



# SUBMISSION TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO DEFENCE AND VETERAN SUICIDE

*Answering the Call: An ESO informed  
response to a Sector Peak Body*

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Report from the National Forums for ESOs 2022/23  
30 November 2023

# LOGOS FROM ENDORSING ORGANISATIONS



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following paper reports the progress and outcomes of the National Forums for Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs) which took place from November 2022 to October 2023. The paper acts as an account of the sector's response throughout the forum process to developing an ESO Peak Body framework.

The Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL) and the RSL State Branches in collaboration with other ESOs from across Australia facilitated the forums to enable the ESO sector to collectively identify and address current and future challenges.

Over 70 organisations participated in the forum process, representing the continuum of services delivered by the ESO sector and the geographical spread across Australia.

Subject matter experts from Australia and overseas, from inside and outside of the defence and veteran community, were engaged to provide insights into each of the three forums and to co-facilitate delivery. This included representatives from the Australian Defence Force, the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

The intent of the forums was to provide an ESO informed response to the establishment of a sector Peak Body and to address the complexity of the ecosystem ESOs operate within.

Through the forums, consensus was reached on the following items:

- 1. The initial categories for an ESO Classification System** – founded on service outputs to help simplify access, understanding and connection for service users and providers.
- 2. Alignment to establish an ESO Peak Body** to increase the professionalism and provide an amplified voice for the ESO sector.
- 3. The initial operational, governance and membership settings for the ESO Peak Body**
  - A small to medium sized organisation, 3-6 full-time staff, to deliver a defined portfolio of work in the first 18 months of operation
  - the peak entity itself to adopt the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) Governance Standards
  - Use the ESO Classification System to organise membership
- 4. Invite the Australian government to support an independent business case** build on this response, inform the ESO Peak Body blueprint and an implementation plan.
- 5. Invite the Australian Government to partner in the establishment of the ESO Peak Body**

Further agreement determined that the ESO Peak Body must be independent, from government and any single ESO, and will not act as a regulator for the sector.

This paper has been developed in consultation with representatives from across the ESO Sector for the purpose of providing a formal submission to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

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# INTRODUCTION

This submission is provided to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide on behalf of participants of the recent series of National Forums for Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs). A list of participants across each of the three National Forums is included at Appendix 1.

This submission presents the insights for an ESO sector response to the establishment of an ESO Peak Body framework. These findings were derived from a national forum process, facilitated by the Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL) and the RSL State Branches in collaboration with ESOs from across Australia.

The key outcomes of the three National Forums are that consensus was achieved on the following issues:

1. The initial categories for an ESO Classification System (founded on service outputs of the organisation)
2. Alignment that an ESO Peak Body can provide a collective and amplified voice for the ESO Sector
3. The initial operational, governance and membership settings of an ESO Peak Body
4. The need for an independent business case to be developed, to build on the initial settings agreed through the forum process, as a blueprint to establish the ESO Peak Body
5. The benefits of asking the Australian Government to invest in an ESO Peak Body through the provision of funding for the business case.

**Each of the ESOs listed below participated in the third National Forum for ESOs on 10 October 2023, at which consensus was achieved on the above items. The forum agreed to provide a formal submission to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veterans Suicide. This submission would report the collective work of the sector across the forum series and ask the Commission to use all mechanisms available, including recommending the provision of the required support and investment from the Australian Government and other stakeholders, to help establish an ESO Peak Body. Each forum acknowledged that an ESO Peak Body is being developed to support ESOs so that the sector can better enable veterans and their families to access a safe and connected service environment which helps to strengthen their health and wellbeing.**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans Association  
Alliance of Defence Services Organisations (ADSO)  
Australian Catholic University  
Australian War Widows  
Australian War Widows (NSW)  
Bravery Trust  
Carry On  
Commando Welfare Trust  
Defence Families of Australia  
Defence Force Welfare Association (DFWA)  
Defence LGBTIQ Information Service (DEFGLIS)  
Defence Reserves Association  
Department of Veterans' Affairs  
Disaster Relief Australia  
Emereas  
Joint Transition Authority  
Legacy Australia  
Legacy Brisbane  
Mates4Mates  
Melbourne Legacy  
Military and Emergency Services Health Australia  
NSW Office for Veterans' Affairs  
Office for Veterans' Affairs  
Partners of Veterans Association Australia  
Public Affairs ADF Sports Cell  
Red Six  
Returned & Services League Australia and RSL State Branches  
Royal Australian Armoured Corps Corporation  
Royal Australian Regiment Corporation  
RSL Care SA  
RSL LifeCare Veterans Services  
RSL Victoria Royal Commission Working Group  
Soldier On  
Stand Tall 4 PTS  
The Oasis (Townsville)  
TPI Federation of Australia  
Veterans Care Association  
Veteran Support Office  
Veteran Support Centre ACT  
Veterans Wellbeing Network MNC  
Women Veterans Network Australia  
Young Veterans

This submission provides a record of the National Forums for ESOs which took place between November 2022 and October 2023. It was provided as a consultation draft to forum participants during the 1-10 November 2023 consultation period. It is encouraging that participants have continued to explore how their organisations can contribute to the proposed next steps to establish an ESO Classification System and an ESO Peak Body, and to consider how this will benefit and impact to the services and supports provided to veterans and their families. To ensure this continuing work is made available to the Royal Commission, post-forum commentary provided in response to the consultation draft of this paper is included at Appendix 6.

# SUMMARY OF THE ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES OF THE NATIONAL FORUMS FOR EX-SERVICE ORGANISATIONS

The terms of reference for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide include that the Commissioners inquire into *“the role of non-government organisations, including ex-service organisations, in providing relevant services and support for defence members, veterans, their families and others”*<sup>1</sup>.

The Royal Commission’s Interim Report was published in August 2023; although ESOs and the ESO sector were not explicitly addressed in that report, the sector itself took notice of evidence provided to the Commission that demonstrated the difficulty defence members, veterans and their families experienced in accessing the service landscape. The sector heard that evidence as a call to action for the sector to come together to address the issues emerging from the Royal Commission.

The Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL) and the RSL State Branches joined with other ESOs to facilitate a series of National Forums for ESOs to collectively address these concerns. This included standing-up a cross-organisational and cross-sector working group (Secretariat) to support and inform the forum process. This process delivered three national forums, and developed information papers and research which was provided to participants pre and post each of the forums (Appendix 2 & 3).

