



# AUSTRALIAN PEACEKEEPER & PEACEMAKER VETERANS' ASSOCIATION INC

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(INCORPORATED IN VICTORIA)

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*Also assisting veterans' of Iraq, Afghanistan and Peacetime Service*

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

3<sup>rd</sup> September 2015

APPVA National Executive  
APPVA National Committee

## **National President Annual Report for the Annual General Meeting of 19 September 2015, Held at Geelong RSL 50 Barwon Heads Rd, Belmont VIC 3216**

### **Introduction**

Welcome to all our members in attendance at this year Annual General Meeting Conference held in Geelong, Victoria. Firstly I would like to convey my gratitude to our National Treasurer Rhonda Copeland and the National Advisor Paul Copeland for organising this activity in Victoria, I am aware of how much ground work goes into ensuring that the facilities are adequate to cater for the numbers in attendance on both days.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the National Executive Staff in particular Michael Quinn the National Vice President for his continued support in my absence but most of all his continued support in consulting various sections within the DVA on issues pertaining to veterans' entitlements, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank his partner in crime Mr Rod Thompson the National Entitlements officer for APPVA who provides a high level of support in matters of entitlements and welfare which has become very concerning for the association.

The APPVA without Michael and Rod's continual consultation with DVA national executives I strongly believe veterans' would be far worse off in relation to the erosion of their

entitlements, so from an association's perspective I thank you both for your continued hindrance in ensuring the DVA are aware that we are monitoring veterans' entitlements.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Rhonda Copeland who continually maintains our expenditure and her continued support in ensuring that all bookings for the APPVA delegation are done in a reasonable time frame without any hiccups, Rhonda from my perspective thank you from an association's perspective for your ongoing support as the National Treasurer.

To Paul Copeland thank you for your continued support in regards to matters concerning the association, your role as the National Advisor has ensured that the association focus on the main issues at hand, your continued consultation with Honours and Awards have seen very positive results such as ASM CT/SR to those who were involved with I Commando Unit which is the most recent award issued by Honours & Awards, a special thanks goes out to David Vinen as well who continually provides support to Paul when needed.

I would like to thank Kevin Ryan for role as the National Secretary of APPVA; Kevin does a lot of work in the background that goes un-noticed. Kevin's role in the association is vital in terms of the association moving forward his role is virtually the eyes and ears of the association he provides the National President and the National Executives of key issues that arise, so Kevin from my perspective I thank you for your continued support as the National Secretary and ensuring that our membership base is always up to date.

This year the APPVA delegation has yet to consult with various Ministers and key personnel within the DVA, this is due to a various number of projects that have developed over the months which I will now elaborate on:

### **Allegations against Writeway Reports**

<http://www.dva.gov.au/consultation-and-grants/writeway-report>

While there have been isolated complaints over the years, which have been handled on an individual basis, in late 2013 and early 2014 the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) received four letters of complaint from various sources. These letters contained 39 allegations against a contractor used by the Department for the production of military research reports, Writeway Research Service Pty Ltd.

The Department engaged the law firm Clayton Utz to conduct an independent investigation into the allegations. The report by Clayton Utz found that the allegations are largely without foundation.

The Clayton Utz report includes some findings that recommend improvements to the Department's policies and processes. These findings are welcomed by the Department as they are an opportunity to improve its practices for obtaining military research reports. The Department has already implemented some of the changes and the remainder will be progressively addressed in the coming months.

One further matter raised as part of the investigation was a potential breach of Privacy by a DVA advocate. This matter was subject to a separate investigation which was finalised in early 2015. It did result in a departmental privacy breach, which was reported to the Privacy Commissioner, and a departmental breach of Legal Services Directions, which was reported to the Office of Legal Services Co-ordination.

The parties involved in this matter have been separately advised of the outcome. It should also be noted that while the privacy complaint was included as part of the various complaints about military researchers, it did not directly relate to the military research, it was actually a complaint about the actions of a departmental advocate before the AAT.

