

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

**DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION (QUEENSLAND INCORPORATED)**



**SUBMISSION ON THE QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL ACT 2021  
(Corrected)**

*John Lewis*  
**President**  
**DFWA (Qld Incorporated)**

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## SUBMISSION ON THE QUEENSLAND VETERANS' COUNCIL ACT 2021

Queensland Branch of the Defence Force Welfare Association (DFWA) welcomes the opportunity to provide veteran community comment on the tabled Queensland Veterans' Council (QVC) Act 2021.

### BACKGROUND TO DFWA

DFWA was formed in 1958 at the urging of federal parliamentarians as there was no organisation representing the interests of serving ADF members and their families to government. At that time, the standing Army had recently been created and legislation changes concerning superannuation pensions, affecting serving members and obviously affecting them after service, were being introduced. Existing ex-service organisations (ESO) such as the RSL were only concerned with "returned" servicemen and Legacy was concerned only with the widows and dependents of those who did not return.

**Our Purpose.** The DFWA purpose is to support the interests and wellbeing of both serving and ex-serving members of the ADF and their families. We have official ADF and Defence recognition for this role.

- We are an Authorised Intervener at Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal on Pay and Conditions of Service hearings. For example, we represent the interests of currently serving ADF members, especially on the Workplace Remuneration Arrangement hearings every three years.
- We are the official ADF Member representative on the national Emergency Services Industry Reference Committee managing recognition of training across the industry. Other members are emergency service unions and emergency services employer and the Defence employer representatives.
- DFWA Qld Branch office is in a Defence provided office in Victoria Barracks Brisbane.

DFWA is also a founding member of the Alliance of Defence Service Organizations (ADSO) and has acted as the spokesperson for the 18 Ex-Service Organisations making up ADSO, all with members in Queensland<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> ADSO comprises The Defence Force Welfare Association (DFWA), Naval Association of Australia (NAA), Air Force Association (AFA), Royal Australian Regiment Corporation (RAR), Australian Special Air Service Association (ASASA), the Australian Federation of Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Ex-Service Men and Women, the Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia, Partners of Veterans Association of Australia, Royal Australian Armoured Corps Corporation (RAACC), the National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association Australia (NMBVAA), Defence Reserves Association (DRA), Australian Gulf War Veterans Association, Australian Commando Association, the War Widows Guild of Australia, Military Police Association Australia (MPAA), the Australian Army Apprentices Association, the Women Veterans Network, and the Combat Support Association.

**Queensland Specific.** DFWA is active in Queensland through the Queensland Branch incorporated.

- DFWA has been represented on the Queensland Veterans' Advisory Council for several years. In that time our representative, Robert Shortridge has actively advised on Veteran issues including the development of the Veterans' portal and advising on issues affecting families of serving ADF raised in the All-Abilities Qld discussion paper.
- DFWA Queensland Branch conducts briefings and information seminars on Veteran Issues. These are attended by serving ADF members and families in Queensland, other Ex-Service Organisations, and our members. At state election time, we have produced a Red Amber Green score card rating each political parties' position on key veteran issues. This is distributed to all ex-service organisations scattered throughout the state.
- Before the Office for Veterans was formed, the Queensland Branch made representations to the Premier to provide permanent staffing and co-ordination support to address the numerous veteran related services which were scattered across various government departments. The need for this was identified in the lead-up to the Centenary of ANZAC and with the increased interest in veterans as result of more recent conflicts in the middle east.

Queensland has a greater number of serving ADF and their families than any other state, largely concentrated in the SE corner and Townsville. The most popular place for veterans (and their families) on transitioning into civilian life is Queensland, again, mainly in the SE corner (Sunshine and Gold Coasts).

## **THE QVC CONCEPT**

DFWA supports the concept of a QVC.

Before sighting the Act, DFWA had identified various emerging veteran issues which needed to be addressed at state level. These included the following:

- With few exceptions, the Qld state bureaucracy has regarded veterans as a federal responsibility and not the business of the state. With the few exceptions, the responsibilities for them were scattered amongst various departments, and co-ordination was needed.
- There have been increasing demands on state provided services such as justice, health, homelessness, incarceration (whether mental health or imprisonment) by

former ADF members and their families resident in Qld, as a result the effect of 20 years of continuous warlike operations. There was also the on-going demand of these state provided services, NDIS, plus education and health for the many ADF families based in Qld.

- Veterans with health and medical conditions are eligible for treatment under multiple Federal Acts but for various reasons, many of these Veterans are supported by Qld Health without support they are often entitled to under Federal legislation. There would be benefits for both the Veterans and Qld Health services if federal funding entitlements were accessed to assist Qld Health in providing veteran support.

### **FIRST AND IMMEDIATE IMPRESSION**

The Act focusses the Veterans' Council on the management of, in order:

1. Anzac Square,
2. ANZAC Day Trust, and
3. "Other Matters," the latter as almost a throwaway line.

The order of importance seems to reflect a bureaucratic organisational imperative of sorting out the ANZAC Square management and maintenance organisational structure as the lead concern. Then to use the structure adopted to manage the ANZAC Day Trust and then throw in the management of other miscellaneous veteran stuff that is generally regarded as a federal, not state responsibility.

