



# *National Bosun's Call*



Vol 5 No 7

Once Navy, Always Navy

August 2024

## **ADF Command Change**



Chief of the Defence Force Admiral David Johnston, AC, RAN, with Vice Chief of the Defence Force Air Marshal Robert Chipman, AO, CSC, after an Australian War Memorial Last Post ceremony in Canberra, 10 July 2024.

Photo: Rodney Braithwaite



National Newsletter of the  
**Naval Association of Australia**

## Captain Matthew Flinders finally returns home

Captain Matthew Flinders was finally returned to the village where he was born – Donington, Lincolnshire, in north-east England.

His grave was rediscovered when archaeologists were working on the HS2 project, high speed rail line near Euston, London five years ago, prompting a campaign by Donington locals to 'bring him home'. They were able to confirm his remains from a lead breast plate on his coffin.

On July 13, their long campaign came to fruition. His descendants were joined by the Bishop of Lincoln and dignitaries from Australia and Mauritius – where he was held captive during the Napoleonic wars. Australia's Assistant Navy Attaché, Commander John Relyea, represented the ADF at the service.

Also in attendance at the service were the South Australian Governor Frances Adamson and Australia's Deputy High Commissioner, Elizabeth Bowes.

Church bells started ringing at 10am, before the coffin was carried through the village, with streets lined with thousands of people, passing a Navy guard of honour, to the Church of St Mary and the Holy Rood for a special burial service.

"It was an emotional one, understanding the incredible impact that Captain Flinders has had on Australia and the world. He was a pioneer whose charting skills were so accurate they are being used some two centuries

later," Commander Relyea said.

Captain Flinders was accompanied by Bungaree, who became the first known Australian Indigenous person to circumnavigate Australia and contribute to the mapping of the country's coastline.

"The story of how Captain Flinders' reburial came about is simply incredible," Commander Relyea said.

Captain Flinders died almost 210 years ago, on July 19, 1814, aged 40, but the exact location of his burial site was lost in the mid-1800s.

The service was held with full military honours and included a firing party salute before his coffin was lowered into a grave prepared within the church itself.

*Chanel 9 news and Defence*



*Above: Flinders entering the church with the Union Jack showing*

*Right: Flinders in the church with the Australian National Flag showing*

*Right above: Matthew Flinders' tombstone set over his new grave in the Church of St Mary and the Holy Rood Donington*



**The Naval Association of Australia Inc** Patron-in-Chief His Majesty, King Charles III  
ABN 56 653 989 978

Editor: Peter Cooke-Russell Contact [peter.cookerussell@gmail.com](mailto:peter.cookerussell@gmail.com)



## New veterans' legislation introduced to Parliament

11 July 2024

On 3 July 2024, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel, Matt Keogh, introduced legislation into Parliament to simplify and harmonise the veterans' rehabilitation and compensation framework. This is another important step the Government has taken to respond to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide's Interim Report.

The Bill would consolidate all legislation governing veterans' compensation and rehabilitation into the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004* (MRCA) from 1 July 2026. This means the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* (VEA) and the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988* (DRCA) will be closed to new compensation and rehabilitation claims. An underlying principle of the Bill is that there will be no reduction in payments that veterans or families have previously received or are currently receiving.

These changes will make the claims system easier to navigate and help veterans and families receive the support and services they are entitled to. It will also ease the administrative burden for DVA, making determinations less complex, and reducing training and system maintenance overheads.

- The Bill also introduces a range of enhancements that will improve compensation arrangements for veterans, including:
- a new Additional Disablement Amount (ADA), similar to the existing Extreme Disablement Adjustment (EDA) available under the VEA (This will compensate older veterans who have a high degree of incapacity due to service-related conditions.)
- introduction of 'presumptive liability', which will allow the Repatriation Commission to specify injuries and diseases that can be determined on a presumptive basis where they are known to have a common connection with military service, without needing to engage with the Statement of Principles (SoP) system
- consolidation of household and attendant care, travel for treatment, and retention of automatic granting of VEA funeral benefits in the MRCA
- an increase to \$3,000 for funeral allowance for previous automatic grant categories currently covered under the VEA, and the availability of reimbursement of funeral expenses up to \$14,062 for all service-related deaths.

The 2024-25 Budget included a measure providing an additional \$222 million in veteran and family entitlements across the first 2 years from commencement of this legislation, with increased expenditure continuing beyond the forward estimates.

The Bill is the result of significant community consultation undertaken over 3 rounds since late 2022.

Over 50 consultation sessions were conducted in 2023 and 2024 and 569 submissions were received. DVA found there was broad support within the veteran community for a single ongoing Act.

Following consideration of the feedback on the exposure draft in early 2024, these changes have been made to the Bill:

- Veterans in receipt of DRCA incapacity payments will automatically transition to MRCA incapacity payments on the date of commencement.
- Where the Repatriation Medical Authority updates an SoP between the veteran's primary and reviewable decision, the version of the SoP which is most beneficial to the veteran's circumstances will be applied.
- An introduction of an instrument-making power to enable the Repatriation Commission to determine circumstances where a veteran must receive financial advice before receiving a lump sum payment.

