



AUSTRALIAN PEACEKEEPER & PEACEMAKER
VETERANS' ASSOCIATION
NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

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*Commemorating 20 Years of the Deployment of the
Australian Contingent to the United Nations Advance
Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC)*

7th October 2014

APPVA National Executive
APPVA NATCOM

**National President Annual Report to the Quarterly General Meeting of 11 October 2014,
Held at Potts Point, Sydney NSW 2000**

Introduction

As I enter into the first year of my second term as the National President of the Australian Peacekeeper & Peacemaker Veterans' Association (APPVA), I would like to take this opportunity to thank the National Executive and the National Committee for their continued support throughout my past and present tenure. To all our members who continue to provide ongoing support at state levels I thank you for your time and efforts and I urge you to continually provide positive feedback and support to our members and their families. We as an association are only small in comparison to the RSL, Legacy and Vietnam Veterans' association, but it is how we provide the level of support to our members and their families that make us a unique.

To those who represent the association at National Forums I commend you for your feedback to the national executive and our national committee as this is vital to the way we operate both at national and state levels. Lastly to the APPVA delegation who continually visits the Australian Parliamentary Ministers on matters raised by our members I thank you personally for the time you commit to the association in addressing matters that are and have been raised by our members.

National Forums

Since our last AGM in Tasmania, we have had some significant changes to names of the National Forums which is chaired the Department of Veterans Affairs, the changes were adopted I believe to further develop the departments understanding of the contemporary soldiers needs and how to address situations as they arise. I have included a list of APPVA representatives on current forums so you are aware:

Ex-Service Organisation Round Table Forum	Allan Thomas (National President)
National Advisory Committee Forum	Paul Copeland (National Advisor)
National Aged and Community Care Forum	Chris Dawson (Qld President)
Younger Veterans – Contemporary Needs Forum	

The National Forums is a place where the association can raise issues concerning their constituents; most of the main points raised are concerns that have been generated at our Annual General Meetings. It provides the association with a platform where we are able address issues that have a big impact on defence force personnel's (currently serving and non-serving members) entitlements and the welfare of not only them but their families. We as an association use this to ensure that our action plans are addressed accordingly. If you would like to be kept up to date with information from either national or state forums please visit:

http://www.dva.gov.au/ex-service_organisations/consultation/Pages/index.aspx

Future of Veterans' Advocacy

Delegates for the APPVA, Allan Thomas, Michael Quinn, Paul Copeland and Rodney Thompson met with the MRCA Review Team in Canberra in November 2013 to put forward our concerns in regards to the operation of Service Centre. We as an association believed that the best way forward for ESOs was to adopt a one stop shop and have us co-located with the various VAN Offices nationally. We found by adopting this new approach it would have all Ex-Service Organisations working together for the betterment of the greater veteran's community.

Since our discussion with the department, they have now reviewed various locations of their Veterans' Affairs Network (VAN) Agencies. We have now seen the department close some of its VAN Offices located all over Australia.

We have also seen the department conduct a review under the guidance of the past Repatriation Commissioner BRIG Bill Rolfe who is conducted a review of training under TIP. This is to see whether there is a need to get external contractors in to provide future training. More information in regards to this will follow once BRIG Rolfe's review is released regarding training; I believe that it will open for discussion at the up and coming ESORT meeting in November 2014.

Greater Access to Health and Wellbeing Services for Veterans and Their Families through Facebook

The Abbott Government's ongoing commitment to increasing the accessibility of veteran mental health support, Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Senator the Hon Michael Ronaldson launched an integrated social media presence for the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS). The VVCS is at the frontline of mental health and wellbeing support for the veteran community and provides counselling and group programs for veterans and their family members.

Combined with the recently launched VVCS Website, a VVCS Facebook presence provides an additional pathway for members of the veteran community and their families to connect to this important support service.

The VVCS Facebook page will enable the veteran community to learn more about VVCS group programs and other services. It will also provide an avenue for community questions to be answered as an online VVCS veteran support community is established.

VVCS online tools can be accessed on mobile platforms, ensuring instant and simplified access to information and support details when it's needed.

AUSkey and Registration for Ex-Service Organisations

<https://abr.gov.au/AUSkey/Registering-for-AUSkey/Register-for-an-AUSkey/#https://abr.gov.au/AUSkey/Registering-for-AUSkey/Register-for-an-AUSkey/>

Role of the ESO Portal Champion

Portal Champion Attributes

The Portal Champion is a vital change agent who will contribute greatly to the success of the ESO portal implementation in your organisation. They will be the key person who will liaise with DVA Online Services team and ensure that your organisation is prepared for staff to access the portal.