- Gai Brodtmann, Independent Facilitator and MC
- Professor Andrew Condon, Australian Catholic University
- Amy Cooper, CEO Solider On
- Rachael Cosgrove, President, Defence LGBTI Information Service
- LTGEN Natasha Fox, Chief of Personnel, Australian Defence Force
- Alison Frame, Secretary, Department of Veterans’ Affairs
- Nick Kaldas APM, Dr Peggy Brown AO, Hon James Douglas KC, Commissioners, Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide
- Peter Kennedy, President, Young Veterans Sunshine Coast
- The Hon Matt Keogh MP, Minister for Veterans’ Affairs
- LTGEN Sir Nick Pope, Executive Chair, UK Confederation of Service Charities
- Marc Purcell, CEO, Australian Council for International Development

Participants at the forums were drawn from ESOs across Australia, representing a mix of large and small ESOs and the continuum of services delivered by the sector (Appendix 1). Each participant was asked to consult widely across their organisation and networks to enable them to bring an informed, representative, and fulsome view to share at each forum.

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1 [Terms of reference | Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide](#) accessed 26 October 2023

Each Forum adopted a consensus approach to collective decision making, seeking to build agreement amongst participants about the many ideas and proposals surfaced by different participants, presenters, and facilitators. The approach successfully enabled different thinking and views to surface, and to be shared, considered and refined. As the lead facilitator of the National Forum series, the RSL was required to have several team members lead the Secretariat, and to enable the delivery of each forum event; to ensure fairness and transparency only one RSL representative engaged as a participant to provide feedback and/or voting on issues as they arose at each forum.

## FIRST NATIONAL FORUM FOR ESOs

The first National Forum for ESOs (Forum 1) held in November 2022 brought together over 70 representatives from ESOs from across Australia. Participants collectively explored the emerging challenges and opportunities for the ESO sector as revealed by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, jointly identified synergies within the sector to enable efficient and effective service delivery and committed to collaboration with fellow ESOs to advocate into the Royal Commission for the needs of veterans and their families. The agenda for the first forum was intentionally broad to facilitate open conversation and sharing of ideas. Participants chose to speak about the current operational concerns of ESOs and shared their views about the future challenges facing the sector with commentary about opportunities for collaboration.

Participants at Forum 1 jointly determined five priority issues to collectively address:

- Establish a peak body for the ESO sector to represent and advocate the needs of ESOs
- Map and categorise the services that ESOs deliver, and provide measurements of service quality to assist veterans navigating service needs and providers
- Explore standardised reporting and measurement frameworks for ESOs that use quantitative and qualitative data to measure the success of services and programs
- Prioritise the establishment of ESO-led, in-service transition coaching, support, and resources from ESOs for veterans
- Advocate for enhanced defence family engagement by calling on government to expand DVA's transition seminars to next of kin to ensure family members are aware of support services available to veterans

The full report from Forum 1 (Appendix 4) has been previously shared with the Royal Commission.



## SECOND NATIONAL FORUM FOR ESOs

The second National Forum for ESOs (Forum 2) in May 2023 brought together over 80 representatives from across the ESO sector. The Secretariat in consultation with ESO stakeholders agreed the second forum would focus on addressing the priority issues identified at the first forum that were linked to the possible development of a Peak Body. Therefore, the agenda was structured to enable participants to jointly determine the initial elements of a Peak Body framework. This was delivered through designated sessions that discussed a process to categorise ESOs, and to jointly examine Peak Body functions that would add value to the ESO operating environments.

Forum 2 participants agreed:

- An initial classification system for ESOs (accepted subject to changes provided during the forum)
- The purpose and scope of an ESO Peak Body – an independent collective voice for the sector, growing to support the sector to improve service quality
- The three priority functions of an ESO Peak Body
  - Policy advocacy, a collective voice to lobby for the interest of the sector and the veterans and families supported by ESOs
  - ESO Code of Conduct and Setting Service Standards
  - Communication, engagement and representation on behalf of veterans and their families

The full report from Forum 2 (Appendix 5) has been previously shared with the Royal Commission.

## THIRD NATIONAL FORUM FOR ESOs

The Third National Forum for ESOs (Forum 3) in October 2023, brought together over 80 representatives from across the ESO sector.

Participants focused on the updated ESO Classification System prepared for endorsement, and the initial operational, governance and membership settings of an ESO Peak Body. Participants were also asked to consider the required steps to establish an ESO Peak Body.

Participants at Forum 3 reached consensus on the following:

- The categories for an ESO Classification System
- The initial settings of an ESO Peak Body to be a small/intermediate operational start, using the ACNC Governance Standards as the initial governance settings, and the ESO Classification System to organise membership.
- The development of an independent business case as a blueprint to establish an ESO Peak Body
- A formal request to the Department of Veterans' Affairs asking the Australian Government to invest in the establishment of an ESO Peak Body through the provision of funding for a business case

The above points of consensus achieved through the collaborative work of the ESO sector across the series of National Forums for ESOs are detailed in the following sections of this paper.

Forum 3 participants were provided with minutes of the third forum on 27 October as a working record of the day. This submission acts as the final report from Forum 3 and the National Forum series to date.

# ESTABLISHING AN ESO CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

*“What it says on the tin must be what’s inside the tin”*

National Forum Participant speaking about why an ESO Classification System is needed.

Participants at Forum 1 identified the need to map and categorise the services ESOs deliver, and to provide measurements of service quality to assist veterans and their families navigate service needs and providers, as priority issues to be addressed through the national forum process (*Appendix 4: National ESO Forum 1 Report, p.13*)

The Secretariat’s work and research to prepare information papers for participants ahead of Forum 2 (*Appendix 2*) sought to leverage the findings of previous research and analysis of the ESO sector and the services it delivers to the veteran community. The pre-papers were developed in consultation with a range of experts<sup>2</sup> and ESO sector stakeholders, and a literature review of information about peak bodies in Australia and overseas, and in meetings with some of those peak bodies.

*The Productivity Commission’s report, A Better Way to Support Veterans (2019)*<sup>3</sup>, was a primary input to the development of the first draft ESO Classification System which was presented to participants at Forum 2<sup>4</sup>.

At Forum 2, participants were asked to map their own organisation against the Classification System using the primary service/activity they provide to align with a category. While the exercise identified that many ESOs provide more than one service, it helped participants to understand how the Classification System could help veterans and their families more easily navigate service offerings across the sector. Classifying organisations by primary service or purpose reflects the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission’s (ACNC) process to classify registered entities by charitable purpose<sup>5</sup>.

