



Location: Level 11, 91 King William St, Adelaide, SA

Minutes

Attendees	
Ms Janice Silby	Chair, Deputy Commissioner SA, Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA)
Bill Bates	Operation Unity / Friends of Veterans' Association (FOVA)
Stuart Conboy	SA Health
Tara Belton	RSL SA
Meredith Burgess	RSL SA
Philip St John	Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia (SA Branch)
Jan Milham	Australian War Widows SA Inc.
Mina Schoeman	Veterans' Health Advisory Council (VHAC)
Mick Burgess	Defence Force Welfare Association
Mick Curry	TPI Association
Ray Kemp	Naval Association of Australia (SA Section)
Karen May	Military and Emergency Services Health Australia (MESHA)
Don Cochrane	Vietnam Veterans' Federation (SA Branch)
Bob Ellis	Vietnam Veterans' Federation (SA Branch)
Lee Norrey	Women Veterans' Network Australia
Sharon Cahill	Women Veterans' Network Australia
CMDR Tony Ryder ADC	Navy
LCDR Samantha Fuss	Navy
David McKenna	Veteran Wellbeing Centre
Nathan Klinge	RSL Care SA
Brigadier Nicholas Wilson	Army – 10 Brigade
WO1 Anthony Hortle	Army – 10 Brigade
Jon Wauer	Director, Open Arms
Secretariat	
Bonnie Wallace	Executive Officer to the Deputy Commissioner SA (DVA)
Apologies	
Paul Rosenzweig	National Malaya & Borneo Veterans' Association Australia Inc
Scott Jeffrey	Veteran Advocate Wellbeing Officer

Rob Atkinson	Defence Reserves Association
Mal Thiele	Vietnam Veterans' Federation (SA Branch)
Don Cameron	National Malaya & Borneo Veterans' Association Australia Inc.
Andrew Ormsby	Air Force Association (SA Div) Inc
Malcolm Schlein	William Kibby Men's Shed
Bill Denny	RSL SA

Agenda Item 1. Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

Ms Janice Silby welcomed everyone and followed this with Acknowledgement of Country, introductions, apologies and housekeeping.

Agenda Item 2. Guest Speaker – Peter King, Deputy Commissioner WA

Peter spoke about the new Claims Lodgement Support Model.



18122024104721-00
01.pdf

Peter took questions and comments from the group.

Mick Curry – Where do advocates who charge a fee for service fit into the new model?

Peter King – They don't, DVA will not be working with them.

Karen May – Will there be any female specialisation in the claims process?

Peter King – There is no female specialisation, however, the model can match female veterans to female Claims officers if that's their preference. One of the benefits of the claims support model is the ability to get younger people engaged, including younger female Claims officers. Currently in Perth the whole claim support group are female.

Nathan Klinge – In terms of broadening the aperture and assisting advocacy groups to handle more numbers, where is the extra capacity being generated from, we assume there are not extra advocates being brought on?

Peter King – A trust has developed between the DVA staff members and the veterans, they are physically at the location and through word of mouth more and more veterans have been coming in to see the staff members and the advocates are freed up to do other things and support other people as they do not need to sit in on the conversations. Another benefit is that the DVA staff members are refining the claims, so when they are lodged more accurate information is included, with a better sense of evidence attached, giving the claims a greater chance of progressing successfully. The DVA staff member speaks to the veteran and their family, ensures wellbeing supports are in place, has a holistic picture of the circumstances for each veteran. This has meant less follow up requests are being received by the veteran and advocate, so it speeds it up from that perspective.

Ms Silby mentioned that it would be a great idea to start this model in South Australia, and if any organisations would like to explore this further, please get in touch by emailing DC.SA@dva.gov.au. Ms Silby reiterated that there should never be any need for people to use paid advocates, and the approved list of advocates online at the [Advocacy Register](#) are all for free.

Agenda Item 3. Guest Speaker – Jonathon Wauer, Director Open Arms

Jon was the Regional Director of Open Arms for South Australia and attended to provide a wrap up of Open Arms for the year. **Note:** Thomas Sutcliffe took over as Director from 9th December 2024 and Jon moved into a new role at DVA.

Jon spoke about the strategic priorities for Open Arms. One of them was to open an office in the South to service the large number of veterans and families in that area, Jon was pleased to advise this was successfully achieved. In the new year, they will be looking to rent rooms in GP practices to further expand their reach. Currently Open Arms travels to regional areas such as Port Pirie, Port Augusta and Whyalla once a month.