DVA online services team recommends that the Portal Champion be someone who:

- Is well organised
- Is comfortable using a computer
- Has a good knowledge of who's who in your organisation
- Is well-connected in your organisation
- Is a person who can get things done

They can be an administrative assistant, general staff member or committee member.

Functions

The Portal Champion will have a few critical functions that they will undertake to prepare for the ESO Portal implementation. They will need to:

- Identify who is the AUSKey administrator

If no AUSKey administrator

Find out who is listed with the ABN and set up administrator. (An AUSKey help guide will be provided in a later email)

- Liaise with AUSKey administrator to set up staff AUSKeys before October 2014
- Coordinate staff training • Update management on progress
- Liaise with DVA and complete the Readiness Checklist (provided via email)

Liaison

Management

Management is the owner of the portal for your organisation. They may or may not require access to the portal. They may also be the Portal Champion, portal manager or a general user of the portal. They may require 'read only' access to be able to download reports on activity within the portal.

- The Portal Champion will update management on any problems with issuing of AUSKeys to staff and request instructions (if required)

AUSKey administrator

The AUSKey Administrator is a person who is registered with ABR as an owner of the organisation's ABN. They are responsible for setting up access for all staff to individual AUSKeys.

The Portal Champion will ensure the AUSKey Administrator:

- has been identified
- is aware of the requirements to set up AUSKeys for all portal users.
- sets up portal user AUSKeys by October 2014 (AUSKey guide provided via email)
- understands the ongoing need to manage the issuing of AUSKeys

Portal Manager

The organisation requires one initial portal manager who may set up others with portal manager access. They should set up at least one alternate portal manager. They will generally be a coordinator or supervisor who can determine the type of access individual staff will require and set up that access.

The Portal Champion will ensure the portal manager:

- details are provided to DVA
- receives training and understands their role
- receives their activation code from DVA
- sets up access within the portal for all staff who require it
- sends activation codes to all staff who require access
- updates DVA with changes to the organisation contact information

DVA Online Services team

The Portal Champion will liaise with DVA Online Services Team to:

- Provide the name, phone number and email address of the portal manager
- Coordinate questions from management, portal managers or staff and provide
- Complete and send the Readiness Checklist (will be provided via email)

Performance Audit of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA's) administration of the Repatriation Transport Scheme

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) has commenced a performance audit of the Department of Veterans' Affairs administration of the Repatriation Transport Scheme. This Scheme provides eligible veterans and war widows/widowers with assistance with transport for medical treatment.

The ANAO will be examining DVA's administration of the Repatriation Transport Scheme with a particular focus on the Booked Car with Driver Scheme and reimbursement of travel claims. The scope of the audit will not include ambulance services provided under the Scheme.

Repatriation Transport Scheme

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) is responsible for delivering the Repatriation Transport Scheme (the Scheme). Veterans' Transport is one of a range of DVA services aimed at promoting and supporting quality of life and independent living for the aged in their own homes.

The Scheme provides eligible veterans and war widows/widowers with assistance with transport for medical treatment including financial assistance towards the cost of travel, meals and accommodation as well as providing pre-booked cars with drivers for the more aged and frail.

More than 2 million trips were undertaken by veterans last year for treatment purposes. DVA has reported that demand for the Scheme is increasing. In 2012–13, travel reimbursement claims

increased by 13 per cent (to 165 137 claims) and Booked Car Scheme bookings increased by 8.9 per cent (to 955 954 person trips).

The Australian Government allocated \$184 million for veterans' travel for treatment purposes in the 2014–15 Budget and expects this expenditure to increase in the future.

Alliance of Defence Service Organisation (ADSO)

As partners of the ADSO, these are some of the issues that we are currently raising with Ministers in Canberra, the alliance organisation has been put into place to ensure that government aren't making changes through the lower house without consultation with Ex-Service Organisation input, these are some of the issues that are currently being discussed:

Military Superannuation

- Review of Government thinking on the new ADF accumulation superannuation scheme, including transition arrangements from MSBS; and
- Discussion on MSBS issues with consideration for the possible removal of MBLs and the adoption of portability provisions for those members with preserved employer funds.

Veterans Disability Pensions

- Thoughts on defining a benchmark for the Special Rate now that this is planned to be removed as part of the budget measures; and
- Discussion on feasibility of excising the Veterans Disability Pension from the proposed reduction in scope for the biannual adjustment of Commonwealth Age/Service and other Pensions.

