



RSL AUSTRALIA
NATIONAL ESO FORUM
Tuesday, 30 May 2023

PRE-PAPERS

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Purpose and outcomes

In response to discussions across and outside of the Ex-Service Organisation (ESO) sector, RSL Australia collaborated with RSL State Branches to facilitate a process to enable the sector to come together to address issues surrounding the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

The first National Forum for Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs) held in Canberra in November 2022 brought together nearly 50 ESOs from across Australia. The Royal Commissioners addressed the forum and updated participants on their inquiry. Participants jointly decided the priority issues that they wanted to work on together, as a sector that supports veterans and their families.

The second National Forum for ESOs on 30 May 2023 will build upon the two initiatives voted as the most important to address by participants from the first National Forum, namely¹:

- Establish the framework for a peak body for the ESO sector to represent and advocate the needs of ESOs, and Australian veterans and their families
- Map and categorise the services ESOs deliver, and provides measurements of service quality to assist veterans navigating service needs and providers

To facilitate and inform discussions on the day, the Forum will engage subject matter experts to provide insight into how peak bodies function, both in Australia and overseas, and the importance of representing the interests of the sector. Presenters include:

- The Hon Matthew Keogh MP, Minister for Veterans' Affairs
- Marc Purcell, CEO, Australian Council for International Development (ACFID)
- Maj Gen Sir Nick Pope, Executive Chair, UK Confederation of Service Charities (Cobseo)
- Nick Kaldas APM, Peggy Brown AO, Hon James Douglas KC, Commissioners, Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

The Forum seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

- Agree potential classification system for ESOs, and identify gaps that may exist in those classifications
- Agree the purpose of a potential ESO Peak Body, including the preferred scope of roles and responsibilities
- Agree potential functions of an ESO Peak Body

Information papers have been prepared and included in this pack to support participants to engage fully in discussions during the Forum. These include:

- An outline of potential classifications for ESOs
- Examples of existing peak bodies
- A history of Royal Commissions in Australia and brief details of outcomes and subsequent actions

The following papers are not exhaustive. Participants are encouraged to undertake their own research and thinking ahead of the second forum.

¹ RSL Australia, 2022, *National ESO Forum Report* p. 13

Definition of an ESO

During discussions of ex-service organisations (ESOs) during this Forum, the term ESO will apply to all organisations that provide support to veterans and their families as their core function. This is a very broad application of this term, but the most suitable considering current usage of the term ESO in the veteran services sector.

Currently, the Department of Veterans' Affairs' website defines the roles and responsibilities of ESOs as²:

An ex-service organisation (ESO) supports current and former ADF members and their families.

They can support you with:

- *advocacy services to access payments and other benefits*
- *visitation services at home, hospital or an aged care home*
- *seeking financial help, employment or vocational studies*
- *social activities to make friendships and to improve general health and wellbeing.*

They also support you by lobbying governments for better services and payments to live a meaningful life.

Although not overtly included in the DVA's definition of an ESO - for the purpose of reflecting the diversity of ESOs and supporting the sector to consider the issues before it, it is acknowledged that some ESOs support veterans and their families to:

- *maintain connection to limited membership groups such as Unit specific, defined service period or geographical area.*

² [Find an ex-service organisation | Department of Veterans' Affairs \(dva.gov.au\)](https://www.dva.gov.au)

Classification

At the first National Forum, participants identified the need to map and categorise the services ESOs deliver and provide measurements of service quality to assist veterans navigating service needs and providers.

A starting point for pursuing this action will be for participants to determine initial categories that reflect the services delivered by ESOs across the country. Leveraging existing work and to inform discussion at the forum, this paper outlines some initial categories to reflect the work of the sector in supporting the Australian veteran community.

To assist mapping ESOs against these categories, forum participants will be asked to seek to classify their organisations by the services they provide to veterans and their families. While organisations may deliver on multiple outcomes, the focus will be for organisations to classify themselves using the primary service output provided to veterans and their families. Participants will be able to choose to list secondary categories, or subtypes, for classification for their organisations. This approach reflects the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission's (ACNC) process to classify organisations by charitable purpose³.

The Productivity Commission's report, *A Better Way to Support Veterans (2019)*, outlined three main classifications of the services provided by veterans⁴. This was repeated in the Interim National Commissioner for the Prevention of Defence and Veteran Suicide's *Interim Report (2021)*⁵. The classifications are:

- Claims advocacy
- Wellbeing supports
- Policy influence and input

The Productivity Commission also listed several additional roles undertaken by ESOs:

- Referral to other support services (noting a difference between referral to services delivered face-to-face and those accessed online or via an app)
- Commemoration and recognition
- Social events
- Education, training, and mentoring

Based on the above, it is suggested that participants consider the following categories to classify the primary services provided by their organisation.