The Classification System was further refined ahead of Forum 3, based on feedback provided during and after the second forum. The updated list was included in the Forum 3 pre-papers (*Appendix 3: Forum 3 Pre-paper, p.6*) and presented at Forum 3. It was endorsed by participants at the third forum with some minor adjustments to language (the endorsed system can be found on page 12).

Participants at Forum 3 were asked: Do you endorse the updated ESO Classification List as a starting point for the development of an ESO Classification System?

Forum 3 response: Consensus achieved. ESO Classification List endorsed with minor language refinements to sub-categories

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2 Forum 2 pre-papers were informed by engagements with the Australian Catholic University, the Australian Council for International Development, the UK Confederation of Service Charities.

3 [A better way to support veterans - Productivity Commission \(pc.gov.au\)](#) accessed 29 October 2023

4 RSL Australia, National ESO Forum Report, 30 May 2023, p.6

5 [Charitable purpose examples | ACNC](#) accessed 29 October 2023

The ESO Classification System is intended to help the sector more easily communicate the services that are delivered by ESOs. It is also intended to be used as a framework to make it simpler for service providers, users, and funders to identify service capability and identify those ESOs that deliver across multiple categories. The classifications are about providing clarity of the service/activity delivered by an ESO rather than defining the type of client the services are provided to. This was determined to be a logical approach because of the existing way service users seek to navigate the ESO ecosystem, and because the organisational name of an ESO does not necessarily make it clear what type of services or supports are provided.

Participants discussed the importance of ordering classifications in the system itself, agreeing that a strengths-based narrative was required. This resulted in ordering the main classifications from services that support proactive wellbeing through to services that respond to more complex health and wellbeing needs.

Participants agreed that the Classification System is a framework that can also support the development of service standards and quality assurance approaches. By clarifying the different types of service offerings, it provides room for different governance requirements rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to ESO governance. This was another strong benefit of founding the system on service output rather than client type. Noting that many services may be tailored or offered to just one client type but will need to adhere to a set quality assurance process for the service output regardless of this client type.

The ESO Classification System agreed through the National Forum process (below) is foundational and expected to evolve overtime as the needs of current and former serving ADF members and their families change and the ESO sector adapts to meet those needs.

ESO CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM	
Main Classification	Core Purpose and sub-groups
Commemoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remembrance and honour</li> </ul>
Comaraderie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mateship and social connection</li> </ul>
Connection and Referral Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assisting veterans and their families to access different types of services (including services provided by organisations outside of the Defence and ESO sectors)</li> </ul>
Veteran and Family Advocacy and Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy advocacy - informing and influencing policy development and government decision making.</li> <li>Awareness – communications and activities to raise awareness of the social and economic contribution of veterans and their families and issues specific to them.</li> <li>Fundraising</li> </ul>
Claims Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assisting veterans and their families prepare and lodge claims to DVA, supporting veterans and their families in appeal processes and other engagements with DVA, the Veteran's Review Board (VRB) and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal</li> </ul>
Wellbeing Services – General	<p>Informed by the Australian institute of Health and Welfare's Domains of Wellbeing Veteran-centered model<sup>6</sup>.</p> <p>Classified into sub-groups for those providing services related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vocational Services (service outputs can be a combination of delivery, increasing access into, scholarships and/or skills development within the following vocational offerings) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employment Services</li> <li>Veteran Enterprise initiatives</li> <li>Education, skills, and training initiatives</li> </ul> </li> <li>Transport</li> <li>Income and finance</li> <li>Justice and safety</li> <li>Social support</li> <li>Health and eHealth</li> <li>Spirituality, identity, meaning and purpose</li> </ul>
Wellbeing Services - Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing and accommodation – including emergency and crisis accommodation.</li> </ul>
Wellbeing services - Aged Care Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aged care – including services in homes and age specific settings.</li> </ul>

Fig.1 ESO Classification System as endorsed by participants at Forum 3

6 [Understanding the wellbeing characteristics of ex-serving ADF members, Introduction - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au/understanding-the-wellbeing-characteristics-of-ex-serving-ADF-members-introduction) accessed 1 June 2023

# THE INITIAL SETTINGS OF AN ESO PEAK BODY

*“An ESO Peak Body is about a collective voice, it will not take away control of your organisation”*

National Forum Participant speaking about the initial settings of an ESO Peak Body.

Forums 1 and 2 reached consensus on an ESO Peak Body's purpose as being to create a collective voice to represent and advocate for the needs of the sector. The first two forums also reached agreement that the strategy underpinning an ESO Peak Body could best be developed once the other initial settings, such as for operational, governance and membership settings, were in place. The first two forums saw participants reach agreement that the must-have Principles of an ESO Peak Body are:

- Independence – from government, from individual ESOs and from delivering services provision to current serving members, veterans and their families
- Separate from regulation – supports service standards and processes for reviewing and checking alignment to those standards but does not undertake any regulatory functions.

Forum 2 participants heard directly from the UK Confederation of Service Charities (Cobseo) and the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) about the history, operations, settings and achievements of each of those peak bodies. The Australian Catholic University delivered a presentation of the work that has previously been undertaken to map the ESO sector, classification of services and facilitated discussion about how to evidence service quality and simplify access for veterans and their families.

Research undertaken by the Secretariat into different peak body models to inform Forum 3 pre-papers found that the majority had similar components – purpose, strategy, operational/delivery capability, governance, administration and funding. In consultation with stakeholders, these findings showed that the forum process could most usefully explore and seek consensus about the initial settings of those common components for an ESO Peak Body.

The pre-papers for Forum 3 (*Appendix 3*) were developed in consultation with a representative group<sup>7</sup> from the ESO sector. This consultation allowed for a period of critical peer review prior to dissemination of the papers and was to ensure that the papers drafted had sufficient detail to enable forum participants to engage in robust conversation and pre-consultation with peers in their own organisations and with fellow ESOs before attending the forum. (A similar consultation and review was undertaken in the preparation of this submission).

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7 Representatives from the following organisations provided feedback and endorsement of the Forum 3 pre-papers: Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association, ADSO, Bravery Trust, DEFGLIS, Legacy, Soldier On, The Oasis Townsville, Young Veterans.