Other Issues – Open up discussion and an update on what is happening with the outsourced ADF health system and Government priorities relating to mental health support.

Minister Robert opened proceedings by welcoming the ADSO leadership group and reiterated that this was only the first of a number of similar meetings going forward. The suggestion that on-going future meetings be scheduled during each of the Autumn, Winter and Spring Parliamentary sitting periods seemed sensible.

He acknowledged the ADSO Policy Agenda Briefing Paper which he had read. Some issues will need to be taken up separately out of session with those Ministers who have specific responsibilities for them. That said, he thought that there was no topic that could not be broached, given the spirit of the original arrangement which had as its objective *'the coming*

together for open debate and discussion between an ADSO leadership group and key portfolio Ministers who have an abiding interest in veterans and ADF conditions of service issues'.

New ADF Super Scheme

- From 1 July 2016, MSBS will be closed to new members and the new 'accumulation' ADF-specific scheme will come into being. Existing MSBS members will have the option of moving to the new scheme – there will be no compulsion to do so;
- The final features of the proposed new ADF Super Scheme are a long way from being finalised. Draft legislation could emerge by July 2015. ADSO will have input but opinions/attitudes of ADF members will be canvassed around the country;
- Minister Robert summarised those elements known about the new scheme – they are as follows:
 - Employer contributions will be paid at a rate of 15.4% to a default superannuation fund, probably managed by ComSuper. That contribution will increase to 18% for any period in which members are serving in war-like operations. the Minister made the point that any retrospective reclassification of a deployment that triggered the additional 3% would attract an assumed earning rate equal to the Commonwealth bond rate over the period from an individual's deployment to the date of decision to reclassify ;
 - There will be no mandatory employee contribution;
 - The scheme will allow full portability to another Super scheme if a member leaves the Service;
 - Death and disability benefit arrangements will be consistent with those under the MSBS;
 - ADF members will have far more control over where their funds are invested. Any reputable fund can use its initiative to attract ADF clients.
- Discussion followed the summary with the Government reporting that there had been no public or other input/debate from anyone about the proposed 15.4% employer contribution rate. Despite ADSO argument that it should be higher (to recognise the 'uniqueness of military service' and transfer of risk), Minister Robert stated that it was a cabinet decision and unlikely to be changed. Government opinion is that for the majority who serve 10 years or less, the new accumulation scheme will be a 'good thing'. The Minister made the observation that those in MSBS and converting to the new scheme will mean an immediate "rise" of a so-to-speak a 5% pay increase because there will be no compulsory employee contribution. We informed the Minister that we regarded this statement as extremely misleading.
- A debate ensued about claims of a 'pay rise' and about what salary component upon which the 15.4% contribution will be based. Will 'Service Allowance' and other allowances be included? Minister Robert did say the salary basis "would be better than" the salary for MSBS purposes and undertook to provide details before any next discussion about that issue.
- While it is early days in how the structure of the new scheme will evolve (future meetings will discuss), one early known difficulty to resolve is 'how will the insurance component' of the scheme be handled and legislated.

- Very little draft legislative work has thus far been undertaken. More information will be available at the next meeting.

MSBS Issues

- A key feature of MSBS (employer financed benefit) is that benefits are not related to contributions but on years of service and salary. Such 'defined benefits' have been gradually phased out in the public sector (and private ones too) in favour of accumulation schemes. Under an accumulation scheme, a member's benefits are directly related to cumulative contributions and investment earnings on the accumulated balance.
- According to the Minister closure of the MSBS is expected to reduce unfunded superannuation liabilities by \$126 billion by 2050. The switch to an accumulation scheme will however have an impact on the budget as the employer contributions will be paid when the liability is incurred. The Podger Review called for a new accumulation scheme. The National Commission of Audit called for the MSBS to be closed to new entrants. It considered that the 'Commonwealth's unfunded superannuation liabilities' represented a significant long-term risk to the Government's balance sheet and should be better managed. Closing the MSBS was to be part of a package of measures to address these risks. The Government made its decision on that basis.
- The weaknesses of MSBS were discussed. ADSO put its strong points of view on the table. MBLs should be removed, portability of employer benefit should be introduced for those with "preserved employer component" funds and pension benefit must be indexed in the same way as recently legislated for DFRDB recipients. Further discussion will undoubtedly ensue but the Government is currently reluctant to move on any of those issues. Probable reasons for this arising from the Minister's comments:
 - MBLs affect few members (approx. 450); the portability issue would be fixed if those on MSBS elected to transfer to the new ADF Super scheme, and
 - 'indexation' of military superannuation is now a wider budgetary measure introduced in the last budget which dictated that age/service pensions will be indexed to CPI.