By way of background, the Department has been contracting military research services since the late 1990s to prepare research reports in relation to compensation claims. Military research reports are requested for a very small number of compensation claims and only where there is insufficient evidence for a decision to be made in relation to a claim.

In 2013-14 there were approximately 59,000 compensation related decisions covering DVA primary determinations, internal reviews, the Veterans' Review Board (VRB) and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) with military research reports only requested in 46 cases. This represents only 0.08% of all compensation decisions requiring further clarification of military service or events.

Military research reports do not determine a claimant's eligibility to compensation. Generally, the report seeks to confirm that an event occurred for which evidence has not been readily available from the ADF through routine information requests or that the claimant witnessed or participated in the event. When requested, military research reports form a very small part of the evidence used to determine a compensation claim.

The Department routinely provides a claimant and their representative with a copy of the military research report for their comment prior to making any adverse decision or for matters before the VRB or the AAT.

**Health Studies that the APPVA have shown interest in over the years and continue to consult various Ministers and DVA Executives about, these reports can be viewed by individuals by visiting the website that I have provided before:**

<http://www.dva.gov.au/about-dva/publications/research-and-studies/health-research-publications>

### **Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) Health Studies**

Overview: These studies are part of the Military Health Outcomes Programme (MilHOP), a significant body of research commissioned by the Department of Defence to determine the impact of operational deployment on the health and wellbeing of service men and women.

### **Peacekeepers Health Study**

Overview: This study investigated the health of Australian veterans of deployments on United Nations sanctioned peacekeeping missions to Rwanda, Somalia, Cambodia, Namibia, Western Sahara and East Timor over the period 1989-2002.

### **Rwanda Deployment Health Study**

Overview: This study aimed to examine the health and compensation outcomes of Rwanda veterans and investigate whether there were differences in outcomes between the different groups deployed.

### **The Health and Wellbeing of female Vietnam and Contemporary Veterans**

Overview: The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) commissioned Dr Samantha Cromptoets to lead a study in 2009 into the health and wellbeing of female Vietnam and contemporary veterans. The study was completed in 2012.

### **Timor-Leste Family Study**

Overview: The study investigates the effects on the health and wellbeing of the families of Australian Defence Force members who were deployed to Timor-Leste.

### **Vietnam Veterans' Family Study**

Overview: The Vietnam Veterans Family Study (VVFS) is the most significant research program ever undertaken by the Australian Government into the health of the families of Australia's Vietnam veterans. The study examined the physical, mental and social health of Vietnam veterans and their families, covering a broad range of health outcomes for these people.

### **Independent study into suicide in the ex-service community**

Overview: Independent study by Professor David Dunt - to examine the broad issue of suicide in the ex-service community, including a number of specific cases of suicide over the past three years.

### **Intergenerational Health Effects of Service in the Military - Research Protocol**

Overview: Research protocol report for the study of intergenerational health effects of service in the military.

### **Oberon Class Submarine Occupational Hygiene Project**

Overview: The final report, Oberon Class Submarine Occupational Hygiene Project, was submitted by the Centre for Military and Veterans' Health to the Australian Government Department of Defence on 28 February 2006. The study retrospectively developed an exposure profile for the submariners.

### **Report of the third study of mortality and cancer incidence in aircraft maintenance personnel**

Overview: Results from the third study of mortality and cancer incidence among F-111 aircraft maintenance personnel, commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs, were released on 20 February 2009 by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

### **Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Program Review Reports**

Overview: The Review of PTSD Group Treatment Programs was undertaken by the Centre for Military and Veterans' Health (CMVH) to ensure that services offered to clients of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) were evidence-based and met the needs of both older and contemporary veteran cohorts.

### **Review of Commonwealth agencies' relationship with the late Signaller Geoffrey Gregg**

Overview: The Government's response to a review of the circumstances surrounding the death of Signaller Geoffrey Gregg was published on 30 July 2008. The response outlined 15 outcomes to address systemic problems with transition out of the services.