## INITIAL OPERATIONAL CAPACITY

*“Take a growing not failing approach, regardless of where it starts”*

National Forum Participant speaking about the initial settings of an ESO Peak Body.

The Secretariat’s research undertaken to inform discussions at Forum 3 determined that operational capability was seen as providing for:

- Day-to-day running of the organisations (support functions such as financial administration and accounting facilities management arrangements, HR)
- Connection and engagement with membership
- Support for connection and engagement with non-member stakeholders (government, media, academia, etc)
- Delivery of strategy (including strategic actions such as policy advocacy, facilitation of a member Code of Conduct, education and support around service standards and/or compliance, education for skills development, communications and marketing)
- Reporting and quality assurance of peak body performance

Forum participants considered that the operational capability of an ESO Peak Body must necessarily align with the amount of funding available. Indicative costs were provided as examples based on the operating costs of existing peak bodies and industry information about salaries (*Appendix 3: National ESO Forum 3 Pre-Read Requirement, p.9*).

Participants were asked to consider three options: a small start, intermediate start, or full-service approach as the initial (first 18 months) operating model, including staffing, for an ESO Peak Body (*Appendix 3: National ESO Forum 3 Pre-Read Requirement, p.9&10*).

Participants at Forum 3 were asked: What is your preference of the operational capability (initial settings) of an ESO Peak Body?

Forum 3 response: Consensus achieved. The preferred initial settings of an ESO PeBody are a blend of Options 1 and 2 (small to intermediate start).

A small to intermediate start/setting for the initial operational capacity was agreed to be between three to six full-time staff, including a CEO. Work delivered over the first 18 months is to include the initial implementation of the legal and functional requirements of the organisation (including appropriate strategic governance, reporting and compliance), a peak body strategy (including resource strategy), the launch and co-ordination of membership, work to develop a sector response to the final report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (or, dependent on timing, a progress report on the sector’s implementation of recommendations), building relationships with key stakeholders and, dependent on initial capability, beginning to plan for the development of an ESO Code of Conduct.

## INITIAL GOVERNANCE STANDARDS AND SETTINGS

*“Ethics and integrity of those in charge of an ESO Peak Body are important.  
There will need to be absolute transparency”*

National Forum Participant speaking about the initial settings of an ESO Peak Body.

Discussion and engagement across the first two forums identified the importance of governance of an ESO Peak Body. Conversations at the forums and commentary outside of the forum process pointed to differences in thinking about how that might best be achieved. The majority of ESO representatives called for best practice governance, including independence of responsible people while others considered appointments based on organisational (ESO) representation.

The intention for Forum 3 was to achieve consensus about a starting point from which to build the initial governance standards and settings for an ESO Peak Body.

Stakeholder engagement in preparation for Forum 3 determined that the governance standards of an ESO Peak Body should be separate and distinct from any conversation about governance of ESOs (peak body member organisations) themselves.

This engagement surfaced the proposal to consider the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission’s (ACNC) Governance Standards for registered entities<sup>8</sup> as a potential starting point for developing the strategic governance settings of an ESO Peak Body. It was found that these standards are well-known to the ESO sector, and importantly, given the different levels of understanding about governance across forum participants, they provided a common comprehension.

Forum 3 participants focused on the appropriateness of using the ACNC Governance Standards as the initial governance settings for the ESO Peak Body.

Participants at Forum 3 were asked: Do you endorse initially using the ACNC Governance Standards for an ESO Peak Body?

Forum 3 response: Consensus achieved to use the ACNC Governance Standards as the initial settings.

Commentary from Forum 3 participants also noted that the Australian Institute of Company Directors’ (AICD) not-for-profit principles offer another resource to inform strategic governance of an ESO Peak Body. Further discussions included the need to consider the legal status of an ESO Peak Body, such as not-for-profit or charity, and a need to understand how the sector and others can be involved in the development of a constitution or board process.

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8 The 6 ACNC Governance Standards are a set of core, minimum standards relating to the governance of a registered entity and how it is run – including its processes, activities and relationships [ACNC Governance Standards](#) | ACNC accessed 29 October 2023.



There was strong support for an independent skills-based board, with the expectation that standard process and best practice would be used for the transparent appointment of responsible people.

## INITIAL MEMBERSHIP SETTINGS

### *“Heart is behind why ESOs should join an ESO Peak Body”*

National Forum Participant speaking about the initial settings of an ESO Peak Body.

Participant discussions and research undertaken by the secretariat and other stakeholders across the first two forums looked at the membership structures of peak bodies. This identified three common ways memberships are structured and/or divided:

- Cost structure
- Cost benefit structure
- Functional structure

Forum 3 participants discussed that many peak bodies appeared to structure membership through a blend of the fee (cost) and functional (size/service) structures. Participants agreed that because there was as yet limited information about the actual running costs of an ESO Peak Body and about sources of available funding, detailed consideration of membership fees was outside the scope of Forum 3.

Participant discussions about the initial membership settings at Forum 3, therefore, focused on the functional structure breakdown. Participants determined that the ESO Classification System (as endorsed earlier in the forum) was a logical framework to group member organisations into like-service/activity groups and provided a functional structure for the initial membership settings. Additionally, it would increase visibility of the membership's expertise to inform the development of policy, grow communities of practice, and help strengthen referral pathways between member ESOs.

Participants identified that a membership framework based on the ESO Classification System could support future exploration and implementation of service standards and quality assurance. Participants considered that member organisations might be asked to demonstrate adherence to appropriate standards for their organisations, based on the service/s they deliver. Participants further considered that service standards would likely include standards that applied to each member organisation and standards specific to the different types of services provided. Such an approach could enable service users, government and other stakeholders to know what is expected of an ESO. In practice, and for example, this might require an ESO in the Wellbeing Service – Aged Care Service membership category to be compliant with the Aged Care Quality Standards regulated by the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission<sup>9</sup>, whilst also upholding the code of conduct established and required by any member of the Peak Body.

It was considered outside the scope of Forum 3 to deliver a recommendation for minimum service standards, but it was noted that using the ESO Classification System as the initial framework to organise membership would not impede the establishment or early operations of an ESO Peak Body.

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9 [Quality Standards | Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission](#) accessed 30 October 2023

Participants at Forum 3 were asked: Do you endorse peak body membership that is initially based on the ESO Classification List?

Forum 3 response: Consensus achieved to use the ESO Classification list. And for any work to develop service standards to be based on existing standards were possible.