Veterans Disability Pensions

- ADSO strongly stated its position in relation to the proposed budgetary changes which had the effect of indexing Age/Service and Veteran Disability Pensions to CPI undermined the Government's previously explicitly stated position that such entitlements should not erode in value over time. The budget effectively decreased the DVA-dependant recipient incomes and that had an extremely adverse impact on the general veteran community. This reversal of policy has prompted a loss of trust in the Government within the defence community.
- Other apparent detriments in the budget that affected veterans were raised. ADSO reported to the Ministers that large sections of the veterans' community were now 'offside', particularly the disability pensioners. The Government took the issues on notice for consideration at future meetings but proffered that the parlous state of the Commonwealth's finances precluded it from making too many early changes to the current budget directions. The Minister (Senator Ronaldson) stated his "priority" is to ensure that veterans of the more recent conflicts are

better treated than those returning from Vietnam and that priority where he is looking to direct the Department's resources.

- Whilst not ruling it out, the Minister is resistant conducting a formal review of the issues surrounding the impact of the budget on veterans disability pensions and the Government believed we needed to be certain of the likely ramifications should one be initiated. No review is proposed for the near future. The matter was deferred to a future meeting.

ADF Health Support System

We reported that we are still receiving negative reports on the performance of the outsourced arrangements from ADF members and the medical professional associations. Minister Robert conceded the implementation of the outsourcing arrangements was badly handled but that things were improving. He claimed to have reports and statistics supporting this. He also mentioned that for the first time he as Minister is starting to get reports giving him a comprehensive overview of the situation. He promised to provide copies of these reports to us. (Note: He has previously supplied reports on the take up of the ADF health support to families but these constituting "Departmental Advice" cannot be further circulated. They did indicate though that some 40% of eligible families have enrolled.) I would expect the promised information on the performance of the ADF health system will have similar constraints but we should be able to share the information on a "one to one" basis when next we meet.

We also urged the Ministers to fully support and make information about the emerging "peer support" programs aimed at helping ADF members and veterans with mental and emotional health issues more accessible and for Minister Roberts to do so for ADF unit based initiatives but counselled against allowing such initiatives to become institutionalised.

The Government's Priorities

Both Ministers Robert and Ronaldson proffered that, while they would like to do more, the short term holds little prospect that much can change. With its limited resources it has short term priorities of shoring up the BEST grants scheme, focussing on mental health issues, and supporting those who have returned from recent conflict zones, including their families.

General Assessment

As a first-up meeting that sought in the first instance to exchange thoughts/ideas on matters of concern to those serving or who may have served, the assessment is that it achieved at least that objective. Key issues were indeed canvassed unimpeded by bureaucratic inputs and influences. Those issues were discussed in a frank and informal way. Because much was unresolved future meeting will probably have the same topics on the agenda – a good thing because they will remain important.

The next set of discussions is likely in the September/October Spring sitting session.

Achievements for 2014

The achievements of the association through constant consultation with departmental/parliamentary dignitaries are as follows:

- the families of four Australian Defence Force members who lost their lives during service with United Nations peacekeeping operations have been awarded the Dag Hammarskjold medal.
- Meritorious Unit Commendation for FCU UNTAC 1992 – 1993

Terrorist Attacks on Australian Defence Force Members

This issue was raised by an association issue (Paul Copeland) on behalf of the association to the Minister of Veterans' Affairs and the Minister of Defence:

I write this email to you in response to concerns from the Veteran and ADF community into coverage of Military Compensation Entitlements in the unfortunate event of a Terrorist attack on ADF members that are off-duty and targeted veterans of the ADF.

Given the recent tensions within Australia of radical Islamists targeting, in particular Australian Military and Police; including the unfortunate incident in Endeavour Hills, Melbourne this week with the attempted murder of two officers from the Counter Terrorism Squad, along with the reported threats against an ADF member in Sydney; it may be time to consider an amendment to the VEA/MRCA to provide for ADF members who become victims of terrorism, outside of duty hours.

With the case of the Royal Fusiliers Drummer Lee Rigby, we expect that the family would have received full compensation entitlements under the Brit Military Compensation Entitlements system. In the UK, there is no discrimination of service type, as opposed to Australia. However, in saying this, the MRCA provides for the full compensation entitlements for any ADF member who dies as a result of such an incident due to travelling to and from their place of duty.