**The Senate referred the Bill to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee for inquiry and report by 3 October 2024.**

More information is available at: [www.dva.gov.au/legislationreform](http://www.dva.gov.au/legislationreform).

Information on the Senate Inquiry is available on the [Australian Parliament House website](http://www.parliament.gov.au).

### Creating a simpler, easier to use system for the veteran community.

The Government is committed to ensuring that Defence personnel, veterans and their families are well looked after.

Highlighted by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide in its [Interim Report](#), and fully supported by the Government, we are simplifying and harmonising veterans' legislation that governs compensation and rehabilitation, so veterans and their families can more easily get the support they are entitled to.

The introduction of the draft Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 into Parliament, followed consultation on the exposure draft Bill undertaken with the veteran community between 28 February and 28 April 2024. A [list of changes made at the end of the consultation](#) is available, as well as an [information booklet](#).

A range of materials have been developed to assist you in understanding the Bill and how the changes will impact you and can be found under the [Resources page](#).

# Selection of Bills Committee

## Report No. 7 of 2024

*The Senate adopted the report. The recommendations of the report were agreed to, with amendments, on Thursday, 4 July 2024.*

[Download the Report as PDF \(3MB\)](#)

1. The committee met in private session on Wednesday, 3 July 2024 at 7.15 pm.  
The committee recommends that—

f. the **provisions** of the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 be **referred immediately** to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee for inquiry and report by 3 October 2024 (see appendix 5 for a statement of reasons for referral).

### Appendix 5

#### ELECTION OF BILLS COMMITTEE

##### Proposal to refer a bill to a committee

Name of bill:

Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024

Reasons for referral/principal issues for consideration:

To further investigate this legislation.

Possible submissions or evidence from:

A range of interested parties and veteran stakeholders.

Committee to which bill is to be referred:


Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee

Possible hearing date(s):

August, September

Possible reporting date:

3 October

  
Print name: Waddy Askeu

## Consultation Report

Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support

(Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 – Exposure Draft

### Extracted from pages 3 to 6 of the Report dated 2024

#### Scope of this report

This report provides an analysis of the feedback received during consultation on the draft Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) (VETS) Bill 2024 conducted between 28 February and 28 April 2024.

The report summarises the submissions that the veteran community provided to DVA during the consultation process, and classifies them into three categories:

1. issues that will be addressed in the draft Bill;
2. an ongoing issue that may be considered in the future; or
3. issues that are out of scope for this legislation reform (see Table 1 on page 4).

Direct quotes from those who sent in correspondence and submissions during consultation have been included throughout the report, where consent to publish them has been given.

This report is not intended to present policy recommendations or provide evidence on specific issues. This report simply represents the views that were expressed by organisations and individuals regarding the proposed changes to veterans' legislation.

#### Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 - Exposure Draft

The Government sought comments on the draft VETS Bill 2024 which, if passed by Parliament, would implement a new model of veterans' compensation.

The VETS Bill would implement the single Act model proposed in the Veterans' Legislation Reform Consultation Pathway, shaped by the feedback provided by the veteran community in 2023.

The core elements of the model are:

- single ongoing Act — an improved *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA)* where all new claims for compensation and rehabilitation will be considered under the improved MRCA.
- closing the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA)* and the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related claims) Act 1988 (DRCA)* to new claims for compensation and rehabilitation, with grandparenting

of already approved VEA/DRCA compensation payments.

The Government listened to the feedback received from the veteran community on the Pathway in 2023 and made some further enhancements to the MRCA, including:

- the introduction of a new Additional Disablement Amount (ADA), similar to the Extreme Disablement Adjustment (EDA) available under the VEA. Like EDA, the ADA would compensate veterans who are Age Pension age or older and have a high degree of incapacity due to service-related conditions.
- consolidation of household and attendant care, travel for treatment, and retention of automatic granting of VEA funeral benefits in the MRCA.
- an increase from \$2,000 to \$3,000 for funeral benefits for previous automatic grant categories under the VEA, and the availability of reimbursement of funeral expenses up to \$14,062 for all service-related deaths.
- the availability to all veterans of the higher travel reimbursement amount, regardless of kilometres, when a private vehicle is used to travel for treatment.

Further information, including explanatory materials of the Bill can be found at '

[www.dva.gov.au/legislationreform](http://www.dva.gov.au/legislationreform)

#### Summary of findings

There was significant interest in the exposure draft legislation. DVA acknowledges the time and effort taken to provide submissions.

Table 1 classifies the main issues raised into three categories:

1. submissions on issues that were already included in the draft Bill or will be addressed before introduction to Parliament
2. submissions on ongoing legislative or policy issues that may be considered in the future by the Department
3. submissions on broader DVA issues that are out of scope (not directly related to the simplification and harmonisation of veterans' legislation)

Please note that the categorisation of the themes is correct at the time of publishing.