### **Review of Mental Health Care in the Australian Defence Force and Transition through Discharge**

Overview: Prof. Dunt's comprehensive report compared mental health care support in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) with world's best practice and assessed the extent to which the mental health needs of serving and transitioning ADF members were being met.

### **Review of SAS Veterans' health Concerns**

Overview: The health study was initiated in December 2002 to identify and document exposures of concern arising through Special Air Services (SAS) operational skills enhancement and training, and to examine their possible adverse effects.

If any executive or members within the state would like to contribute the any of the above Health Studies please feel free to contact the National Secretary of the APPVA.

### **Review of the Special Rate Disability Pension**

A Steering Committee has been formed and has met four times this year to identify issues surrounding the MRCAs Special Rate Disability Pension which was to be examined during the review. The Steering Committee is also considering feedback provided by the ESOs.

An ESO Consultative Group (ESOCG) has been formed to ensure views of the veteran community are considered. The ESOCG met on 20 February 2015, they explored the background of the SRDP, the role of the ESOCG, an identified issues requiring consideration.

The Terms of Reference for the review has now been finalised taking into account the ESO input and the MRCC's views on coverage.

The Review is likely to take until the end of 2015; members of the ESORT will be updated as the review progresses.

### **Veterans' Advocacy Training Programme**

Following a number of reviews undertaken to date, including recent work by Brig. Rolfe AO (Ret'd.), a Working Party was formed from ESO, TIP and DVA nominations to progress the development and implementation of a veterans' advocacy training model. This Working Party formed a Technical Working Group to identify the issues in detail and provide a proposed approach.

Based on the significant work undertaken to date it has been agreed that the core of any proposed learning and development programme should be a Capability Framework. This framework would provide the required structure, content and feedback to develop a practitioner (advocate, pension officer or welfare officer) who is able to provide the best quality support to the veteran community.

The framework should be nationally consistent, in-line with adult learning principles and incorporate assessed competency and accreditation standards. It would also assess the practitioners, trainers and content of the programme to ensure its ongoing success, and would provide a clear training and development path from novice practitioner to senior accredited levels. This assessment of practitioners may also allow DVA to consider links between accredited advocates and claims processing priorities.

At all points in the review, the importance of providing the highest quality service to the veteran community has been identified as paramount.

Following on from this, and from the meetings of the Working Party and Technical Working Group, the Department has drafted a blueprint of a structure which could provide the basis for the final detailed design work and subsequent implementation and management of the entire programme. This blueprint builds on the current training responsibilities undertaken by TIP, while requiring stronger involvement from the ESOs and DVA. This blueprint is not a formal

Departmental position; it is however expected to provide the Technical Working Group with a basis for final discussions.

This proposed structure revolves around a three tiered system which brings together the ESO community, TIP and DVA as partners in managing and delivering a high quality learning and development programme for practitioners providing advice and assistance to the veteran community. While the current state TIP management structure and state based Training Consultative Groups (TCGs) are subsumed into the proposed structure it is expected that a number of current office-bearers would continue in similar roles.

The three proposed management groups are:

- *Strategic Governance Board*  
a national governance board with approximately seven members representing ESOs, TIP & DVA. It will provide strategic oversight, direction and governance.
- *Capability Framework Management Group*  
a national management body with approximately 11 members representing ESOs, TIP & DVA. It will develop, implement and maintain the Capability Framework.
- *Regional Administration Groups*  
Three Regional Administration Groups, each of approximately 8 members, would be formed to carry out the day-to-day administration issues of delivering the framework (including trainer management) and ensuring that communities of practice are developed and maintained within their regions to support practitioners.

While this draft blueprint provides a detailed management and governance structure there would still be considerable work required to identify and implement national practitioner development and assessment pathways and training content. This would be the role of the Capability Framework Management Group with strategic direction from the Strategic Management Group and regional advice from the Regional Management Groups.

As part of the blueprint a draft timeline has been developed and high-level consideration of transitional considerations provided.