What isn't clear is that if such an aggression is made against an ADF member who is not either on duty, or travelling to and from duty, what will be the service classification of such aggression? My suggestion is warlike service entitlements, if the ADF member survives, however with wounds, injuries or illness. These are considered to be compensable and liable conditions, because of that person's stature and employment that being the ADF.

Terrorism today is not bound by distance and Areas of Operations. It is an act of aggression toward the sovereignty of Australia and its citizens. It can and has happened without warning, both domestically and internationally.

Terrorism has no bounds. There are no particular Areas of Operations [AO], where warlike service is the norm for the expectation of casualties; the Department is highly recommended to seek a resolution to this highlighted matter.

The APPVA is enthusiastic to discuss this matter with you and your staff at your earliest convenience.

To that end this will be the main thrust of the association now and up until the next ESORT meeting where hopefully we are able to obtain some resolution. Once again I thank my colleagues for their concerns in the midst of this current crisis.

Conclusion

Since being accepted back into the chair for tenure by the national committee, the association has progressed in such a manner where we have seen Queensland go through a restructure due to manpower. This was always going to be the case as past has shown us with the Vietnam Veterans' returning from conflict, men and women on their return continued to work up to an age where they had to retire or their disabilities got the best of them.

They then took up office within their respective Ex-Service Organisations, what we are now seeing within our organisation is ex- defence force people with injuries taking up positions within Ex-Service Organisations which is great to see.

On another matter our Action Plan from 2013 has moved ahead slowly this is due to the recent change in government and changes within the department of Veterans' Affairs. In saying that new people in positions means new directions requiring implementation, this is more prominent in new applications that have been instigated on the internet and on mobile phones to enhance the contemporary Australian Defence Force member's knowledge of what type of resources are available to them through the different government agencies and where they are able to seek advice on matters of entitlement through either their local Ex-Service Organisation or local Veterans' Affairs Network Agency.

Now that we have new people in positions at both State and National levels within government we are now in a position to go over our past Action Plan and address these issues which were never finalised with their predecessors. As the only younger Ex-Service Organisation which predominately deals with younger veterans' issues our presence at higher levels of government are more prominent now as we have a brand that is recognisable to all government agencies and defence establishments nationally.

We as an association have and will continue to operate under these ever decrease government constraints in order to maintain our effectiveness and efficiency at all levels and deliver the best outcomes for our members and their families.

Once again I cannot thank those who do a lot in the back ground in my absence, in particular Rhonda Copeland the National Treasurer with her attention to detail ensuring that our paid

pension officers and delegates who go to Canberra and other areas within Australia do not incur out of pocket expenses, Rhonda provides a high level of expertise when issues are raised about BEST funding to state executives. Special thanks must go out to Paul Copeland the founder of the association who works tirelessly in the back ground as the National Advisor to keep me up to date with current medallic issues or changes to entitlements and welfare of our members. I would like to thank Michael Quinn for his ongoing support as the National Vice President of APPVA for his advice in regards to association issues and filling in when I am not available at meetings, in hand with his role as the National Vice President, Michael provides a high level of knowledge in matter of entitlements and is called upon by DVA National to discuss matters of importance in terms of compensation. Rodney Thompson our National Entitlements Officer works endlessly out of Brisbane and provides good advice and a stable platform for all our pension officers nationally, Rod is an integral part of the team who consults with Ministers when called upon as part of the National delegation that visit Canberra.

Kevin Ryan our National Secretary who I cannot thank enough for his prompt response in getting vital information and issues as they arise to me. Kevin also maintains the National Membership Database and the mail outs of our Peacekeepers Magazines quarterly.

Mick Phelan our National Website manager who continues to provide a high level expertise by ensuring the information that appears on the website is true and accurate for all our members, Mick from the executives we thank you and commend you for your work to date.

To our State President's your input into our quarterly meeting are extremely valuable to our cause it provides National with some insight as to what is transpiring within states and what issues they have raised with the relevant state government bodies regarding their members and their immediate families.

These people take on these duties in a voluntary capacity to ensure that the information raised within Parliament or within the Department are disseminated as quickly as it comes in to all our members and their families and to all those on lookers who continually visit our website to see gain the most up to date information or information about the association.

That concludes my report for the AGM; I look forward to seeing you all at Potts Point in Sydney on the 10 and 11 October 2014.

Regards

Allan Thomas JP
National President