Classification of major themes raised during consultation

(Continued on page 6)

## Consultation Report

(Continued from page 5)

**Table 1: classification of major themes raised during consultation**

### In Scope of the Bill

- Definition of a veteran
- Differences between amounts of funeral allowances under the different Acts
- Differences in entitlements to Veteran Home Care (VHC) and Household Services and Attendant Care
- **Introduction** of presumptive liability provisions to streamline claims processing
- Addition of ADA that addresses concerns about extremely disabled veterans who reach retirement age
- Transition from DRCA incapacity payments to MRCA incapacity payments
- Changing offsetting arrangements for MRCA incapacity payments with Disability Compensation Payment (DCP)
- Gold Card eligibility for DRCA veterans
- Update of incorrect wording used in the legislation, e.g. Victoria Cross *for* Australia
- Expand MRCA eligibility to include all National Servicemen
- The unique arrangements for ADF Firefighters and F-111 Deseal/Reseal workers will be transferred into the MRCA
- Harmonising travel for treatment under the three current Acts
- Responding to concerns about lump sum payments for vulnerable veterans
- The MRCA does not sufficiently recognise the various caring arrangements that may apply in regard to section 80 payments

### Ongoing legislative and policy issues

- Whole-of-Government coordination of veteran benefits and payments
- The definition of dependants and wholly dependent partners contained within the MRCA The common-law damages upper limit should be indexed twice a year
- Provide coverage to address the modern, multi-agency approach to peacekeeping type operations, including Police Officers and Defence Civilians
- Increased demand for financial advice, including advice on management of lump sum payments and requests to increase the reimbursement amounts

- Training for advocates and legal representation
- The impact of changes (e.g. terminology) on state and territory concessions
- The Government needs to ensure an appropriate transitional plan is in place for veterans, families and advocates
- Information sharing processes between DVA and Defence
- Incentives for care providers to help veterans

### Out of Scope

- Extend Non-Liability Health Care for all conditions, and expand to reservists and national servicemen (1965-1972)
- Remove the service differentials to reflect the changed nature of conflict, service and force structure
- Request to use rent assistance provided by the ADF for mortgage payments
- Compensation for military working dogs
- Request for a single standard of proof
- Classification of Malaysia as an operational area between 1968-1989
- Concerns with the MRCA whole-of-person assessment model
- Allow legal representation at VRB hearings
- DVA cultural change
- The need to improve/streamline the claims process and educate veterans and families on how the claims process works in order to achieve the benefits of the simplified legislation
- The need for psychiatrists to diagnose mental health conditions in order to accept claims
- Allow veteran Gold Card holders to access Defence Home Ownership Assistance Scheme

### Consultation process

A total of 26 consultations were conducted in person and online across Australia, including sessions in each capital city and Townsville. The Minister for Veterans' Affairs convened two of these face-to-face meetings in Brisbane and Canberra. More than 230 individuals attended these sessions, including veterans, families, advocates, legal experts and representatives from ex-service organisations (including members of DVA's National Consultation Framework).

(Continued on page 7)

## Consultation Report

(Continued from page 6)

DVA also met with other stakeholders, such as the Veterans' Review Board and other Government agencies.

The following communication platforms were continued from the 2023 consultation to ensure reach across Australia and ensure the veteran community was kept informed of the consultation process:

- a dedicated email channel so people could contact DVA and submit their comments ([legislation.reform@dva.gov.au](mailto:legislation.reform@dva.gov.au))
- dedicated pages on the DVA website to provide information and facilitate consultation
- 3 public webinars delivered nationally, with one recorded and published on the DVA website
- 103 updates and posts on DVA's social media platforms

- ads in 10 newspapers, covering all capital cities and Townsville, on 9 and 30 March 2024
- written correspondence to the Minister and DVA regarding legislative reform

**At page 16 of the Report it is stated**  
**Submissions that were out of scope**

**The list of issues in Table 1 [which] have been categorised as out of scope. This is not a rejection of the issue; however, they are not considered necessary to achieve the simplification and harmonisation of the legislation. These requests have been forwarded to the appropriate business area in DVA for consideration.**



Full report may be downloaded at:

[Consultation Report - Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support \(Simplification and Harmonisation\) Bill 2024 – Exposure Draft \(dva.gov.au\)](#)

### Comment by Andrew Green ABC Defence Correspondent 2 July 2024

Legislation to simplify the way veterans' entitlements are processed is being introduced to parliament on Wednesday, with the government assuring those who are already receiving payments will not have their benefits altered.

However, the changes, prompted by interim findings from the Royal Commission into Defence and Veterans' Suicide, are being branded a "bandaid" solution by advocates critical of the current system.

In August 2022, the royal commission warned legislation governing compensation and rehabilitation for veterans and their families was "so complicated that it adversely affects the mental health of some veterans and can be a contributing factor to suicidality".

Under the revised Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024, all new compensation claims from July 1, 2026 will be dealt with under a single piece of legislation, regardless of when or where the veteran served.

Veterans' Affairs Minister Matt Keogh insists current DVA clients will not be affected by the overhaul while some may even benefit from the introduction of the new harmonised system.



## Admiral David Johnston AC RAN

Admiral David Johnston AC RAN was born in 1962 and entered the Royal Australian Naval College as a junior entry Cadet Midshipman in 1978. He graduated from the College in 1982 as a seaman officer, later specialising as a Principal Warfare Officer. He was appointed Vice Chief of the Defence Force on 7 July 2018.

