



**Government
of South Australia**
Veterans SA

19th August, 2014

The Hon Jay Weatherill MP
Premier of South Australia
GPO Box 2343
ADELAIDE SA 5001

The Honourable Sir Eric Neal AC CVO

**Chairman
Veterans' Advisory Council**

Veterans SA
GPO Box 2264
ADELAIDE SA 5001
Phone: (08) 8226 8552

Received:.....	21/8/14
Physical ID	AR5114004344
File No	AR51140044
Action Officer	MVA - Direct
Draft Due	4/9/14
Previous Corres.....	

Dear Premier,

I write in response to your letter dated 8 July, 2014 about your decision to reform South Australian government boards and committees.

Thank you for providing the Veterans' Advisory Council (VAC) with the opportunity to contribute to the process. Your letter was placed on the agenda for the VAC meeting held on 1 August, 2014. The VAC strongly believes that its functions are critical in ensuring that the veterans' community continues to have a voice at the highest levels of government.

The "veterans' community" is inclusive of people with a direct link to service or a veteran. This could include widows, partners, former partners, children, parents, siblings, relatives or carers of ex-servicemen and women, and should not exclude anyone with an evident link to or interest in matters associated with veterans' welfare or wellbeing.

There are more than 20 major ex-service organisations in South Australia and numerous smaller and associated groups with diverse memberships. Some veterans also choose not to belong to an ex-service organisation. This makes a traditional representative body like the VAC essential so that the veterans' community can raise its concerns to Government in a unified manner. The membership of the VAC reflects this diversity:

- Mrs Helen Adamson, State President of the War Widows' Guild;
- Mr Michael Benyk JP (Alternating), State President of the Vietnam Veterans' Association (SA Branch);
- Mr Chris Burns CSC, United Nations Peacekeeping Forces, Legacy Club of Adelaide Representative and CEO Defence Teaming Centre;
- Mr Leon Eddy, State President of the Australian Federation of Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Ex-servicemen and Women;
- Lieutenant Colonel Jack Gregg, Deputy Commander of 1 Brigade based at RAAF Base, Edinburgh;
- Brigadier Tim Hanna AM, State President of the Returned and Services League of Australia (SA Branch);

- Mr Gerry Harrison OAM, Korean War Veteran (Battle of Maryang San);
- Mr Bronson Horan, South Australia & Northern Territory State Manager for Solider On;
- Mr John Hough (Alternating) State President of the Vietnam Veterans' Federation;
- Ms Jean Hudson, State President of the Naval Association of Australia;
- Brigadier Laurie Lewis AM (Retd), Chair of the Defence Communities Association (SA);
- Wing Commander Robert Macintosh AFC (Retd), Vice President of RAAF Association SA Division;
- Mr William Schmitt AM Ex- Prisoners of War Association (Bill retired on 2 June, 2014 owing to ill health);
- Dr Pamela Schulz OAM, Chair of the Defence Reserves Support Council in South Australia;
- Lieutenant Colonel John Spencer OAM RFD (Retd), National Servicemen's Association Representative;
- Mr Michael von Berg MC, President of The Royal Australian Regiment Association (SA); and
- Lieutenant Colonel Malcolm Wells, Commanding Officer of the 7th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment.

Many elderly members of the veterans' community are not users of modern technology. This necessitates a traditional board structure and associated hard copy communication to ensure direct engagement with the wider veterans' community occurs. I would like to see this direct engagement continue, given how much the World War II generation of South Australians sacrificed to ensure the preservation of the way of life we enjoy today

In terms of direct community engagement and veterans' community representation the VAC has worked hard to ensure the views and recommendations of the veterans' community are conveyed accurately to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, who is then able to advocate on its behalf at either a State or Commonwealth level.

Over the last 6 years the State Government has taken the opportunity to use the VAC to conduct direct engagement with the veterans' community in the knowledge that the recommendations provided by the VAC, as a consequence of its broad membership, are genuinely representative of the veterans' community.

In recent times the VAC has been focussed on matters such as:

- The development of a Veterans' Charter approved by Cabinet on 28 January, 2014, which recognises the special needs of the veterans' community resulting from the unique nature of military service.
- Monitoring plans for the commemoration of the Centenary of World War One during the period 2014 till 2018 from a South Australian perspective. Including suggesting that the ANZAC Centenary Memorial Garden Walk be our state's priority project for Commonwealth funding.

- Participating in the naming of state infrastructure projects such as the Gallipoli Underpass and the Northern Expressway Interchanges (Hamel, Tobruk, Kokoda, Kapyong and Long Tan).
- Making representations on behalf of the veterans' community for the permanent retention of the Women's Playing Fields, St Mary's as an area permanently reserved for women's sport and for acknowledgement of the Bangka Island Massacre at the annual Bangka Island Memorial Service.
- Making a submission to the Commonwealth Government's Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's Inquiry into the Care of Australian Defence Force Personnel Wounded and Injured on Operations about the taxation treatment of wounded soldiers.
- Planning and construction of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander War Memorial.
- Securing tenure of leases for graves of war dead.
- Successful advocacy for the expansion of the services to the parents of deceased veterans provided by the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service.
- Supporting the Trojan's Trek, a program that helps with the rehabilitation of young veterans returning from combat duties.
- Employment of Veterans in the Commonwealth Department of Veterans' Affairs.
- Advocacy to the Commonwealth Government to counter the inappropriate wearing of unofficial medals at commemorative events.
- Communication with the National Archives to ensure regulations concerning the release of personal information from veterans' records to ensure privacy concerns are not compromised.
- Working with the Veterans Health Advisory Council on the formulation of the Framework for Veterans' Health Care 2012-2016.
- A proposal to the Commonwealth Government for the creation of an award for the NOK of soldiers killed on active service.
- A proposal to establish Veterans' Pastoral Care Service.
- Improving consultation between the State Government and the veterans' community.
- The publishing of a South Australian Ex-Service Commemorative Calendar identifying service dates of significance for use within State Government, schools and the community. The Ex-Service Commemorative Calendar was designed to raise awareness of the service and sacrifice of the South Australian veterans' community.
- Assisting the development of a register of South Australian Aboriginal men and women who have served in the Australian Navy, Army and Air Force in peace and war.
- Advocacy on behalf of former members of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force, to ensure they receive the same entitlements as their A.I.F. colleagues.
- Reviewing and expanding the ANZAC Day Sporting Medals Program.

- Providing strong advocacy at a State and Federal level on behalf of the veterans' community.

I am proud of the achievements of the VAC over the last six years and believe that we have been successful in giving the veterans' community a voice at the highest levels of Government. South Australia has led the nation with our state-based veterans' affairs portfolio. The VAC consultative and advocacy model is being progressively adopted nationally. As the Centenary of ANZAC commemorative period unfolds over the next four years our work on behalf of the veterans' community will remain vital. I believe the State would benefit if the VAC continues to operate in its current form.

In response to whether the functions of the VAC could be merged with another board, the unanimous consensus of the VAC was that all three veterans' affairs related Councils - these being the VAC, the Veterans' Health Advisory Council and the ANZAC Day Commemoration Council, fulfil distinct and important roles and the variety of their memberships reflects these different functions. I will leave it to those councils to make a case for their continuation.

I trust you will find this contribution helpful to your decision making process.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Neal." The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

The Hon Sir Eric Neal AC CVO
Chairman
Veterans' Advisory Council

Cc: The Hon Martin Hamilton-Smith MP, Minister for Veterans' Affairs