Forum participants noted several times that using the ESO Classification System as the initial membership structure would likely help to enhance knowledge and understanding of the sector for external and internal stakeholders.

# ESTABLISHING AN ESO PEAK BODY

*“Investing in an ESO Peak Body is an investment in veterans and their families”*

National Forum Participant speaking about the initial settings of an ESO Peak Body.

The forum process identified that there is strong alignment across the sector about the need for an ESO Peak Body. Forum 3, the final forum of the series in 2023, reached consensus on several issues to inform the establishment of a peak body and concluded with a dedicated focus for participants to consider how to evolve the conversation and create and plan for Peak Body establishment.

In seeking to move conversation and consensus towards action, participants acknowledged the support of the Australian Government, ADF, DVA and the Royal Commissioners, noting all are keen to see the sector succeed in this work and establish an ESO Peak Body. The long-term investment made by DVA in supporting ESOs was specifically acknowledged, noting that the partnership between the department and the sector is critical to the health and wellbeing of veterans and their families. An effective ESO Peak Body would mutually benefit the department and the sector, enabling the collective pursuit of better outcomes for the veteran community.

It was agreed that the consensus achieved through the forum on fundamental components of a Peak Body provided the initial framework for an ESO informed Peak Body. However, this framework required specific expertise, ongoing ESO consultation, and a governed and skilled process to create a detailed blueprint to establish a Peak Body, including an implementation plan. It was considered that the optimal way to deliver this was through an external business case process.

Forum 3 further considered how that business case might be funded. Participants considered different sources of funding including approaching the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, DVA, philanthropic organisations, and the possibility of the sector self-funding. Participants noted that:

- DVA is currently funding the development of business cases related to the establishment of Veteran and Families Hubs, with \$50,000 allocated for each business case.
- The Royal Commission has allocated funding for research pieces to understand elements of the veteran community.
- Self-funding is possible but raises questions about independence.

Participants at Forum 3 were asked:

- Do you support the development of a business case to provide a blueprint to establish an ESO Peak Body?
- What is the best model of funding for the business case – approach the Royal Commission, Government/DVA, sector self-funds or a blended approach?

Forum 3 response:

- Consensus achieved for an independent business case.
- Agreement to first approach DVA for funding for the business case, second preference to use a blended funding model (government/sector).

Robust discussion occurred during the concluding session of Forum 3 regarding a sector-funded model for the business case process or request government support. Participants agreed that approaching government first was the priority because:

- Ensuring government is invested in the outcome of the business case for an ESO Peak Body is important to the veteran community and will deliver a level of assurance and scrutiny
- The continued growth of the partnership between ESOs and DVA is critical, both sectors deliver the fundamental components of wellbeing support as required by Australia's veteran community
- The logistics of sector-funding are a limiting factor, may impact independence, and will not deliver an outcome that considers DVA requirements for a productive partnership with the sector

## NEXT STEPS

***“The shared mission of the ESO Sector is to enable veterans and their families to reach their full potential post-service. We must do this together to make it easier for them.”***

National Forum Participant speaking about the need for ESOs to remain directly engaged in work to establish an ESO Peak Body.

Forum 3 participants agreed that the Secretariat make an approach on behalf of the sector to DVA regarding business case development support.

Participants also agreed to provide information to the Secretariat about their continued ability and capability to support and inform an independent business case for an ESO Peak Body.

## THE ESO SECTOR'S REQUEST TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION

ESOs across Australia have invested their time, expertise and resources to engage in the National Forum process because it aligns with their mission to enable veterans and their families to reach their full economic and social potential. Forum participants acknowledge and are grateful for the support provided by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide for the forum process. Particular thanks are given to the Royal Commissioners who have addressed each of the forums and engaged in question-and-answer sessions at each event.

The Royal Commission's call to the ESO Sector to make it simpler and easier for veterans and their families to navigate the service environment has been clearly received by the sector. The establishment of an independent ESO Peak Body is a critical element of that response.

**In return, the ESO Sector asks the Royal Commission to make use of all the mechanisms available to it to support and further the sector's work to establish an independent ESO Peak Body that will create a collective voice for the sector and the veteran community, enable future work to develop an ESO Code of Conduct and setting Service Standards, and strengthen communication, engagement and representation on behalf of veterans and their families. This includes asking the Royal Commission to take action to recommend the Australian Government, and other stakeholders, to support and invest in the establishment of an ESO Peak Body in order to deliver better outcomes for veterans and their families.**

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT ORGANISATIONS

The following organisations were represented at all or some of the National Forums for ESOs :

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans Association**  
**Air Force Association**  
**Alliance of Defence Service Organisations**  
**Australian Catholic University**  
**Australian Commando Association**  
**Australian Council for International Development**  
**Australian Defence Force**  
**Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association**  
**Australian Special Air Service Association**  
**Australian War Widows Inc**  
**Australian War Widows NSW Ltd**  
**Bravery Trust**  
**Canberra Legacy**  
**Carry On**  
**Commando Welfare Trust**  
**Contemporary Veterans (Wagga Wagga)**  
**Defence Families of Australia**  
**Defence Force Welfare Association**  
**Defence LGBTIQ Information Service**  
**Defence Reserves Association**  
**Department of Veterans' Affairs**  
**Director Timor Awakening Program**  
**Disaster Relief Australia**  
**Emereas**  
**InnoClub Ltd**  
**Joint Transition Authority**  
**Legacy Australia**  
**Legacy Brisbane**  
**Legacy Club Services**  
**Legacy Sydney**  
**LFG Education**  
**Mates4Mates**  
**Melbourne Legacy**  
**Military and Emergency Services Health Australia**  
**Naval Association of Australia**  
**NSW Office for Veterans Affairs**

**Pain Australia**  
**Partners of Veterans Association of Australia**  
**RAAF Association WA**  
**Red Six**  
**Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL)**  
**Royal Australian Armoured Corps Corporation**  
**Royal Australian Regiment Corporation**  
**Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide**  
**RSL Care SA**  
**RSL LifeCare Veteran Services**  
**Servulink**  
**Social Futures**  
**Soldier On**  
**Stand Tall 4 PTS**  
**Suicide Prevention Australia**  
**Swiss 8**  
**The Confederation of Service Charities (UK)**  
**The Oasis (Townsville)**  
**The Younger Heroes**  
**TPI Federation of Australia**  
**United Nations and Overseas Policing Association of Australia**  
**Vasey RSL Care**  
**Veteran Support Centre**  
**Veteran Support Force**  
**Veteran Support Office**  
**Veterans Care Association**  
**Veterans Centre Australia**  
**Veterans' Wellbeing Network MNC**  
**Victorian Veterans Council**  
**Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia**  
**Wandering Warriors**  
**Women Veterans Network Australia**  
**Wounded Heroes Australia**  
**Young Veterans**

