

MINUTES

NATIONAL YOUNGER VETERANS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Thursday 21 June 2007

Members	Mr. Mick Quinn, <i>Australian Peacekeeper & Peacemaker Veterans' Association Inc.</i> Mrs. Anne Pahl, <i>Returned & Services League</i> Mr. Jason O'Dowd, <i>Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia</i> Mr. Colin Doust, <i>Australian Veterans' & Australian Defence Services Council</i> Mr. Michael Dowsett, <i>Regular Defence Force Welfare Association</i> Mr. Gerry Bampton, <i>Australian Federation of T&PI Ex-Service Men and Women</i>
Departmental Attendees	Brigadier Bill Rolfe, <i>Repatriation Commissioner – Chair</i> Mr. Mark Johnson, National Manager, <i>Compensation Policy</i> Mrs. Fiona Tuckwell, Director, <i>VEA Compensation Policy</i> Mr. Adam Luckhurst, National Manager, <i>Rehabilitation, Research & Development</i> Mrs. Helen Westbury, Director, <i>Defence Links</i> Mr. Richard Bartlett, National Manager, <i>Primary Care Policy</i> Ms Heather Jackson, Director, <i>Rehabilitation Policy</i> Mr. John O'Connor, Director, <i>Vietnam Veterans' Counselling Service</i> Mrs. Carolyn Spiers, National Manager, <i>Access Card Taskforce</i> Mr. Wayne Penniall, National Manager, <i>Community Care Policy</i> Mr. Jeff Fairweather, National TMS Coordinator, <i>Business Support</i> Mr. Bob Peck, Director, <i>Medication Management</i> Mrs. Marie Leach, Director, <i>Business Improvement & Monitoring</i> Mr. Matthew Klippan, Director, <i>Veterans' Services</i>
Guests	Associate Professor John Pead, <i>Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health</i> Professor Niki Ellis, <i>Centre for Military and Veterans' Health</i> Mr. Steven Grzeskowiak, Defence Personnel Executive, <i>Department of Defence</i> Dr. Ian Gardner, Functional Head & Senior Consultant in Occupational & Environmental Medicine, Centre for Occupational Health, <i>Department of Defence</i> Mr. John Heggart, Director, Centre for Occupational Health, <i>Department of Defence</i> Maree Riley, Directorate of Mental Health, <i>Department of Defence</i> Jenni Stephenson, Assistant Director, <i>VEA Compensation Policy</i>
Secretariat Apologies	Mr. Tim McCombe, National President, <i>Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia</i> Mr. Gordon Traill, National Vice President, <i>Australian Peacekeeper & Peacemaker Veterans' Association</i> Mr. Paul Copeland, National President, <i>Australian Peacekeeper & Peacemaker Veterans' Association Inc.</i> Mrs. Narelle Bromhead, President, <i>The Partners of Veterans' Association of Australia Inc</i> Professor Mark Creamer, Director, <i>Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health</i> Ms Alison Stanley, Deputy Commissioner Queensland Mr. Ken Douglas, General Manager, <i>Service Delivery</i> Dr. Graeme Killer, <i>Principal Medical Advisor</i> Mr. Sean Farrelly, National Manager, <i>Military Compensation</i> Dr. Eileen Wilson, Director, <i>Strategic Research & Development</i> Mr. David Morton, National Manager, <i>Vietnam Veterans' Counselling Service</i> Grp Capt Len Lambeth, Director of Mental Health, <i>Department of Defence</i> Dr. Brian O'Toole, Chief Investigator, <i>Vietnam Veterans' Health Study</i> Mrs. Lizabeth Thomson, Defence Community Organisation, <i>Department of Defence</i> Mr. Jim Porteous, Director, ADF Rehabilitation Services, <i>Department of Defence</i>

The Forum opened at 10.30am.

Agenda Item 1: Minutes of Previous Meeting

Bill Rolfe welcomed all present, and acknowledged apologies.

Bill reflected on the letter he sent to Members discussing re-focusing the Forum. He acknowledged that DVA relies on Members to provide them with reports and information in order to address younger veterans' issues. He stressed that it is important that the department promote the cause of younger veterans and identify the issues that they face.

The Minutes of the previous meeting were accepted.