His operational naval tours include serving as Commanding Officer of HMAS Adelaide (FFG 01) and HMAS Newcastle (FFG 06). In these commands he conducted border security patrols and deployed on Operation QUICKSTEP to Fiji in 2006.

His staff appointments include Command and Control specialist staff positions in Australian Defence Headquarters, Operations Manager at Sailors' Career Management and later as Director Joint Plans in Strategic Operations Division, where he developed strategic military response options for consideration by Government.

In July 2007 on promotion to Commodore, he joined Fleet Headquarters as Commodore Flotillas where he was responsible for planning maritime operations and the operational training of Navy's ships, submarines and diving teams.

In November 2008 he assumed the role of J3 (Director General Operations) at Headquarters Joint Operations Command. This role encompassed the operational level execution of all Australian Defence Force operations both overseas and within Australia.

In October 2010, he deployed to Operation SLIPPER in the Middle East Area of Operations as the Deputy Commander Joint Task Force 633. He supported the Commander JTF in providing national command oversight of all Australian Defence Force elements conducting maritime, land and air operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and adjacent maritime areas. He was awarded a Commendation for Distinguished Service for this role.

Promoted to Rear Admiral he assumed the role of Deputy Chief Joint Operations Command in June

2011. While performing this role he commanded the Defence Joint Task Force that supported the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2011 and the visit by the President of the United States of America later in that year.



He was appointed Commander Border Protection Command in December 2011 and held this responsibility until December 2013. As commander of this multi-agency organisation he was responsible for the civil maritime security of Australia's maritime domain using resources from both the Australian Defence Force and the then Australian Customs and Border Protection Service.

On promotion to Vice Admiral in April 2014, he was appointed Chief of Joint Operations in May 2014. As CJOPS his role was to plan, control and command ADF military campaigns, operations, joint exercises and other activities in order to meet Australia's national objectives.

In July 2018, Vice Admiral Johnston was appointed Vice Chief of the Defence Force. On 9 April 2024, the Australian Prime Minister announced that subject to the Governor-General's consideration and approval, he would become Chief of the Defence Force in July 2024. He was promoted to Admiral and commenced his appointment as Chief of Defence on 10 July.

Admiral Johnston holds a Master of Science in Operations Research from the USN Postgraduate School in Monterey, California and a Master of Arts in Strategic Studies from Deakin University. He participated in the inaugural Australian Security Executive Development Program in 2009. In 2012 he was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (Military Division) and in 2018 was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (Military Division). In 2022 he was appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia (Military Division). He is married and has two children.

*Defence*





## More than \$4.7 million announced to support veteran advocacy

**Thursday, 18 July 2024**

More than \$4.7 million in funding will be provided to 102 ex-service organisations (ESOs) across Australia to support veteran advocacy through the Building Excellence in Support and Training (BEST) grants program.

The annual grants program helps ensure veterans and families have support when making a claim or accessing entitlements with the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

ESOs from every state and territory will receive funding in the 2024-25 round, helping to pay for veteran advocates' expenses such as salaries, office equipment and domestic travel.

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide has made it clear that delays in accessing supports can have negative impacts on veterans and families.

The BEST grants announced today support qualified advocates in helping to make it easier for more veterans and families to get access to the services they need and deserve.

In another important step in responding to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide's Interim Report, earlier this month the Government introduced legislation into Parliament to simplify and harmonise Australia's veterans' rehabilitation and compensation system earlier this month after significant community consultation.

After decades of piecemeal change built on top of a century of different veterans' entitlements legislation, these reforms will deliver a system that is easier for veterans and families to understand what they are entitled to, and will make it simpler for veteran advocates to assist veterans, so veterans receive the benefits and supports they need and deserve.

The full list of grant recipients are in the table below, and more information is available on the [DVA website](#). *[Could not find the table.]*

More information about the simplification and harmonisation of Australia's veterans' rehabilitation and compensation system is available on the [DVA website](#).

*Authorised by The Hon Matt Keogh MP.*

## Grants honour our veterans and preserve history

Ninety community organisations, ex-service organisations, schools, and councils across Australia will receive a share in more than \$1 million in grants through the latest round of the Albanese Government's Saluting Their Service Commemorative Grants Program.

These grants support essential local projects that commemorate the enduring service and sacrifices of our veterans and preserve Australia's rich military history.

Grants have been awarded to large-scale projects such as the Australian National Veterans Arts Museum, which will host a commemorative art exhibition for the veteran community, through to local activities such as renovations and upgrades to the Soldiers Room at Mount Morgan Citizen's Club.

Saluting Their Service is an ongoing national program. Applications for the next grant round are now open until 20 June, encouraging ongoing community participation in honouring our veterans.

A wide range of organisations can apply for grants, including ex-service organisations, community groups, schools, and local councils. Two grant categories are available:

- Community Grants: Up to \$10,000 for local, community-based commemorative activities.
- Major Grants: Between \$10,001 and \$150,000 for significant commemorative projects with national, state, territory, or regional impact.

To find out more, or apply for a grant, visit: [www.grants.gov.au](http://www.grants.gov.au).