The work undertaken by Open Arms is 40 percent internally employed staff and 60 percent contractors which is made up of psychologists, social workers etc.

A new process was introduced this year which positively changed the way contractors were sought and procured. Open Arms now has more contracted skilled staff thanks to this new process, which allows them to service more clients as they have greater capacity.

Jon informed the group of the increased demand for Open Arms services nationally and locally since the Royal Commission. Also as a result of the Royal Commission, Jon mentioned that accepted recommendation number 75 is the requirement to conduct a wholesale review of Open Arms in 2 years to ensure this is still fit for purpose and continuing to meet veterans needs into the future.

Ms Silby mentioned the anniversary for the peer support network. It has been 5 years since bringing on lived experience peers.

Ms Silby also advised on the Open Arms web page there are multiple courses that people can enrol for [here](#) - It is highly encouraged that people are made aware of these courses and are encouraged to attend them. DVA has also funded [Mental Health Protect - Mental Health First Aid Australia](#).

The spike in needs for support are always straight after Christmas Day and ANZAC Day. In communicating with members we need to be conscious of this, and promoting the training and courses can help.

Agenda 4. Guest Speaker – Brigadier Nicholas Wilson, Commander of the 10th Brigade

Brigadier Nick Wilson advised he's been with the Army for 30 years, he is an Artillery Officer by profession. The 10th Brigade is the Army's newest Brigade, the Army does not often raise new Brigades. They were created as a result of the Defence Strategic Review. The 10th Brigade started with 33 staff and are on a fast growth path. They are based at Edinburgh with the focus being Accelerated and expanded long-range strike (HIMARS) and integrated air and missile Defence capabilities (NASAMS).

They will be firing live for the first time in June 2025, and a public campaign about the new Brigade will start launching at the same time. Multiple new Regiments will be stood up as well.

Nick advised if he can be of any assistance as a link between DVA and the current serving community, he welcomes the opportunity. He is keenly attuned to the challenges faced by current serving and past serving members.

Ms Silby advised DVA has noticed an increase in claims from those still serving. Once again she invites feedback on the Claims Lodgement Support Model being implemented in South Australia.

Nathan Klinge – With the rapid expansion and additional regiments, how are the community services, schools, childcare etc, around the areas equipped for this?

Brigadier Nicholas Wilson - In the short term there is no pressure, the army has time to assess the growth because with expansion there is also natural attrition in other areas freeing up space, and there is less pressure than remote posting locations as the housing, schools etc. are all easily accessible both North and South in Adelaide. Others will be doing the studies and working with state governments to ensure local pressure will be eased if it gets to that point, but it's not expected the base would ever be "full" per se. Talking about attrition, that is something else that needs to be addressed. People who post in Adelaide like to stay in Adelaide, they want the opportunity to be homeowners or live near their families.

Agenda 5. DC Report & Other Business

Royal Commission

Ms Silby commenced by advising she welcomes comments about the Royal Commission recommendations, so please reach out at any time.

DVA were pleased to get the Government's response to the Royal Commission before Christmas. It was one of the quickest responses to a Royal Commission that has ever occurred. You can read more on [the DVA website](#).

Out of 122 recommendations, 104 were accepted and 17 noted for further consideration – this does not mean they will not be accepted, but further investment into these is needed first. One recommendation was not supported in part.

The Government will be establishing a new statutory entity – a defence and veterans services commission to oversee reform. This will be an ongoing body but will commence with an interim body which will be set up to establish the new commission – it will provide oversight and evidence-based advice to improve suicide prevention and drive better outcomes for all serving and ex-serving ADF personnel. An interim head will be put in place. It is not yet known who this will be.

DVA has received funding to enable engagement and codesign with the veteran community - with a number of the accepted recommendations, funding has been made available to consult with the community and that will be the first step in a number of the recommendations.

Some of the recommendations are complex, and they are not just recommendations for defence or DVA, there are also recommendations for ex-service organisations and for state and territory governments. This is about everybody coming together and DVA will work closely with everyone as needed. DVA will also continuously seek feedback to ensure they are on the right track. Ms Silby emphasised that DC forum members should share any requests for consultation they receive far and wide to enable everyone in their network to have their say.

Ms Silby commented that it took great personal courage from a number of people to present and share their stories to the Royal Commission to achieve these recommendation outcomes. Royal Commission next steps will be shared as soon as they are known.

