



DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

NATIONAL OFFICE

Patron-in-Chief: His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd)
member of the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations

RESPONSE TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION'S DRAFT REPORT

REPORT OF MEETING OF EX-SERVICE ORGANISATIONS 14/15 JANUARY

The members of the Ex-Service Organisations Round Table (ESORT) met in Canberra to review the Draft Report and seek to develop a 'one voice' response. This notion of 'one voice' to the various issues impacting on the veteran community continues to develop and is being received favourably (suspiciously?) by those in the political and bureaucratic arena.

The ESORT members took the view that despite the tight timeline allowed to provide responses (15 Feb 19, extended to 30 Feb) it would not waste time in fighting for a further extension. 'Let do it and attack the Draft Report as if our future relies on a constructive and emphatic response to what is agreed to be a document of questionable value'.

The ESORT and the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations (ADSO) have the view that we have before us a once in a life time opportunity to reset the program for the care and support of the veteran community into the future. It is up to the present generation to set the course so let us be constructive and develop our agenda.

In analysing the Draft Report, it was agreed to take a strategic view and address the five 'Themes' used by the Commissioners. Further agreed that individual ESOs should take responsibility for the individual recommendations and findings as they impacted on their individual memberships.

The ESORT agreed that:

- a. DVA be retained with a dedicated Minister.
- b. The 'transformation' of DVA through VCR and Secretary's stated objectives continue.
- c. A review of the National Consultative Framework be undertaken with the aim of ensuring integration and coordination; the proceedings of the various fora (YVF, OWP & Female and Veterans \$ Family Forums) inform ESORT.
- d. ESORT be transitioned into a Strategic Advisory Council.
- e. The Gold Card' be retained 'as is'.
- f. 'Open Arms' be retained as a dedicated veteran and families counselling service.
- g. A review of the benefits for widow(ers) be undertaken.
- h. ESOs be co-funded to ensure their ability to represent and provide services.
- i. Excision of the 86 proposed 'removals' in the Draft Report.
- j. The abolition of MRCA Table 23.2 (Peacetime PI) and Reasonable Hypothesis Class of SoPs be discussed. This is not a given but warrants further serious discussion.

- k. The primacy of the Unique Nature of Military Service be maintained in consideration of all aspects of veteran services and care. There should be no ‘relaxed standard of proof’ (Reasonable Hypothesis test).

There are 15 ESO members of ESORT and each are within their brief to submit responses to the Draft Report. That is a given.

ADSO, which comprises 18 ESOs, will submit an ADSO response to the Draft Report with the collaborative support of that membership. This response will be at the strategic level. Achieving consensus, all will agree, is sometimes a fraught exercise but if we are to advance with the strength of speaking with ‘one voice’ it is imperative that it occur where possible.

The ADSO submission to the Draft Report will also address specific issues that must underpin the future support and care of the nation’s veterans and their families. These include:

- a. The Unique Nature of Military Service.
- b. Strategic view. It is accepted that the Draft Report is a snap shot only, but it must be couched in terms of the strategic environment we are in at present, the volunteer base of the ESOs, and the nation’s strategic needs.
- c. DVA transformation. This is happening and is supported by ADSO

Remember that this is a Productivity Commission Report not a Government Report. The Commissioners are yet to conduct the national ‘talking tour’ after which they will finalise their Report and submit to government by mid-June 2019. The Draft Report is simply the end of the beginning of the process and its recommendations and findings demand critical analysis by all involved in the veteran space.

Many FB Posts have expressed anger with some elements of the Draft Report and even called on the Prime Minister to shut down the Commission. Frankly, being angry does not achieve anything but simply causes one to be distracted from the main game. This is the chance for us in the veteran community to grasp the future agenda, lay out our demands for the care and support of veterans and their families for the benefit of those who will surely come after us.

Remember this is our once in a life time opportunity to set the direction for DVA and the care and servicing of the nations’ veterans and their families. Let us prosecute that opportunity and not be distracted by those who are content with the status quo or, to put it bluntly, are not up to the fight.

Kel Ryan

President

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<i>Contacts</i>		
Executive Director: Alf Jaugietis (0438) 282 284	www.dfwa.org.au	National President: Kel Ryan (0418) 759 120

DFWA – Voice of the Defence Community