To assist with the ultimate development of the capability framework content, the Department has also committed to making its staff technical training coursework available. A registered training organisation has been contracted by the Department to provide expert assistance in identifying how to best use this coursework within an advocacy training structure.

The blueprint for Advocacy Training is yet to be released but as soon as it has I will ensure that it is distributed to all advocates, pension and welfare officers who provide this type of work on behalf of the APPVA.

## **Homelessness**

Homelessness is becoming a major veteran concern in the community attributed in the main to mental health issues, substance abuse and a break in family unit associated with domestic violence. This matter was discussed briefly at the ESORT and due to some ambiguity, legislation issues, federal and state responsibilities and conflicting duty of care responsibilities, it was recommended that a subcommittee be formed through the Royal Australian Regiment RAR Association to research and determine the real, rather than anecdotal, issues and report those findings and recommendations to the ESORT.

Some of the points raised by the subcommittee:

1. It is recommended that the Commonwealth Government provide dedicated funding to address homelessness in the veteran population in Australia.
2. It is recommended that a report be presented to the Defence Links Steering Committee comprising senior managers of DVA, the Department of Defence and the ADF for consideration and discussion of findings and recommendations that affect each/ all organisations.
3. It is recommended that the Inter-Departmental Working Group led by the former Australian Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) to address homelessness in Australia be presented with the information, strategic options and recommendations identified in the report, with a request for a response to the DVA.
4. It is recommended that DVA develops a formal policy and strategic plan in relation to housing and support for veterans who are homeless or at risk. The policy should be used to inform the development of relevant DVA policy and programs in all related areas, e.g., housing, drug and alcohol, mental health, suicide, transition, aged care other. Priority should be given to ensuring that the strategic plan articulates with existing mainstream policy and programs (e.g., the homelessness, housing and aged care service systems) at Commonwealth and State/ Territory levels.

It has been five years since a report and its recommendations was tabled and the issue of veterans homelessness has not gone away; in fact all evidence supports the observation that it has become more prevalent and the only difference between 2009 and now is the media has picked up on it and hard questions are being asked of the Minister and one assumes the Department. I will keep you updated with the findings and report once approved by the Steering Committee.



## **Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia and the Australian Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Veterans Association Join Forces in Townsville**

Wednesday 12 August 2015 herald the opening of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (VVAA) and the Australian Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Veterans Association (AAPVA) in Townsville. The event started off with a life membership presentation to Mr Geoffrey John Evans OAM (Lofty) who was the immediate past president of the North Queensland APPVA, It was fitting that the award be presented on this day as Lofty is also a Vietnam Veteran, and this was presented to him by the National President of the APPVA Mr Allan Thomas.

The opening of the Townsville Branch of the VVAA and APPVA was held at Zac's House which is owned by the VVAA that provides accommodation for those veteran's and past members of the ADF who may be financially disadvantaged or homeless, the joining of these two major veterans' groups will create one powerful voice for veterans in Townsville.

The occasion yesterday was well attended by dignitaries from the Australian Defence Force, Department of Veterans' Affairs, members of state government and various Ex-Service Organisations. The VVAA and the APPVA will act in unison while maintaining their own identities; the arrangement will mean that the Townsville Branch of the VVAA and APPVA will be able to provide greater support to veterans and members of the forces both past and present.

The Branch of the VVAA and APPVA will work together on a number of issues that arise, including policy development, advocacy and welfare for veterans and members of the ADF and fundraising programs that are needed within the local government area.

Mr Peter Hindle the State President of the VVAA in Queensland and Mr Chris Dawson the APPVA State President in Queensland are looking forward to further extending their working relationship by adopting a similar concept at Remembrance House in Burpengary which is located north of Brisbane City.

The official opening of the Townsville Branch of the VVAA and APPVA at Zac's House was further acknowledged by the attendance of the National President of the APPVA Mr Allan Thomas who further extended his appreciation to both State Presidents regarding the hard work that has been put in place by their respective Sub Branch committees.