Agenda Item 2: Action Items

- ④ Action Item 1 - Paul Copeland to e-mail questions regarding Middle East Area of Operations to Professor Sandy McFarlane, Centre for Military and Veterans' Health. **Actioned.**
- ④ Action Item 2 - Paul Copeland to send a copy of the Canadian Forces, report on stress syndrome to Professor Sandy McFarlane, Centre for Military and Veterans' Health. **Actioned.**
- ④ Action Item 3 - Richard Bartlett to report on the type of hearing aides being provided to veterans. **Actioned.** Richard Bartlett presented a discussion on hearing aides. A brochure on Hearing Services Program was made available to the Forum. Richard discussed the new features of hearing aides that are on the current list and which are at no cost to the veteran. Veterans are encouraged to contact the department regarding co-payment required for more specialised hearing aides, and to contact welfare officers for advice on accessibility.
- ④ Action Item 4 - Bill Rolfe on behalf of Dr Graeme Killer to report on the issue of the availability of new carer DVD. **Actioned.** Bill reported that in response to assisting carers the Victorian Ex-service Round Table Advisory Committee (VERTAC) had provided the Carer DVD. He said it is an excellent resource but it should be watched with professional assistance available.
- ④ Action Item 5 - Paul Copeland to send information regarding Sub Mariners to Adam Luckhurst. **Not Actioned.**
- ④ Action Item 6 - Heather Jackson to report on the number of veterans successfully utilising Vietnam Veterans' Rehabilitation Service (VVRS). **Actioned.**
- ④ Action Item 7 - The Department of Defence to address the issue of Radio Frequency (RF) Radiation. **Actioned.**

- Ⓢ Action Item 8 - Brigadier Rolfe will write letters to Members to discuss re-focusing the Forum to issues of particular interest to Younger Veterans.
Actioned.

Agenda Item 3: Centre for Military and Veterans' Health - Professor Niki Ellis – *handout attached*

Professor Niki Ellis presented a discussion on a number of new initiatives. The Deployment Health Surveillance Program Stakeholder Day, Port Pirie Lead Exposure Study, South East Queensland Ex-service Organisation Forum, Workforce Innovation, and Health Systems Under Stress. Niki also provided an update on existing initiatives, including the Occupational Health and Safety Program and Living Well Program.

Members raised the issue of the potential of ESOs to assist with the development of research. Bill Rolfe suggested that it would be best to develop a program of strategies and undertake measures over a year before making a decision on research.

Agenda Item 4: Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health – Associate Professor John Pead

Associate Professor John Pead presented a discussion on National Guidelines for Mental Health Treatment. He explained that effective counselling requires problem solving. The number of veterans participating is declining as younger veterans do not find posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) programs effective for a variety of reasons. Anxiety, depression and substance abuse may overlap and are the three main problems associated with PTSD.

Mick Quinn raised the issue of veterans engaging in an emotional debriefing to provide valuable information on mental health. Maree Riley discussed that former debriefing practices have impacted on how debriefing is currently done, and how it might be done in the future.

Agenda Item 5: Matters arising from State Younger Veterans' Forums

Ⓢ TAS – Minutes of 6 March 2007

Jason O'Dowd requested information on the companion card for Tasmanian veterans. It appears to be a local government initiative.

Ⓢ SA – Minutes of 22 February 2007

Bill Rolfe suggested that some important local issues about younger veterans are not passed on. Younger veterans need to be identified to reflect the veteran community's views.

Colin Doust asked if there were any younger veterans' groups. Bill Rolfe questioned whether current infrastructure, processes and facilities are effective in small

organisations and whether they serve the best interests of younger veterans. It would benefit both younger veterans and the organisation to have them join an organisation sooner. This issue requires continued monitoring.

④ **VIC – Minutes of 12 February 2007**

Anne Pahl suggested that ADF health studies should also include the whole family. It is important for a family member to be present when a claim is being made and families should be educated on the discharge process. Bill Rolfe explained that there are limitations to DVA's statutory roles. However, the issue of families is one that can be addressed through programs like the VVCS and Transition Management.

- **Action Item 1** – Anne Pahl to provide information on the family program available with the RSL.

Maree Riley discussed the key points of transitional management within the Defence Force as being recruitment and retention with an aim to increase resilience through training and collaboration.