## **APPENDIX 2: FORUM 2 PRE-PAPER**

The Forum 2 Pre-paper is available online at [National Forum for ESOs – RSL Australia](#)

## **APPENDIX 3: FORUM 3 PRE-PAPER**

The Forum 3 Pre-paper is available online at [National Forum for ESOs – RSL Australia](#)

## **APPENDIX 4: FORUM 1 REPORT**

The Forum 1 Report is available online at [National Forum for ESOs – RSL Australia](#)

## **APPENDIX 5: FORUM 2 REPORT**

The Forum 2 Report is available online at [National Forum for ESOs – RSL Australia](#)



## APPENDIX 6: POST-FORUM COMMENTARY

### Australian War Widows NSW Ltd

Regarding the veteran and family advocacy stream on ESO Classification – Should this become operational we will need to consider splitting this as the needs and circumstances are very different and the policy responses are at very different levels of maturity. For example, the veteran policy space is very mature and the family space is just emerging, there is a lot more work required in the latter and therefore I think it ought to stand on its own.

— *Renee Wilson MAICD, BHons LL, BBus(International), GDipLL, GCertBA, CEO*

### Bootstraps

1. Bootstraps supports the establishment of a Peak Body to provide a collaborative all-encompassing single voice for ESOs.

The following points refer to the content and intent of the Peak Body as detailed in the Consultation Draft:

2. Bootstraps did not attend the Forums as the cost of attendance to either Sydney or Canberra Forums was prohibitive. Therefore, in future it is recommended that the consultative process be 'shopped' around so other ESOs can attend without significant attendance expense.
3. The document states in the Executive Summary: "Over 70 organisations participated in the forum process....." A Speaker at the RSL Qld Forum of 3 Nov 23 stated that at present there are approximately 7 000 ESOs operating within Australia. Therefore, about 1% or less of the Australian ESOs attended the forums. I now refer back to sub-paragraph 2 above recommending that further forums be more accessible to the other 6 930 ESO organisations reportedly operating in Australia at this time. Forum attendance and round-table discussions are usually more productive (in my experience) than written submissions.
4. Bootstraps is aware that this process is in its infancy and clarification on numerous issues are yet to be finalised. With that in mind the following points are highlighted by Bootstraps as areas that would require further clarification:
  - a. The Secretariat. As is indicated in the document, RSL Australia/Queensland took the lead in the formation of the Secretariat and the conduct of the Forums. This is understandable due to the staff required, the funding required, the connections required. And by all accounts a very successful Triad of Forums, so congratulations to the Secretariat. However, in the future it is recommended that in conjunction with the ideas detailed in sub-paragraphs 2 and 3 above, perhaps other ESOs could/should be encouraged to provide Secretariat Staff.
  - b. Executive Summary sub-paragraph 3: "....., 3-6 full-time staff....." Questions posed include: Where do these staff come from? How are they selected or appointed or recruited and by whom i.e. who makes the judgement on suitability? Who funds the salaries of these staff members? Who is responsible for the 'Job Descriptions'? Do the full-time staff have any executive authority?

- c. Executive Summary sub-paragraphs 4 and more significantly 5: Peak Body to be 'funded' for set-up by DVA. And yet the sentence following sub-paragraph 5 states: "Further agreement determined that the ESO Peak Body must be independent, from government and any single ESO, and will not act as a regulator for the sector". This sentence seems to contradict the essence of sub-paragraph 5 i.e. on the one hand the Peak Body is asking government for funding to set-up and on the other professing independence.
- d. Membership along the lines of ESO (ACNC) Classification System is supported by Bootstraps. However, again, **being cognizant of the fact that nothing has been finalised**, clarification of costs and benefits of Peak Body Membership is critical to going forward. "Why join? What if you don't join? Is the Peak Body just going to end up being another hoop jumping exercise when dealing with DVA?" *Bootstraps mini-conference participant when speaking about Peak Body Membership.*
- e. Bootstraps supports the ".....to establish a Peak Body, including an implementation plan.....the optimal way to deliver this was through an external business case process". (Reference: Establishing an ESO Peak Body p 17).
- f. "Participants also agreed to provide information to the Secretariat about their continued ability and capability to support and inform an independent business case for an ESO Peak Body". (Reference: Next Steps p 18). A vital aspect of going forward, taking into account the points raised previously in sub-paragraphs 2 and 3 above.

"The Australian veteran service and support environment is large, diverse and complex. However, this week's forum was a reminder that we all share a single, unifying purpose and drive to secure positive futures for all veterans, and their families, that have sacrificed and given so much in service to our country. To do this, we need to be clear, consistent and relentless in how we are advocating for veterans and their families with the government, and across society. "

- *RSL Australia President Greg Melick Press Release 18 Nov 22.*

**Summary.** There are, reportedly, 7,000 independent ESOs in Australia. Herding that size of a cat crowd will be a significant challenge. However, Bootstraps, for the benefit of all Veterans and their Families, firmly supports the concept of developing a Peak Body to give the sector a single strong voice.

If the Peak Body Secretariat has any questions regarding this response and as a point of contact for any future Peak Body Invitations/Surveys/Submissions don't hesitate to approach the Bootstraps Secretary.

— **Paul Kaye, Secretary, BTSTRAPS INC (Bootstraps)**

## **Defence Force Welfare Association (DFWA)**

The DFWA, which has been directly involved in the advocacy of veteran issues since 1959 and through membership of both ESORT and ADSO urges that caution be the guiding principle as the concept is developed. Australia's veteran organisations have a well-recognised and warranted scepticism with regard to being dictated to on issues that impact them as individuals and as representative bodies. Further, DFWA recognises that the report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide will have a major influence on the future of veteran representation to the government and the bureaucracy.

— *Del Gaudry CSC, DFWA National President*

## **Legacy Australia**

While Legacy supports the peak body, the generic classification and cluster model, Legacy recommends that the classification model is amended to include a dedicated cluster with a focus on families. As you are aware, the current classification includes veterans and families in a single cluster, however, there is a strong argument to split the wellbeing cluster into Veteran Wellbeing and Family Wellbeing.