The Memorandum of Agreement also has practical benefits, with the assets and skills of both organisations complementing each other. The VVAA has significant knowledge in advocacy and negotiation expertise honed through years of fighting for veteran's rights, but its membership is ageing. The APPVA's membership base is typically younger, with its numbers swelled by recent ADF deployments, such as East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan by members of the 3 brigade; the initiative of both associations will only benefit the greater veteran's community in Townsville

The amalgamation of the association's will ensure veterans and members of the ADF both past and present who reside in Townsville will continue to have a strong and active voice in Queensland.

## **FUNCTIONAL REVIEW of the VETERANS AND VETERANS FAMILIES COUNSELLING SERVICE**

### **DRAFT RESPONSE FOR CONSULTATION**

#### **Introduction**

The Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) is, and will remain, Australia's leading provider of mental health and wellbeing support to the veteran and ex-service community and their families. VVCS will continue to have a strong presence across Australia will continue to evolve to meet the needs of its clients.

An independent review of the VVCS (the Functional Review) was commissioned by the Department to identify opportunities to enhance administrative and clinical efficacy. The Review focused on identifying areas for improvement /enhancement in order to position VVCS to remain a flexible and responsive service that continues to deliver positive client outcomes.

Ensuring appropriate services are in place to support our clients is of utmost importance. VVCS recognises that different client groups may have different needs and needs to ensure the right systems are in place to remain a responsive service. The Department wishes to consider the Review in consultation with staff and stakeholders to determine a considered response to the Review's recommendations.

This draft response to the Functional Review of the VVCS was developed following consultation with the VVCS senior National Management Team. Further input was provided by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs National Advisory Committee on VVCS (NAC). It is intended to form the basis of a discussion with staff and stakeholders on the future direction, structure and functions of the VVCS.

#### **APPVA have opted out of Partnership with the Alliance of Defence Service Organisation (ADSO)**

In Mid July 2015, the APPVA National President and his executives decided to opt out the ADSO because we were diverting our away from our current issues with relevant Ministers and the DVA. The APPVA are committed to firstly ensuring that we continue to raise focus on the National Peacekeepers Memorial Project and matter affecting entitlement and welfare of our constituents.

The DVA are currently undergoing changes to the current health system were we have seen a large number of complaints come through from several states regarding loss of allowances, loss of RAP equipment to name a few.

These issues that I have just mention are part of why we the APPVA needed to opt out so we can maintain our focus on the vary issues that affect our constituents.

### **PROJECT OSCAR MIKE - (OM)**

Project Oscar Mike (OM) is an Australian Community initiative that was implemented in July 2015 by an APPVA member Ellaine Gallagher from the Kenmore RSL in Queensland. The yoga and holistic practitioners have offered free and or discounted rates of yoga and various therapies to Gold and White Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) card holders.

The goal is to assist in the rehabilitation of our Australian Veterans through holistic healing. Eventually, Ellaine is hoping that holistic healing will be recognised by DVA as part as the rehabilitation process. Ellaine has just completed her pension officer course and is now qualified to operate as a Level 2 pension officer for the APPVA in Queensland. I would like to acknowledge the work that Ellaine is doing for the association in Brisbane and wish her well in her endeavours.

To conclude my report the APPVA delegation comprising of the Allan Thomas, Michael Quinn, Paul Copeland and Rod Thompson attended a workshop in Melbourne recently to talk about key issues that the association needed to focus on, all that were present agreed that there was a need to consult with various ministers and the DVA about current issues that have evolved since our last meetings in 2014. The APPVA delegation is looking at visiting these dignitaries in October to discuss key issues that are concerning not only our membership but our constituents and their families. We will certainly keep you updated with our visits in our up and coming additions of the Peacekeepers Magazines, that concludes my report for the Annual General Meeting held in Geelong on the 19 September 2015.

Regards

*Allan Thomas*

Allan Thomas **JP**  
National President of the APPVA