

Community Support and Services Committee

From: Robert Shortridge [REDACTED]
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To: Community Support and Services Committee
Subject: Submission on the Queensland Veterans Council Bill 2015

Committee Secretary
Community Support and Services Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Submission on the Queensland Veterans Council Bill 2015

From
Group Captain Robert Shortridge (Retired)

I read with interest your proposed bill forming the Queensland Veterans Council.

I note the QVC is a statutory body which means the members will be paid and they will have a secretariat. Their main responsibilities are:

- to manage, maintain, preserve and develop Anzac Square as the State's war memorial;
- to administer the Fund, including by making payments from the Fund; and
- to advise the Minister about veterans' matters.

I understand the issues of managing Anzac Square and the fact the fragmented management resulted in a less than complete Anzac Square for the centenary of Anzac however, as there are only going to be four meetings a year the concern is that the QVC will focus almost exclusively on Anzac Square to the detriment of other veteran issues.

If the QVC was focussed solely on Anzac Square I can understand the composition of the eight member QVC being limited to two veterans and other members being experts in the field of:

- corporate governance;
- business or financial management;
- heritage conservation;
- another area the Minister considers relevant or necessary to support the council in performing its functions.

The problems are:

- Veterans are in the minority on the Queensland Veterans Council. I find it somewhat incongruous that with the Women's Safety and Justice Task Force, of the 10 members only 2 are male. Your proposal for the QVC there are eight members and only two of them are veterans, how could this be representative? Imagine the furore if this task force had only two females on it?
- There is no assurance that the Chair Person will be a veteran or be aware of veteran issues in the detail required, yet they will be heading the QVC.
- Only two of the eight positions on the QVC are designated to veterans and any decisions must be passed by the majority.
- A meeting may be called if requested in writing by at least three members. Given that there are only two veteran representatives on the QVC they may not be able to call a meeting if not supported by the other non veteran members.
- There does not appear to have been any assessment of the time to be allocated to the duties. Arguably, Queensland has the highest number of servicemen and veterans than any other state. The role of advising the Government on veteran issues is likely to take up most of the time on the QVC especially given the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide and the

establishment of a National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention. The Bill seems to be focussed almost exclusively on Anzac square issues.

- The QVC, as proposed, does not appear to have the ability to be agile and react quickly to short notice high priority tasks.

As a long term member of the Queensland Veterans Advisory Council (QVAC), one of the challenges was to educate the public servants, and other non veterans, on veteran issues. Almost no one understands the Unique Nature of Military Service (where ADF members can be ordered into difficult, dangerous and deadly situations with no recourse. Every other employment group in Australia has the right to withdraw their services if they think their lives are in danger), many think of the ADF as public servants in uniform and deserve no special treatment, they do not appreciate that movements of ADF personnel around the country both interstate and intra state is not optional and potentially disadvantages veteran's families due to forever going to the bottom of waiting lists for state provided services and some have questioned the existence of the QVAC, their belief is that veterans support is federal responsibility.

The Bill proposes the establishment of a Veterans Reference Group. The suspicion is this will look very much like the current Queensland Veterans Advisory Council. This appears to be an enthusiastic band of volunteers working staffing submissions to the QVC, but not remunerated, and helping support the two paid members of the QVC in preparing papers for consideration and educating the non-veteran members of the QVC on important veteran issues. As they are volunteers, there is no guarantee they will be able to react in a timely manner to QVC requirements and as they are generally retired, they may simply not be available when required.

I do not believe that the QVC will have the capacity or capability to advise the Minister on veterans' matters without heavy reliance on volunteers of the Veterans Reference Group. Nor do I believe they will be able to react in a timely manner to short notice high priority issues due to the meeting schedule of four meetings a year.

Two actual examples of short notice issues actioned by the QVAC are:

- The veteran input to the development of the Queensland Veterans Portal. <https://www.qld.gov.au/community/getting-support-health-social-issue/veterans>. With a small group from representative veteran organisations, as a member of the QVAC, I personally spent a significant amount of time with the consultants developing this portal, working to relatively short timeframes. The information needs to be continually reviewed for relevance and accuracy but since its release I have no idea if anyone is looking at it. Under the proposed legislation this would be the responsibility of the QVC but I doubt they would have the capability or capability to properly manage it..
- All Abilities Qld put out a discussion paper talking about, among things, waiting lists. The QVAC found about this by accident and provided input explaining that ADF personnel and their families move interstate and intra state, the moves are not optional and that consideration should be given to crediting the families waiting time in other locations. The comments were provided but the QVAC did not have the resources to monitor the paper to ensure veteran issues were addressed, nor did the QVAC receive any feedback. Because of the late notice a small team from QVAC worked hard to provide input on behalf of veteran's families, working to very tight time frames imposed by one of the government departments.

There are potential issues associated with developing the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission on Veteran Suicide and providing input to the National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention.

<https://www.nationalcommissionerdvsp.gov.au/>

<https://www.dva.gov.au/royal-commission-defence-and-veteran-suicide-themes-consultation>

While the Commonwealth provides a lot of funding, the states provide the services especially to veterans and their families. There are differences between the states and a national model needs to be explored. This will need input from multiple Qld Govt departments and there will not be months available to develop issues and have them endorsed by the QVC,

The suggestion is that the QVC be restructured in such a manner that a majority of the personnel and the Chair person represent the veteran community and that a Anzac Square Reference Group be established,

subordinate to the QVC, in a similar manner to the Veterans Reference Group proposed in the current Bill.

In Summary:

- Veterans will not be proportionally represented in the proposed bill that has only two of eight positions nominated for veterans and the Chair Person need not be a veteran.
- The bill seems almost exclusively focussed on Anzac Square and there is a risk other veteran issues will take a lesser priority.
- The role of advising the Government on veteran issues is likely to take up most of the time on the QVC especially given the Royal Commission and the establishment of a National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention. The fact that arguably Queensland has the highest number of servicemen and veterans than any other state means there will be a lot of work in this area in the near to medium term.
- The concern is that the QVC will not be agile and will be unable to react to short notice, high priority tasks, in a timely manner

Recommendation

- The QVC be established as a statutory body, with a majority of veterans to advise Government of Veteran issues.
- An Anzac Square Reference Group be established (as proposed in the bill but not as a statutory body) to focus exclusively on Anzac square to:
 - to manage, maintain, preserve and develop Anzac Square as the State's war memorial; and
 - to administer the Fund, including by making payments from the Fund.

Yours truly,

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Former member of the Queensland Veterans Advisory Council

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