④ **NSW - Minutes of 29 November 2006**

Agenda Item 6: DVA Updates/Issues

④ **Younger Veterans Taskforce Update – Matthew Klippan**

Matthew Klippan presented an update on the Younger Veterans Taskforce.

The main issues raised were:

- Communication Strategy and Market Research – work has commenced on integrating the information audit and web redesign;
- Information audit – there are 700 information products that have been identified, reduced from over 1000; and
- Service Delivery Training – training has been completed in Brisbane, Sydney and Adelaide to raise awareness of, and empathy for, the issues facing younger veterans and serving members.

④ **Strategic Research & Development Update – Adam Luckhurst**

Adam Luckhurst indicated end of financial year research contracts are due to be completed and they will include a report on rehabilitation.

Research priorities include mental health, e health, aged care and carers.

④ **Defence Links Update – Adam Luckhurst**

Adam Luckhurst discussed the role of Defence and DVA in the transition of serving members into civilian life by the provision information kits for families and commanding officers will provide them with information on what support is available. Mental health links are an important focus.

Brochures on hearing loss prevention have been distributed as a part of the Health Promotion Program.

🕒 Rehabilitation Update – Adam Luckhurst on behalf of Heather Jackson

Adam Luckhurst provided the Forum with statistics that report on the number of veterans successfully utilising VVRS. These statistics include 1292 (64.6%) being accepted into CRS Australia. Of the veterans who were provided with a program, 686 (53.1%) succeeded in obtaining or retaining a job. Of the 686 programs resulting in a job, 76.5% have achieved sustained employment (employment in excess of 6 months). As at 31 December 2006, there were 162 active cases being managed by CRS.

Bill Rolfe suggested that the Forum should focus on the rehabilitation of younger veterans.

- **Action Item 2** – Adam Luckhurst to present an update on rehabilitation processes under the three Acts.

🕒 Access Card Update – Carolyn Spiers

Carolyn Spiers discussed the Access Card and how it brings together information collected by Medicare, Centrelink and DVA. DVA will maintain Gold and White Access Cards to minimise the impact on veterans.

🕒 Compensation Policy Group Update – Mark Johnson

Mark Johnson reported that there were 5500 claims made for permanent impairment under MRCA and SRCA for the year 2004/2005. A Task Force was set up last year to investigate the time taken to settle claims.

- **Action Item 3** – Mark Johnson to provide statistics on MRCA/SRCA and VEA claims. These statistics are attached to the Minutes.

A draft of the OneDVA claim form has been endorsed by the Steering Committee and it is expected that ESOs will be consulted soon on its format and content. This form is intended to be user friendly and veterans can expect to have access to this next year.

Mick Quinn suggested that the Needs Assessment that is usually done over the phone needs to be reduced to writing. Bill Rolfe agreed that this be looked into.

- **Action Item 4** – MRCA Policy to provide an update on phone versus paper Needs Assessment.

🕒 Vietnam Veterans' Counselling Service Update - David Morton

John O'Connor reported that the name change from VVCS to Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVFCS) has received a positive response.

Agenda Item 7: Update from Department of Defence

- **Action Item 5** – DVA to invite through the Department of Defence a representative from the Defence Community Organisation to do a presentation at the next Forum meeting.

Ⓢ ADF Rehabilitation Program Update - Jim Porteous - *handout attached.*

Jim Porteous was unable to attend the meeting due to work commitments.

Jim provided the Forum with the number of Open and Closed Plans referred to the ADF Rehabilitation Program (ADFRP).

Further information is required on the outcomes of the Program.

- **Action Item 6** – Jim Porteous to provide general information on the outcomes of the ADFRP at the next meeting.

Ⓢ Defence Centre for Occupational Health Update – John Heggart - *handout attached.*

John Heggart gave an update on the key activities of the DCOH. A particular concern is the development of sound reporting procedures when groups go out to areas that may have hazards. This procedure is to be a permanent feature of overseas deployment where groups will collect data before, during and after service.

Countries are expected to collaborate on the collection and sharing of information to identify what we do not already know about the health impacts on individuals.

Ⓢ Update on RF Radiation – Dr Ian Gardner

Ian Gardner gave a presentation on RF radiation. He said that many veterans are concerned about the possible long term health effects from exposure to non-ionising radiation, particularly from radar.