**Quotes Attributable to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Hon Matt Keogh MP:**

"Saluting Their Service grants support local communities undertake projects that recognise and commemorate the service and sacrifice of our Defence personnel, veterans and their families."

"Many older communities around Australia have cenotaphs and memorials dating back to World War I, but as an ever growing country we need to ensure Australia's history is understood, and modern conflicts, and the service of modern veterans is recognised."

"Australia's service personnel come from all corners of our vast nation, this program ensures that the stories of local heroes are known, and recognised."

"There are several significant commemorations in 2024, including the 25th Anniversary of INTERFET and the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings. I would encourage anyone thinking about a project commemorating these two significant events in Australia's military history to apply."

**Quotes attributed to the Assistant Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Hon Matt Thistlethwaite MP:**

"Community projects help ensure Australia's veterans' service and sacrifices are eternally remembered. The quality of applications this round reflects a genuine commitment to commemoration, blending respect, creativity, and innovation."

"We thank everyone who dedicated themselves to applying for grants. Your efforts to honour our veterans are truly appreciated."

"For those interested, submit your applications in the next round and contribute to the lasting legacy of our veterans."

## The Napier Waller Art Prize the Canberra Legacy Connection



Two widows linked to Canberra Legacy featured in the Australian War Memorial's 2024 Napier Waller Art Prize: Merle Hare as a subject, and Kat Rae as an artist. Kat's entry, an installation titled 'Deathmin', won the prize.

Merle Hare is 104 years old and lives at home in Braddon. During the Second World War she served in the Navy, performing clerical duties at HMAS Cerberus near Melbourne. Her twin brother Don was killed in the Second World War serving in the RAAF. Last year Merle carried the Legacy Centenary Torch in the relay in Canberra and was the subject of national media coverage. It was during the relay she met Gary Ramage who later submitted her photo for the Napier Waller Art prize. Gary's photo of Merle was Highly Commended by the panel of judges

Kat Rae served in the Australian Army for 20 years before leaving after the death of her veteran husband Andrew. She was living in Canberra at the time and Canber-

*Left: Deathmin  
Kat Rae—winning entry*

*Below: Merle  
Gary Ramage—Taken in her Braddon home*

*Photos: AWM*



## The Napier Waller Art Prize—AWM

ra Legacy assisted her with the many challenges she and her young daughter faced. Kat now lives in Melbourne and works full time as an artist.

Her winning artwork, Deathmin, is comprised of stacked paper, vinyl, plastic, leather and metal representing the "stack of post-death admin" Kat inherited after her veteran husband Andrew suicided in 2017.

"Deathmin is a counter-monument to the strong, upright imagery often conveyed in the Australian War Memorial. At my height and Andrew's weight, Deathmin embodies the burden placed on veterans and their families. It asks bureaucratic institutions to care for the people they say they will," Kat said in her artist statement.

The judges stated: "This sculpture is a powerful evocation of the burden carried by so many families after the death by suicide of current or former service personnel. The work is powerful, contemporary and layered with multiple codes: the artist presents us with a stack of the paperwork generated before and after her husband Andrew's death. At her height and his weight, Deathmin embodies the challenges attested to at the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. This is a vital contribution to public discourse at a time when the nation is grappling with the urgent need to do better; that no one who serves this nation experiences what Kathryn and Andrew went through. We thank Kathryn for her courage and generosity in sharing her story and congratulate her on the realisation of this finely balanced and complex work."

Canberra Legacy July 24 Newsletter  
from the AWM



Another entry by Mark Nodea, Richard Thomas, Owen Thomas and Peter Thomas

*From massacres to medals— a story of redemption and recognition*

AWM

## Claims processing data – June 2024

In the 2023-24 financial year, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) made over 100,000 determinations – up almost 50 per cent on the previous financial year. DVA is focusing even more effort on processing outstanding claims as quickly as possible, which will get much needed help to veterans and families sooner.

As part of our commitment to routinely, publicly, and meaningfully reporting on claims processing progress as part of the Australian Government's response to the [Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide's Interim Report](#), each month DVA releases updated data via the [claims processing](#) page.

### A snapshot of June 2024:

- DVA received **8,599** claims, compared to 6,291 in June 2023

- DVA made **7,945** determinations, compared to 6,721 in June 2023.
- **72,307** claims were with an officer for processing and **4,986** claims were yet to be allocated for processing (DVA aims to allocate new claims to an officer within 2 weeks of receipt)
- The average time taken to process a MRCA IL claim was **368 days** in the 2023-24 financial year (FY) (1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024), compared to 441 days in the 2022-23 FY.

Please [contact us](#) or an [advocate](#) if you have any questions about submitting a claim. More information about [making a claim for a service-related condition](#) and [eligibility for benefits and payments](#) is available on the DVA website.





**Kahlil Fegan DSC, AM**

Repatriation Commissioner

### Kahlil's Corner

It's been a busy first half of 2024 and it's hard to believe I've now been in the role for over nine months! I am still on a steep learning curve and even with a lifetime of involvement with the military I'm learning more about our veteran community every day. I have been privileged to have met with many of you and am so appreciative of our wonderful veterans, families and public servants giving of their time to support others.

