for the claims submitted.

The DVA has now called on a Registered Training Organisation to transform current courses under the ATDP into an accreditation certified course where students on completion of a course will be issued with certificates of attainments as oppose to certificate of attendance for their achievements. The ATDP will look at rolling out the first of many Compensation and Welfare courses in the coming 12 months, level 1 courses Compensation/ Welfare will be rolled out in November 2016.

We as an association will need to be ready for this transition; I will be addressing this issue at our up and coming Compensation/ Welfare Conference in Townsville on Thursday 13 October 2016.

I have started the first of many audits throughout the APPVA, at present I am currently going through the NSW-ACT APPVA with the honorary auditor who has found some discrepancies in the way the state has handle funds. The state reports will be added to my national report and submitted prior to the 2017 National APPVA elections as part of my promise to ensure that we have dispersed with association funds appropriately and in accordance with the Department of Fair Trading/ Consumer Affairs Victoria regulations.

I would like to reiterate the importance of raising funds for the National Peacekeepers Memorial which we hope will be ready by the 14 September 2017 which will be the week that we will be in Canberra holding our next Annual General Meeting. We as an association need think very seriously about raising funds to ensure that the memorial is built on time to commemorate Peacekeepers Day.

I would like to conclude with my observations in 2016, there has been an increase in claims under the MRCA 2004, the DVA have failed to foresee this in their plan as they continue to down size and move the veterans into the Human Resource sector of Centrelink were we will be known as "Welfare recipient"

After reading the last three capability review reports that the DVA have put out they continue to fail in key areas of their reports, that being the Time Taken To Process (TTTP) claims. We now see more claims failing at the primary level; we are now seeing the department rip apart the burden of proof approach that has been in existence for some time that was very beneficial to veterans when submitting claims. There are more claims going through to obtain second opinions (MLCOA) by another specialist who will only see this veteran once and fabricate his findings to reject a claimant report being related to his/her service.

We are seeing some of our subject knowledge experts (Advocates) being discriminated against by the department because of their robust attitude or dogmatic attitude to delegates who are not that knowledgeable with legislation making determinations on primary claims that are then overturned at the next level of process (ADR, VRB).

The department has taken all reasonable steps at breaking down veterans entitlement to an extent where we are now seeing a spike on cases being not accepted due to the adversarial approach and time wasting tax payers money in making all veterans that have an entitlement under various legislation jump through more hoops to gain at most times a more frustrating outcome to something that should have been approved and addressed more effectively at the time when a primary decision/determination was initially made.

I feel not only for those under the current legislation MRCA 2004 but for those that have entitlements under VEA and SRCA, as I am sure that the current policies in place may change without consultation with Ex-Service Organisations at higher levels. I say this because I have been privy to some of the policy changes made by senior DVA executives who have construed the outcome for the betterment of their gain and not the veteran who in the past has put his life on the line to protect Australia.

I am hoping that we get a bigger show of written submission to Suicides in the ADF and the inquiry into the DVA in their dealings with veterans'. We as an association have provided the support to veterans with excellent outcomes, but we need to see these younger members or constituents who have come to the APPVA requiring our help put in submissions on the way they have been treated by the DVA in the past and present with entitlements and their benefits.

I would like to finish off by thanking each and every one of you for your dedication and time in 2016 and look forward to our ongoing support leading into our next AGM in Canberra in September 2017.

Regards

Allan Thomas

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