Classification	Core Purpose
Claims Advocacy	Assisting veterans and their families prepare and lodge claims to DVA, as well as arguing the veterans' case to DVA, the Veterans' Review Board (VRB) and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT)
Referral Service	Assisting veterans and their families to access different types of services, including services provided by organisations outside of

³[Charitable purpose | ACNC](#) accessed 2 May 2023

⁴ Productivity Commission, 2019, *A Better Way to Support Veterans*, p. 533

⁵ Interim National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention, 2021, *Preliminary Interim Report*, p. 226

	the defence and ESO sectors.
Wellbeing Support	<p>Providing services based on the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's Domains of Wellbeing Veteran-centred model*.</p> <p>Classified into sub-groups for those providing services related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ physical ○ mental • Social Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ connecting veterans with other veterans ○ connecting partners of veterans with other partners of veterans ○ connecting children of defence or veteran families with other children of defence or veteran families ○ connecting veterans and their families with civilians • Justice and Safety • Housing • Transport • Education and Skills • Employment • Income & Finance <p>*We note the DVA adapted model highlights Recognition and Respect and we reflect this in a dedicated classification of Commemoration and/or Camaraderie</p>
Veteran Policy Promotion	Informing government about the practical experience of accessing the veteran support system and recognising veterans' interests in government policy
Commemoration and/or Camaraderie	Providing opportunities for mateship, connection, commemoration, and remembrance of significant military events. i.e. Unit Associations
Awareness	Raising awareness and/or raise funds for veteran welfare, but not involved in service provision

Peak Body

In Australia, peak body is a term for an advocacy group or trade association, an association of industries or groups with allied interests. They are established for different reasons which can include to advocate, lobby, or promote on behalf of members, or to develop common standards, frameworks, or processes.

It is acknowledged that within the Australian ESO sector, some organisations have identified their aligned interests and formed overarching entities to facilitate joint advocacy and working. It is recognised that while these existing structure and arrangements are already working for some parts of the ESO sector they are not currently inclusive of all ESOs nationally, nor are they recognised formally as the sector peak by government or other stakeholders.

The types of functions that Peak Bodies undertake can include:

Activity	Intended outcome	Example of delivery
Advocacy and representation	Influence and inform government and other decision makers	Communications to the general public, submissions to Parliamentary inquires, meetings with Ministers and industry leaders
Research and policy development	Advice to members, government and other decision makers	Investigating new ways of working, mapping the sector, developing guidelines and frameworks
Information provision to sector	Alert sector to challenges and changes	Sharing information about other research in similar sectors, best practice approaches overseas, changes to legislation, notification of grant opportunities
Sector capacity building	Strengthen member organisations' functionality to improve service delivery	Providing education or support on operational issues such as governance, report writing
Grant support	Improve ability to secure funding	Practical support and guidance for grant applications and grant writing
Communities of Practice	Service improvement	Facilitation of focused discussions and sharing about practice issues such as for volunteer management

To assist forum participants to collectively explore the purpose and scope of a peak body for the ESO sector the following examples of peak bodies are provided. The information below has been taken from desktop research and verified through connections with the relevant organisations where possible. The list is not exhaustive, hyperlinks to each body are provided in the text to enable forum participants to undertake their own further reading and research in advance on 30 May.

Military and Veteran Focused peak bodies

The Confederation of Service Charities (Cobseo) UK

[Cobseo](#) provides a single point of contact for interaction with the UK Government, including local government and the Devolved Administrations; with the Royal Household; with the Private Sector; and with other members of the British Armed Forces Community.

The stated objectives of Cobseo are to represent, promote, and further the interests of the Armed Forces Community by:

- Exchanging and coordinating information internally
- Identifying issues of common concern and coordinating any necessary and appropriate action
- Acting as a point of contact for external agencies to the members of Cobseo
- Representing and supporting the needs and opinions of its member organisations, individually and collectively at central and local government levels and with other national and international agencies.

Established in 1984 and restructured in 2004 as a company limited by guarantee. Cobseo is funded by its members, with tiered membership fees. Cluster groups were formed in 2009 to support collaborative working on specific issues – employment, research, non-UK, care, welfare, health, and wellbeing, serving personnel, housing, justice system, membership, and female veterans. Members can join a cluster group to work collaboratively to identify issues, generate solutions and formulate action and/or recommendations.

The Cobseo model brings together the diversity of the armed forces community including, current serving, veterans and their families, ex-service organisations, and governments. It is financed through membership and independent of government.