At the end of June, I have had over 530 engagements in the veteran space, and each has been valuable in terms of helping me understand and contribute to efforts that improve policy, process or procedures that supports our community. So far, I have been spending half my time in Canberra working on Commissions, forums, working groups, policy development opportunities and other Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) matters. The other half has been outwards focused and invested in engaging with veteran stakeholders to learn about the opportunities and challenges within our community. These learnings are immensely valuable in terms of supporting my 'Canberra' based efforts.

I have been particularly interested in the work that DVA and others have been doing to implement the Australian Government's response to the Interim Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide and to better support the veteran community.

The DVA work includes reducing the claims backlog, progressing the simplification and harmonization of veterans' legislation, modernising its IT systems and improving the department's modelling capabilities so it can better plan for the future.

You can read more about the Royal Commission in the DVA update section of my newsletter.

Looking forward, I know there is much work to do, but great people and enthusiasm towards getting after it. Our challenge is to collaborate, consolidate efforts, understand restrictions and do the best we can. With that in mind I am particularly excited about working with the RSL on a terrific and much needed effort to support young contemporary veterans and families impacted by service in the Middle East, and there will be more to follow on this

soon.

I will continue to engage with as many veterans and ESO groups in person, via Teams and regular phone calls as possible. This is a vital part of my role and enables me to best understand how we can work together as a veteran community to support those in need and promote the value of service. Thank you and hopefully I'll see you soon!!

I would like to welcome Rachel Cosgrove-White to my team. Rachel commenced in May and has brought with her a wealth of knowledge on Defence (Navy) and veteran matters which will assist me with some key project work. I am sure some of you may have already crossed paths. Please make her feel welcome.

What follows is an overview of some of my outward facing engagements.

All the best,

Kahlil

### Committees and Forums

Firstly for those of you who are members of the Department's external committees and forums, I would like to thank you for your ongoing participation and contribution. These engagements along with client surveys, help the Department collaborate and collect information to identify and focus on key areas of improvement.

Part of my role as Repatriation Commissioner is to Chair a number of committees/forums which include:

- Commemorative Grants Advisory Committee;
- National Consultation Framework Steering Committee;
- Study of Health Outcomes and Aircraft Maintenance Personnel Serum Management Committee; and Younger Veterans' Forum (YVF).

I am also a member of many departmental and interdepartmental committees/forums as listed below:

*(Continued on page 13)*

## Extracts from the Repatriation Commissioner's Newsletter

(Continued from page 12)

- Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (MRCC);
- Defence-DVA Executive Committee;
- Defence Links
- DC Consultative Forums;
- Ex-Service Organisation Round Table (ESORT);
- Morsehead Group Forum;
- National Aged Community Care Forum (NACCF); Research Board;
- Strategic Leadership Group;
- Timor-Leste Consultative Committee; and
- Transition Working Group.

### National Consultation Framework (NCF)

The NCF is the communication stream between veterans' ESOs, Repatriation and MRCC. The Australian Government and DVA.

Engagement with veterans and families is a key part of DVA's Strategic Framework in the DVA Corporate Plan 2023-2-24. Engagement with veterans, families and stakeholders, through NCF forums is one way the Australian Government and DVA connect and listen to the community and use their feedback to co-design or improve future DVA policy and services delivery.

Forums that make up the NCF are

- ESORT
- YVF
- NACCF
- Operational Working Party
- Female Veterans' Policy Forum; and
- Veterans' Family Policy Forum.

You may be aware that every three years the NCF undergoes a review to assess the ongoing effectiveness and relevance of the Framework. The 2024 review is underway. A key focus of the review is to ensure that the NCF has representation of the current veteran community and their families and has mechanisms in place to enable the representation of their interests and issues to the Australian Government.

I am pleased to be the Chair of the Steering Committee to help ensure that the best structure is in place for the Department to continue working with organisations and individuals.

[The NAA is represented in the ESORT and YVF.]

### Women Veterans' Policy Forum

The Women Veterans' Policy Forum [*Is this the Female Policy Forum?*] held a two day forum in May. The Forum allows DVA to hear and learn from lived experiences and to then use this information to inform the support and services providers. While I don't attend the entire Forum, I received an invitation to be a panel member for the Feedback Panel Presentations. The panel representatives included DVA Secretary Alison Frame, Deputy Secretaries Alison McLaren and Andrew Kelford and the JTA Director General Air Commodore Kaarin Kooji. Members presented their ideas to the panel which then led to a discussion to explore ideas further, ask questions and provide feedback.

DVA hosted a Networking Dinner which was a great opportunity to connect with the members and discuss some of their issues and ideas. I believe it is important we continue engaging with the wider veteran cohorts to understand the unique differences and challenges in the women veteran community.

### DVA Update

For all the latest DVA news head to the DVA website [Homepage | Department of Veterans' Affairs \(dva.gov.au\)](https://dva.gov.au)

As the cooler months are upon us, I just want to remind you of the support DVA provides for the veterans doing it tough. The DVA website has information on how we can help. [Homelessness Support | Department of Veterans' Affairs \(dva.gov.au\)](https://dva.gov.au)

Any veteran who is homeless or at risk of homelessness is encouraged to reach out to the DVA on 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372) or Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling on 1800 011 046 to be connected to appropriate supports.