Dr Gardner explained that there had been a number of recent important studies. The “Epidemiology of Health Effects of Radiofrequency Exposure” had a major focus on mobile telephones and there is no convincing evidence of any RF health effect. The Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA) has produced a fact sheet finding that at low RF exposure levels the evidence for health effects is ambiguous and unproven.

Dr Gardner also discussed the US NAVY Korean War Radar Technician Study, a four year study of 40,581 personnel and so a significant study. The findings of this study were that radar exposure had little effect on mortality.

The position of the DCOH is to focus on the continuation of good RF safety measures, and reporting on all exposures using AC563.

Dr Gardner concluded that it is very unlikely that RF radiation exposure such as what might be experienced today will cause any adverse health effects.

Agenda Item 8: Ex-Service Representative Issues

- ④ Australian Veterans' & Australian Defence Services Council – Colin Doust
 - Effects of RF Radiation on Air Crews
 - WO of each of the services attend the NYVCF

Bill Rolfe would like a representative of the Army, Navy and RAAF to attend the Forum meeting.

- **Action Item 7** – Bill Rolfe to approach the three services to suggest a warrant officer or a representative attend the meeting.

- ④ Australian Peacekeeper & Peacemaker Veterans' Association Inc. – Mick Quinn
 - Younger Veterans in Residential Care

Mick Quinn discussed one particular case where the family of a veteran with a brain tumour is unable to afford appropriate care. Bill Rolfe said that this case should be discussed outside the meeting and that the broader issue is the accommodation options available to veterans. Anne Pahl discussed that she raised this case at the Victorian meeting and that cases should be handled by DVA Case Managers.

Wayne Penniall discussed that accommodation needs should be identified regarding age, circumstances and particular needs. There are 4 younger veterans currently in residential care.

Bill Rolfe suggested VVCS meet with the veteran. Wayne Penniall will follow up and provide details to Bill Rolfe.

- **Action Item 8** – Wayne Penniall to provide an update on the accommodation available to younger veterans.

- Younger Veteran Support
- OneDVA Claim Form

Mick Quinn discussed that the standard of the primary claim should be that an appeal is not necessary. Bill Rolfe agreed that this should be the aim but cautioned that there are complex factors at play. Applicants are entitled to appeal and they may rely on emotive or factual issues. The question may depend on the adequacy of the advice they receive from well meaning but inexperienced representatives. Mick applauded volunteer veterans for their work in advising veterans about their entitlements.

- Membership of the NYVCF (see item 9)
- Special Rate of Disability Pension for MRCA (SRDP)

A paper on this issue has been signed by Mark Johnson and distributed to Forum members.

- **Action Item 9** – The Forum to further consider and discuss the SRDP issue at the next meeting.

- Ⓢ Returned & Services League of Australia – Anne Pahl
 - Younger Veterans in Residential Care
 - Case Management/Responsible Person for Younger Veterans

Anne discussed that case management is a priority. A brochure on Support for Younger Veterans in Residential Care was made available to the Forum. ESOs assisted VERTAC in putting this together.

- Membership to the NYVCF by current serving members of the ADF

- Ⓢ Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia – Jason O'Dowd
 - Assistance VVAA can offer prior to discharge
 - Pharmaceutical discrepancies
 - Transition Management Service

Due to time restraints, the Forum was unable to discuss Jason O'Dowd's Agenda Items. Bill Rolfe said that they would be addressed at the next meeting.

- Ⓢ Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia – Tim McCombe
 - Treatment of Gold Card holders living in country areas
(To be addressed at our next Forum meeting)

Agenda Item 9: General Business

Bill Rolfe raised a request by David Lewis, National Chairman of the Australian Special Air Service Association and Ray Brown, National President of the Injured Service Persons Association to become members of the Forum. Members of the Forum agreed that David Lewis and Ray Brown be invited to become Forum members.

- **Action Item 10** – Bill Rolfe to write to David Lewis and Ray Brown to invite them to become members of the Forum.

Brigadier Rolfe commented that the Forum needs to be more focused by reducing the number of matters on the agenda and by providing documentation to the Forum prior to it meeting.

Agenda Item 10: Close of Forum

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 8 November 2007.

The Forum closed at 4.55pm.