— *Chairman, Legacy Australia*

## **Royal Australian Armoured Corps (RAAC)**

On behalf of the RAAC Corporation, I am happy to endorse its contents and have set out below for Appendix 6 relevant commentary.

### **A New Paradigm - Suspicious Minds**

What is proposed represents a major paradigm shift in the way ESOs conduct their business and is one which will need to be handled very, very carefully. A degree of suspicion as to the proposed entity, still exists. I agree completely. It begs the question, is this another takeover by another organisation? I hear that all the time.

No entity wants to surrender its turf or be told they are not good enough for admission to the Peak body despite decades of doing good things for veterans and families and all done pro bono. People ask, why do we need another level of bureaucracy? This is the oft-repeated refrain. I agree. I have asked myself the same question and continue to do so, regardless of any potential the proposed body may have. The imposition of another Code of Conduct could well spell the demise of ESOS in good standing and is one area of the process that requires very careful thinking, planning and further discussion.

Failure to sell this concept could well damage the entire process with entities walking away and forming a breakaway alliance.

Notwithstanding the sterling efforts of all stakeholders to bring this matter to fruition, a degree of suspicion as to the proposed Peak, still exists. ESOs see this as being an attempt to usurp ESORT and render that organisation redundant. I share that fear. Hence, regardless of what I have read and heard, I have a level of distrust.

I am concerned too that ADSO could also find itself being rendered redundant as well and being a very active ADSO member since 2015, that is something the RAAC Corporation does not want to see happen. The ability of the Corporation to progress matters via ADSO to ESORT is definitely something this writer wants to see continue. Anything less is non-negotiable. ESOs are feeling threatened that they will be rendered useless if they are swallowed up by a Peak.

### **Rights and Interests**

The designers and planners behind the formation of this new body must always have regard to the fact every stakeholder in this process and those outside this process has a right and an interest to protect and that is the continued operation of their entity free of over-control without the threat of it being usurped. They owe a fiduciary duty of care to act in the best interests of their members and if that means walking away from this process to do precisely that, they will do so. That must be respected.

### **Code of Conduct**

My concerns about a Code of Conduct remain unchanged. We are governed up to an incredible extent and are known as the as the most over-governed country in the world.

We need to ensure that as a future ESO Peak Body the same burdensome over-governing does not apply to this new organisation and flow downwards to all ESOs who are a party to the new entity. A danger exists of such an over-governed approach acting as a fetter to good governance and effective advocacy as proposed for the Peak Body.

We cannot afford to have that happen as to do so will hamstring the effective and efficient operation of the new entity.

Incorporated entities have their own code of conduct called a constitution and by-laws with regulatory oversight by the relevant Corporate Regulator State or Federal. Why we persistently need to re-invent this wheel escapes me.

We need also to ensure the role of the primary focus of the peak body's raison d'être remains where the Peak body operates upwards on matters of national veterans' and veterans' families' significance and not downwards to be interfering with the daily operation of a properly constituted entity (autonomy).

### **The Peak Body Advocates Upward and not Downward**

We need to leave the daily operations to the entities under their relevant Constitutions and By-laws.

The Peak's role must be seen to be separate from grassroots issues as they will act as a distraction and drag the Peak down. It is there to advocate at the highest levels of Government on veterans' and veterans' families issues. It is the premier advocacy instrument and stands in the shoes of all that it represents.

It is not on any level there to act on matters that must remain within the purview of individual Associations. That is not the Peak's role and we must be unambiguously clear on that.

We do not need a peak getting bogged in a bureaucratic mindset of form and process over results. This Peak body must on every level, be and remain, focused on results and not process. Ted Chitham of the RAR Corporation and I are in furious agreement after Forum 3 that the focus on the national peak body be directly related to advocating on behalf of the body's constituent member associations and leaving the meat and potatoes quite correctly, to the member entities day-to-day operations. The peak does stuff at peak level - it brings serious grassroots issues affecting veteran and families to a national forum to fight it out between ESC Peak and Govt.

### **Governing Document**

The development of a governing document is a must. Without one the Commonwealth will not provide funding grants to ESOs who are not incorporate federally.

In order to demonstrate its commitment to the proposed Peak, the RAAC Corporation has drafted a Constitution with a working title, to provide the designers of the final product with a starting point for the entity's governing document.

### **Corporate Oversight or Corporate Over-control?**

It was noted at the October Forum that there is very strong support from Soldier On and RSL QLD who delivered an excellent presentation on governance and the ACNC's involvement.

It was argued by both speakers that corporate due diligence and checks and balances including background checks, will have to be in place to ensure rigorous due diligence is carried out on eligible peak body members.

The corporate oversight at State/Territory level and at Commonwealth level (ASIC/ACNC), is significant and pervasive, again contributing to an over-governing of enterprises such as Incorporated Associations.

It follows that, the proposal to have in place such checks and balances as contended by both presenters could be argued quite reasonably to be unreasonably oppressive and act as an impediment in obtaining interested candidates to take up positions on the Peak body. It is in many ways, akin to Caesar judging Caesar. It is a form of over-control that I find particularly unpalatable.

Care and caution will need to be taken that any such process is designed to attract and not deter, interested parties from putting their names forward to become Peak body members.

It can be a potentially fraught process and adding to the governance burden to achieve the objective of another system of checks and balances may be fatal to what is proposed. A deal of suspicion as to the composition of the Peak body and who will be appointed to it still remains amongst some of the ESOs.

### **Commentary on Draft Submission to the Royal Commission**

I also offer the following commentary on matters addressed at p.4 of the Draft; viz

***including to recommend and compel the provision of the required support and investment from the Australian Government, and other stakeholders, to help establish an ESO Peak Body.*** This is an excellent point, in particular the comment "to recommend and compel....." good words and beautifully put.

It encapsulates the power of the RC and hopefully will be seen by the Commissioners to enable them to find a pathway towards making a funding grant to assist in the development of the business case. The closing remarks in the Draft (pp.18-19) are very well stated and supported.

In closing I'd just like to say I think we still have a way to go - a long way in fact, on that and hopefully a 50K grant for a business case will be approved.

It is noted that the funding model to be used to operate the Peak still has not been finalised. We have not reached consensus on either the \$485,000 or \$1.2m dollar model. That will require another further Forum which must be a priority while the momentum is there.