There have been some exciting changes with DVA Veteran Cards. DVA clients can now add these to their myGov app for digital access, for further advice on how to do this visit [Video transcript - How to add your Veteran Card to the myGov wallet | Department of Veterans' Affairs \(dva.gov.au\)](https://dva.gov.au)

I also thought it would be worth mentioning Veterans' Health Week will run from 13-20 October and the theme this year is *Keep Connected*. Eligible organisations can receive one-off funding to support their event. Applications are now open. Further information can be found at [Veterans' Health Week 2024 – 13-20 October | Department of Veterans' Affairs \(dva.gov.au\)](https://dva.gov.au)

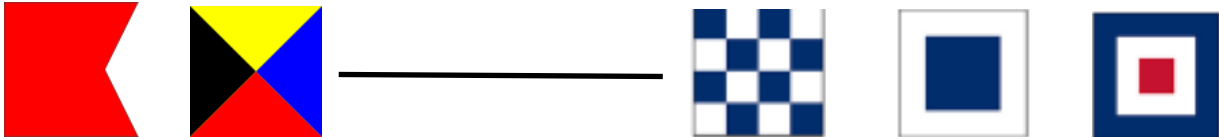
## HMAS Canberra lines up the NSW State of Origin ARL Team



*CAPT Brendan O'Hara, Commanding Officer HMAS Canberra, leads the New South Wales Blues rugby league players and staff along the flight deck to meet members of Ship's company with a Guided Missile Destroyer's mast in the immediate background and Wilde Street to the left of the mast*

*The New South Wales National Rugby League State of Origin squad visit HMAS Canberra, for a meet and greet with ships company ahead of Game 3.*

8 July 2024— Photo POB Jason Herrmenn



## Defence, ASD and Future Fund revealed as CrowdStrike clients

A firmly tightening grip by the Australian Signals Directorate on the exposures and origin of cybersecurity and network perimeter defence applications and solutions installed across federal agencies has paid off in gold, after government networks dodged the global CrowdStrike outage.

In a classic case of having enough self-confidence and inherent defence to not push an upgrade through until you know what it will break first, government spokespeople spent the weekend explaining to political journalists that critical government systems had not gone down, even if major media outlet systems had.

JetStar failed to proceed on Friday. And Harris Farm. And quite a few other businesses. But how many wasn't clarified until Sunday, and we'll get to that.

There's similarly not a lot of doubt that the CrowdStrike-generated outage disrupted a lot of activities for its dependent clients if they proceeded with the dud update.

To be clear, it was a doozy. When Windows machines cop the blue screen of death (indicating a critical or fatal system operating error), it means that your machine is on the canvas.

For the sake of diversity, there is not one universal colour for computing screens of death, it's just that Microsoft uses blue, mostly, except when it's trying to rebrand.

"So, firstly, what has occurred here, can I just be really clear and say this is not a cybersecurity event? What has happened here is an IT outage that has been caused by an error in an update provided by a company that provides cybersecurity software for most major economies around the world," Minister for Home Affairs Clare O'Neil said on Saturday.

"And that's why for Australians, you would have seen on the news yesterday that the sort of outages and issues that we've seen here in Australia are being felt in most major economies around the world.

*Part of an article by Julian Bajkowski  
22 July 2024*



## Beyond Borders: How DFAT and Verizon keep travellers safe in a connected world

Necessity is often the mother of invention, especially in times of crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, global airports stood empty, with 612 million fewer passengers in the first quarter of 2020 alone. Yet, within this crisis, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) embarked on a ground-breaking partnership with Verizon to secure Australia's International COVID-19 Vaccination Certificate, setting a new gold standard for how governments should approach the digitisation of government services. This case study delves into the public-private sector partnership, demonstrating that securing data is as crucial as securing physical borders.

### The global stage

DFAT is Australia's global ambassador, safeguarding the nation's security and prosperity, issuing passports, and ensuring these documents are a highly secure form of identification so people can travel confidently. DFAT's task of ensuring the authenticity and integrity of digital travel documentation was a massive undertaking made possible with its strong technical partnership with Verizon. Verizon's technology infrastructure aligns with international standards, including those set by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and the International Standards Organisation (ISO). The security of the passport has become even more important with the expansion of the myGovID IP3 and the increased use of digital credentials due to the widespread uptake of remote working during the pandemic. This saw cyber threats involving stolen credentials increase to 61 per cent of all breaches (up from 37 per cent pre-COVID).

### The power of partnership

Case study Verizon's Advanced Security Operations Centre (SOC) services emerged as a crucial component of the partnership between DFAT and Verizon. These services ensure the secure digital signing of passports and vaccination certificates, preventing unauthorised access and tampering. Verizon's extensive network infrastructure, fortified by hardware security modules (HSMs), provided a robust foundation for protecting private digital keys. This collaboration involved designing, building, and supporting digital signing solutions, and scaling their capabilities to meet the demands of millions of signatures per annum. Roughly 2,000 certificates are signed per second, conforming to the highest degree of supply chain integrity and security.