National Council of Veterans Associations in Canada (NCVA)

[NCVA](#) is an umbrella organisation of more than 60 distinct veterans' associations formed to provide a strong and independent voice on issues of interest to Canada's veterans' community. The range of NCVA membership includes many regimental, campaign, and service specific groups.

The origins of the NCVA date back to the 1920s when the federally chartered Veterans Associations in Canada began to appear before Parliamentary Committees to present the concerns of Canadian veterans following World War 1. NCVA was formalised in the 1950s to promote understanding, cooperation and, where possible, uniformity in recommendations, proposals, and action to support the welfare ex-servicemen.

The NCVA has a particular focus on legislative change and reform and agrees a Legislative Program on an annual or bi-annual basis to guide advocacy to Government, Parliament, Veterans' Affairs Canada, and the Department of National Defence. The 2022-23 NCVA Legislative Program is built around eight advocacy priorities which include systemic change to reduce the backlog of veterans' disability claims, reform of funeral and burial grants, a re-vamp of the diminished earnings capacity for veterans who are 65 years or older.

NCVA is led by a four-person executive team, comprising experts in healthcare and legislation, and veterans. The War Amps (a registered charity which has grown from supporting veteran amputees to offer supports to all Canadian amputees acts) as the administrative secretariat in carrying out responsibilities for co-ordination and communication of NVAC legislative initiatives and priorities. The Chair of War Amps is also the Chair of NCVA.

The NCVA model leverages the goodwill and collaboration of the member associations. This includes relying on the leadership, operational supports and resources of the War Amps. It is not clear how the NCVA would continue if War Amps did not provide those supports.

Australian peaks bodies

Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS)

[ACOSS](#) is a national advocate supporting people affected by poverty, disadvantage and inequality, and the peak council for community services nationally.

Established in 1956, ACOSS aims to reduce poverty and inequality by leading and supporting initiatives with the community services sector and acting as an independent non-party political voice for the sector. ACOSS draws on the expertise of its diverse member base to inform its advocacy and action.

The ACOSS national member network is comprised of eight state and territory Councils of Social Service, 79 member organisations and six National Constituency Organisation Members (representative bodies).

Membership is tiered based on annual income and membership type, ranging from \$25 for organisations with an annual income of less than \$100,000 who apply for associate membership up to \$17,400 for organisations with an annual income of over \$100 million who apply for national membership. Annual income is taken to be as reported to the [ACNC](#) (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission). National members (top tier) have voting rights at the AGM, including the election of ACOSS Board members.

The ACOSS model reflects the federal, state and territory structures of Australia and represents a diversity of organisations which is not dissimilar to the profile of the ESO sector. ACOSS revenue comes from a combination of government funding, membership fees, grant funding, partner contributions and donations.

Australian Council for International Development (ACFID)

[ACFID](#) is the peak body for around 120 Australian non-government organisations (NGOs) and affiliates involved in international development and humanitarian action. It operates a secretariat based in Canberra and contributes to policy dialogue, the regulatory environment of the Australian aid and development sector, and international engagement.

To be eligible for membership, NGOs must undergo an admissions process, which includes review and determination by a Membership Admissions Committee, Code of Conduct Committee and the ACFID Board. NGO membership fees are related to the total annual funds disbursed to overseas projects, other project costs and communication education as set-down in ACFID's Quality Assurance Framework.

At the AGM, members elect a Governance Board and Code of Conduct Committee.

The ACFID Code of Conduct is a voluntary self-regulatory industry code of good practice. The aim of the Code is to improve the outcomes of international development and increase stakeholder trust by enhancing the transparency and accountability of members.

The ACFID model provides an example of how a peak body can support transparency and accountability across a sector through guidance, education and as a criterion for membership. ACFID has a partnership memorandum of understanding with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and receives funding from DFAT through a separate grant agreement.

Royal Commission Overview

Purpose

This information is provided to give forum participants a brief overview of the recent history of Commonwealth Royal Commissions in Australia, responses from the Australian Government, impact on the sectors subject to inquiry and some of the outcomes achieved. It is not exhaustive, and participants are encouraged to undertake their own further research.

For the purpose of this paper, Government is taken to be the Australian Government.

A royal commission is a public inquiry. In Australia, royal commissions have been the highest form of inquiry on matters of public importance since 1902. A royal commission has broad powers to gather information to assist with its inquiry, including the power to summons witnesses to appear before it and the power to request individuals or organisations to produce documents as evidence.