### **Further Commentary**

I now offer some comments on three dot points at p.17; viz

- ***DVA is currently funding the development of business cases related to the establishment of Veteran and Families Hubs, with \$50,000 allocated for each business case.***

The development of a properly funded and professionally prepared business case is critical to the success of standing the new entity up. Without a business case to advance our contentions and plans, the venture runs a risk of failing at first pass.

I consider obtaining funding and developing a business case to be Priority 1.

- ***The Royal Commission has allocated funding for research pieces to understand elements of the veteran community.***

My sense is that the RC would be more amenable to investing some of its discretionary funding as it is not a Government Department. It has sat through innumerable hours of heart-breaking testimony and it follows that, the RC is not blind to the issues that confront them. I believe they would be very happy to allocate funding for a business case. Their neutrality and independence from Government is the key fact in issue, here. DVA has no neutrality factor. It sits under a raft of official financial management instructions from the Financial Management Act through innumerable Treasury Directions to the extent it could complicate and delay the process of an efficient and positive response. Any funding will come with stricter caveats than those established by the RC.

We need the RC funding as it will have a clear process also but hopefully one minus the perpetual layers of fossilised BS that entities such as ESOs wade through when dealing with Government.

Govt funding and ESO support is subject to the vagaries of a SWOT analysis. A Weakness in a SWOT analysis lies in the refusal of some ESOs to accept the proposed changes.

A further Weakness in a SWOT lies in a lack of Government commitment and possible change of policy.

If Government can quibble about payment of \$1,240 for my Gold Card client's medical treatment out of an uncapped \$11bn budget, then anything is possible.

Similarly, Threats in a SWOT context apply to a Cabinet reshuffle and change of Minister, change of attitude to veterans or change of government.

Additionally Threats in a SWOT context exist for ESOs, too. Those who are left out of the Peak grouping or refuse to join the Peak body may well walk away and form their own Alliance with its attendant bitterness. The volatility of the political system at present, due to, inter alia, demands by Australians for the government to do more to ease cost of living and thereby do much more with its money, potentially sees our modest request disappear altogether. We need to be cognisant of those two Government SWOT factors. We need also to be cognisant of any ESOs who walk away as they will take their funds with them. The consequential effect of this is a reduced funding pool in respect of annual subscriptions to help the Peak body operate.

- *Self-funding is possible but raises questions about independence.*

I agree. There is no objectivity - it's somebody's funds and that is an impediment to obtaining seed money from a kindred ESO.

Not all ESOs have sufficient capital to even remotely consider financing the retention of a professionally prepared business case.

That begs the question, what ESO has that kind of capital to self-fund? Anything that threatens independence however remote, should not be countenanced. On reflection, I would contend this third point should be taken off the table.

### **Closing Comment**

The efforts by all to have the new body created are commendable on every level. It is a significant body of work. The Australian ethos of the fair go applies directly to this project.

On its face, the documentation examined and discussions held are encouraging. However, many questions, chief among them allaying the fears of some ESOs and obtaining funding, require answers.

Suspicious must be assuaged and itches scratched.

Unless that can occur to the satisfaction of those anxious ESOs seeking further and better, support for the Peak will wane.

— **Noel McLaughlin OAM MBA, Chairman**

## Royal Australian Regiment Association (RAR)

**The RAR Corporation supports the national advocacy voice peak body but does not support the second purpose:** *“to support ESOs to thrive so that the sector can better enable veterans and their families to access a safe and connected service environment which helps to strengthen their health and wellbeing...”*

The RARC through both its ESORT and ADSO membership has actively chaired the one advocacy voice proposal initiated through ESORT’s Collaboration Reference Group (CRG). The CRG decided for a one voice peak advocacy body but has not yet commenced a business plan study to select and implement a model.

**The RARC does not support the second purpose because it already exists.**

- Most ESOs and VSO are registered nationally with ASIC, ACNC or State Registered entities (Fair Trading etc): all of which entail legal obligations and standards.
- DVA and other Government Departments veterans’ entitlement services are contracted to service providers under strict compliance conditions and standards. For example, note the accreditation requirement for health providers.

Additionally, a peak body could be seen as a “big brother” interference with the governance responsibilities of the member organisations.

**The RARC supports the need for an independent business case** to be developed as a blue print to establish the ESO Peak Body only as a national advocate to the Government and the Australian people AND requests that an RARC representative be appointed to the RSLNF’s Planning and Development Team going forward.

— *Michael von Berg MC OAM, Chairman*

## Victorian Veterans Council

### Report from the National Forum for ESOs 2022/23

Thank you for the opportunity for the Victorian Veterans Council (VVC) to participate in this series of forums across 2022 and 2023. The VVC supports and welcomes all opportunities that bring members of the ex-service organisation (ESO) community together for common purpose. The VVC congratulates RSL Australia on this achievement and looks forward to future opportunities for sector cooperation and collaboration.

While the VVC acknowledges the achievement of the forums in developing the submission to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (RCDVS) regarding an ESO informed response to a sector peak body, the VVC neither supports, rejects nor endorses the submission.

The VVC requests that the submission does not include the VVC in the list of organisations endorsing the submission, and that every care is taken to avoid any inference that the VVC endorses the submission.



The VVC recommends RSL Australia also considers listing attendees and the organisations they represented and ensuring forum participants and those who have chosen to endorse the submission are clearly delineated.

The VVC also considers the following matters should be considered of high importance in establishing any peak body:

- The independence and diversity of its membership
- Recognition and representation of both veterans and families of veterans as distinct cohorts within the operating model and ESO classification system.

The VVC would further like to highlight to RSL Australia concerns raised with the VVC that there has been limited distribution and consultation on the final proposal which may be counter to the understanding of forum participants that wider consultation would occur.

The VVC would urge RSL Australia to seek the views and opinions of other ESOs prior to making the submission to the RCDVS.

Thank you again for the opportunity for the VVC to participate in the forums.

— *Greg Yorke AM CSC, Chair*

#### **Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (Queensland Branch) Inc.**

1. The need to consider the composition of the six[6] person committee, the Chairperson and the process to appoint people into those positions that represent all of the ESO sector, including smaller ESOs.
2. Any membership fees required to maintain an ESO Peak Body could be a financial burden to smaller ESOs who are struggling to stay afloat without financial support from either the Federal or State Governments.

— *John Weldon, VVAA Qld President*