"This project sets the benchmark for how

governments should approach the digitisation of their services in terms of security and usability." Russell Reed, Managing Client Partner – Major Accounts, Verizon Business

### From crisis to confidence

The partnership between DFAT and Verizon yielded impressive results. Implementing secure-by-design solutions has enhanced security monitoring and intelligence across the board, with more than 1.3 million certificates downloaded in the first month as Australia re-opened for global travel. Over 10 million Australian travellers are protected and use a Medicare account, myGov, or the Medicare Express app to activate the certificate. Real-time digital signatures, supported by Verizon's solutions, have proven invaluable in protecting the integrity of passports and vaccination certificates.

### Securing traveller data

The certificates contain a unique QR code – similar to an Australian passport chip, but in a 2D, printed format – that border authorities and airlines can scan. This QR code meets the highest standards for proof of vaccination set by international organisations like ICAO and the World Health Organisation (WHO). Additional inputs by ISO further the technology's global interoperability while maintaining its uniqueness. The Visible Digital Seal technology has established DFAT and Australia as a world leader in certificate security. It is sharing this technology with other Asia-Pacific countries and has made components available via open source, helping develop their vaccination certificates.

### Certificates awarded the highest honour

Building the technology – encompassing the principles of 'Zero Trust' – in such a short time frame garnered national recognition for DFAT – the IPAA Spirit of Service Award in the 'Breakthrough' category. A project that would ordinarily take years to complete was compressed into months, covering end-to-end project scope, design, test, launch and scale, that ultimately helped restore and protect travel.

### Guardians of your journey

Verizon's defence-grade solutions deliver up to 100,000 real-time digital signatures daily. At the same time, DFAT has firmly established itself as an award-winning IT innovator. The public-private partnership was born during a crisis but now offers hope for delivering best-in-class technology solutions across various other governmental services, including those provided by DFAT.

## DVA Contacts

### Provider enquiry numbers

- Provider invoicing & billing enquiries: [1300 550 017](tel:1300550017)
- Provider enquiries: [1800 550 457](tel:1800550457)
- Transport bookings: [1800 550 455](tel:1800550455)
- [Veterans' Affairs Pharmaceutical Advisory Centre](#) (VAPAC): [1800 552 580](tel:1800552580)

### Hearing or speech impairment assistance

- If you are deaf, or have a hearing impairment or speech impairment, contact us through the [National Relay Service](#) (NRS):
- Talk To You (TTY) users phone [1800 555 677](tel:1800555677) then ask for 1800 838 372
- Speak and Listen users phone [1800 555 727](tel:1800555727) then ask for 1800 838 372
- Internet relay users connect to the [NRS](#) then ask for 1800 838 372

### Who can help me access information

DVA's **Information Access Unit (IAU)** can help you get **personal** or **corporate** information through Administrative Release. It is one of the easiest (and fastest) ways to enable you to get the outcome you need.

It avoids going through a lengthy formal processes such as FOI, a public register or other agency specific legislation.

Depending on the situation, the IAU can usually process a request **within 30 days** and **no charges** apply.

The Department is committed to making more government-held information available to members of the public without requiring them to make a freedom of information (FOI) access application.

Information on health services may be obtained from DVA. The contact numbers for health care providers requiring further information or prior financial authorisation for all States & Territories are listed below:

#### PHONE NUMBER:

Telephone:  
[1800 VETERAN \(1800 838 372\)](tel:1800VETERAN)

International callers:

[+61 2 6289 1133](tel:+61262891133)

#### POSTAL ADDRESS FOR ALL STATES AND TERRITORIES:

Health Approvals & Home Care Section department of Veterans' Affairs

GPO Box 9998

BRISBANE QLD 4001

#### DVA WEBSITE:

<http://www.dva.gov.au/providers/allied-healthprofessionals>

DVA email for prior financial authorisation:  
[health.approval@dva.gov.au](mailto:health.approval@dva.gov.au)

The appropriate prior approval request form can be found at: <https://www.dva.gov.au/providers/servicesrequiring-prior-approval>

#### CLAIMS FOR PAYMENT

For information about claims for payment visit: [www.dva.gov.au/providers/how-claim](http://www.dva.gov.au/providers/how-claim)

Claim Enquiries: 1300 550 017  
(Option 2 Allied Health)

Claims will take a variety of times to complete based on whether or not the claim is prioritised for allocation to a decision maker and the complexity of the claim itself. For example, if the service of the individual crosses two or more Acts or contains a lot of health conditions and injuries or both. This results in some claims being decided faster than the average time, while some claims take longer.

For any condition, to make the claiming process smoother, follow these 3 steps:

- **Step 1:** Get your medical practitioner to confirm your diagnosis.
- **Step 2:** Supply the documents you need to;
- **Step 3:** Check if you are already eligible for free health care and treatment.

**OPEN**  
Veterans & Families  
Counselling  
**ARMS**  
1800 011 046



**SAFE ZONE  
SUPPORT**

FREE ANONYMOUS  
COUNSELLING LINE  
CALL 1800 142 072

**Defence  
Family  
Helpline**



**1800 624 608**

**Defence  
All-hours  
Support Line**



**1800 628 036**