ESORT updates

DVA's Secretary Alison Frame had asked if DC Forum members were privy to the ESORT communique that was regularly sent out. Ex-service organisations present confirmed they are not receiving it. Ms Silby advised she will start sending this out when she receives it.

Legislation reform

The Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 remains before the Parliament. DVA noted the Government has flagged two proposed amendments to the Bill in relation to a statutory review requirement, and apportionment of certain payments in relation to children.

The Bill is listed for early consideration on Parliament's return in February 2025. The proposed 1 July 2026 implementation date has not changed.

Advocacy and VSOs

We need to continue to educate people about advocate services. Please refer to the list of advocates listed in the link on our website. Also available to assist are the Veteran Support Officers (VSOs) located on Edinburgh base, they provide personalised support and education to servicing members and their families and can talk about eligibility for DVA benefits and entitlements and claim processes. This service is completely free of charge. Anyone can make an appointment to see them during their opening hours.

More information:

[Advocates who can assist with DVA business | Department of Veterans' Affairs](#)

[Learn about Veteran Support Officers | Department of Veterans' Affairs](#)

[Veteran Support Office | Department of Veterans' Affairs](#)

Also discussed:

- [Claim processing times | Department of Veterans' Affairs](#)
 - [Veteran Wellbeing Grants Program | Department of Veterans' Affairs](#)
 - [Overseas Commemorative Services | Department of Veterans' Affairs](#)
 - [Private Richard Norden posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for Australia](#)
 - [Consultation with Women Veterans | Department of Veterans' Affairs](#)
 - [Supporting women who have served | Department of Veterans' Affairs](#)
- “The Department has established a new team to investigate where women veterans are missing out on vital supports, explore what more can be done at every point to address this, and improve their experience and outcomes during service, transition and beyond. DVA will continue to provide updates on the development of the strategy and opportunities for consultation. If you would like to engage with this work, please reach out to women@dva.gov.au.”
- [Younger Veterans — Contemporary Needs Forum | Department of Veterans' Affairs](#)

Agenda 6. Minutes and Action Items from 22 August DC Forum

MATES program

Ms Silby commenced by advising there are no new updates since the MATES program ceased in February 2024. There is a written statement from DVA's Secretary Alison Frame available on our website, this statement will be updated if any further information becomes available: [Statement from the Secretary of DVA on the Veterans' MATES Program | Department of Veterans' Affairs](#)

Support for veterans in Hospital

An agenda item was raised in the August 2024 DC Forum as there were concerns that veterans were not being asked if they gave their consent to receive a visit from a Veteran Liaison Officer (VLO) whilst in hospital. DVA wrote to Department of Health in October 2024.

Mick Curry – Despite their response, this is still occurring, often the consent question is not being asked, and it is different from site to site, some sites are worse than others. Does the Minister know this is happening?

Ms Silby – We will leave this on the agenda and continue to follow up, but as a suggestion, ESOs may need to start promoting the service and encouraging veterans to speak up when they are hospitalised, so as an interim solution veterans could ask for the visit directly rather than waiting for the hospital to offer it.

Nathan Klinge asked Mick to email him directly as he'll try push it up the chain separately through Veterans' Health Advisory Council.


Agenda 7. Close

Ms Silby extended her thanks to everyone for their unwavering support to the veteran community and tireless work in their space. Ms Silby looks forward to continuing to work with everyone to solve the complex problems that arise, brokering solutions together. Ms Silby expressed her gratitude when people reach out to her for help.

It was advised that the DC Consultative Forum meetings for 2025 will be:

- Wednesday 26 March 2025 (Day after Budget Day) - *Afternoon*
- Thursday 7 August 2025 - *Morning*
- Friday 12th December (End of Year) – *Afternoon*

Action Items

No.	Action item
2024/12-1	Action point: Despite response from Dept of Health, difficulties with VLO access to hospital patients and inconsistency with veteran consent form questions still being experienced.
Status	<i>Still Open. Nathan Klinge to try escalate through VHAC.</i>
No.	Action item
2024/12-2	Action point: Consultation around launching the Claims Lodgement Support Model in South Australia to commence.
Status	<i>Open. If any organisations would like to explore this further, please email DC.SA@dva.gov.au</i>
No.	Action item
2024/12-3	ESOs not receiving ESORT Communiques.
Status	<i>Closed. Ms Silby to send these out when she receives them from now on. December edition attached with these Minutes.</i>
	 ESORT Communique - 3 December 2024 -