Royal commissions are a form of non-judicial and non-administrative governmental investigation that are only established in rare and exceptional circumstances. Commonwealth royal commissions are established through the issuing of Letters Patent by the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia under the *Royal Commissions Act 1902* (Cth). Commonwealth royal commissions can only inquire into matters that relate to the Commonwealth's responsibilities.

Royal commissions have terms of reference which set out the key areas of investigation as well as the timeline by which the inquiry must be completed⁶.

To be aware

Royal commissions seek to bring to light details about problems, they generate significant focus on those problems and seek to make recommendations to address those problems. While this is intended to achieve beneficial outcomes for different cohorts it may increase the risk of trauma for individuals and vicarious trauma for others. It is incumbent on all participants to manage these risks for themselves and others.

The forthcoming final report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide and the subsequent response from Government may be particularly triggering events. Details about crisis and community support can be found [here](#).

The recommendations of a Royal Commission can only be as good as the information that is provided and considered. It is therefore beneficial for participants and witnesses to ensure a Royal Commission has a good understanding of what is, or what could, work well and the impact any proposed changes would likely have on the intended cohort.

Current Royal Commissions

There are currently three active Royal Commissions:

- Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, due to report in June 2024
- Defence and Veteran Suicide, due to report June 2024

⁶ [About royal commissions | Royal Commissions](#) accessed 6 March 2023

- Robodebt Scheme, due to report June 2023

Recent Royal Commissions

In the past decade the following Royal Commissions have taken place:

- Aged Care Quality and Safety
- National Natural Disaster Arrangements
- Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry
- Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
- Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory
- Trade Union Governance and Corruption

Outcomes of Royal Commissions

A royal commission will usually make a series of recommendations to government in the form of a final report. Government will usually formally respond indicating which recommendations it accepts and those it does not. For example, following the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, the Government did not accept the recommendation to establish a national ariel fire-fighting fleet.

Recommendations can apply to government and other organisations subject to the inquiry. For example, the Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry saw the introduction of anti-hawking provisions which changed the way providers can sell financial products, and increased funding to regulators to enable them to prosecute providers who made inappropriate sales – previously this action had not been possible.

Government will then decide how to best fund delivery of the recommendations it has accepted. It is usual for Government to establish an advisory body to provide expert advice and help to guide implementation. For example, following the Royal Commission into Age Care Quality and Safety, a National Advisory Council and Council of Elders were established, made-up of leaders from across the not-for-profit, government and private sectors, to report directly to the Minister for Health and Aged Care.

Royal Commission recommendations often include a detailed focus on improving transparency and accountability of service providers. The final report from a Royal Commission can be the start of a journey of change for a sector which plays out over several years. For example, the National Office for Child Safety was established to lead the development and implementation of key recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and the introduction of National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. Organisations that provide services to children and young people or that include children and young people were required to report annually to the National Office for Child Safety about their progress in implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission and the new principles. Reporting was voluntary in the first few years, before becoming mandatory. And the principles were a stepping-stone to new service standards and requirements, some of which were linked to receipt of government funding.

The timeline for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

This Royal Commission will continue to focus on private hearings and special reports in the first half of 2023. Private hearing sessions applications with close on 28 April, and the next public hearing block will take place in Perth from 16 May.

The last date for submissions to the Royal Commission is 13 October. With the final report due to be presented to Government by 17 June 2024.

It is possible that some of the recommendations will be shared before the final report, similar to the Interim Report, this would allow Government to consider inclusions for the 2024/25 Budget which will be handed down in May 2024.

The opportunity to influence how Government responds to the recommendations of the Royal Commission is before our ESO sector now. Previous reports and inquiries into defence and veteran suicide have not resulted in the change required. Forum participants have asked, what can be done differently this time to see sustained action that deliver the change that is required?

Part of the response was agreed at the first ESO National Forum, a peak body for the ESO sector. The work undertaken at the second forum is intended to build on that work to achieve the outcomes defined at the beginning of this information paper:

- Agree potential classification system for ex-service organisations, and identify gaps that may exist in those classifications
- Agree the purpose of a potential ESO Peak Body, including the preferred scope of roles and responsibilities
- Agree potential functions of an ESO Peak Body

The RSL has advocated for the inclusion of funding in the 2023/24 budget to establish a National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Wellbeing, to be established independent of Government by an Act of Parliament to lead and guide implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission. The RSL believes that establishing a National Commissioner for Defence and Wellbeing will help to ensure that momentum is not lost in implementing the recommendations, that the ESO sector will have an influential independent partner in this work, and that the collective response to defence and veteran suicide is focused on wellbeing to create greater opportunities for early intervention and prevention.