The Act's solution seems to assume that the experience and organisational structure needed to manage ANZAC Square is the same as that required to manage the ANZAC Day Trust and to advise government on veteran matters. It treats advice on veteran issues as a trivial matter.

This is rejected by DFWA and all other ESO that DFWA has consulted.

### **ANZAC DAY TRUST**

The ANZAC Day Act, which incorporates the ANZAC Day Trust was established 100 years ago:

- The Trust has been administered by a four-member board of Trustees – all veterans.
- The trustees **must** be chosen by the Minister from three nominations each by the RSL, Legacy and by other established veteran charities.

- The Trust has worked well and is highly regarded amongst the veteran community.

The new Veterans Council Act changes the administration of the ANZAC Day Trust.

- The Trust will be administered by a Council comprising six persons and two veterans.
- Of the six persons:
  - Two employees from the state and the Brisbane City Council are bureaucratic appointments nominated by the chief executive officer.
  - Four persons selected **must** have qualifications or experience in areas totally unrelated to the business of the trust, i.e., veteran support.
  - None of the six are required to be veterans, or have experience with veteran organisations or charities, or have experience with organisations or charities providing support to veterans or have experience of veteran families or have any knowledge of veteran support needs.
- Of the two veteran appointments:
  - The Veteran Organisations from which the Minister **may** appoint are chosen by the Minister and not prescribed by legislation.
  - The veteran organisation only puts forward one name, not a choice of three for the Minister.
  - The veteran community has little say in the process. The appointment and the source organisation are totally at the discretion of the Minister.

This Act changes an arrangement that has worked well and has had the respect and confidence of the veteran community. The Act, ignores the success of the past 100 years (part of our heritage if you will), rejects community participation, and reduces the number of veteran trustees, replacing them with others for whom there is no requirement for knowledge or experience of veterans or their families or their concerns.

There has been no justification for this change. The system was working well.

This change represents a rejection of veteran input and the veteran community as a whole and makes a mockery of the title of the Bill.

## ANZAC SQUARE

Within the context of overall management and maintenance of the cultural heritage significance of ANZAC Square, the ANZAC Square Trustee tasks involve:

- **Physical Infrastructure Management.** This includes maintenance, preservation and development tasks of a State memorial and requires experience in heritage conservation, corporate governance, and business/financial management for funding and budgets. The need for these skillsets was no doubt informed by the hard lessons learned from the refurbishment activities for the ANZAC Centenary project. These skillsets are required for the essential bricks and mortar day to day management of ANZAC Square. Whether detailed experience in these skillsets as stipulated in the Act is required to make decisions at Council level is debatable.
- **On-Going Services to the Community.** This includes approval and oversight of veteran commemorative events and the management and promotion of public programs to educate and inform, all related to the history of the service and sacrifice of Queenslanders in wars and other operations.

## PROVISION OF ADVICE TO GOVERNMENT ON VETERANS' MATTERS.

The Queensland Veterans' Advisory Council (QVAC) is the extant ministerial advisory committee and has provided a forum for communication between Queensland's veterans' community and the Queensland Government. QVAC provides advice to the Queensland Government on veterans' matters. The QVC Act replaces the QVAC with a veterans' reference group to support the QVC in providing advice to government.

Apart from providing advice as requested from the Minister, there is a need for the veteran community to be able to raise issues of concern that the Minister may not be aware of.

Combined, this could cover many areas such as:

- Memorial Grants.
- An education role be it:
  - as part of ANZAC Square activities supported by the state organisations,
  - programmes associated with the ANZAC Day Commemorative Committee, and
  - programmes rolled out to Qld schools by the education department and supported by various ex-service organisations.

- Defence/ADF Liaison, e.g., support of ADF support staff in schools with high numbers of mobile defence families, health service support for mobile defence families and veterans with fully funded health care for specified conditions.
- State medical treatment and support waiting lists and disability programmes as they affect family members of serving ADF compulsorily moved by the ADF both within Qld and between different states/territories.
- Inquiries from the Royal Commission into Veteran Suicide which will involve evidence from coronial services, first responder organisations and other state service providers.
- Support for the Qld participation in the Veteran Ministers Round Tables.
- Health and educational support available from Federal Funds for veterans and for family members of current and former ADF members located in Qld and supported by state service providers.

Gaining knowledge of these areas requires lengthy experience in broad range of areas and that knowledge needs to be kept current. It also requires an understanding of military practices and jargon and an ability to explain this. The QVAC or a veterans' reference group could cover the breadth due to their reach back to appropriate veteran organisations and community and also access the depth of knowledge required for particular issues.

The Act's governance structure means that the advice to government from veterans and veteran organisations via the veterans' reference group, is filtered by the QVC comprising six non-veterans with no required knowledge of veteran experience and concerns and just two veterans. Veteran issues are complex due to the unique nature of military service and its effects on veterans and ADF families. This filtering introduces risk to the timeliness, accuracy and completeness of the advice on Veteran issues provided to government.

## **OVERALL IMPRESSION**

It is totally unexplainable that the newly established Qld Veterans' Council, aiming to bring veteran related services and support together under one "Veterans" banner, reduces veteran and veteran community involvement in governance and could totally reject veteran input on welfare matters by majority vote.

- Non- veterans can require the Chairperson to call a meeting on an issue, but veterans alone cannot as such a call requires support of 3 councillors.
- It signifies distrust of the Veteran community to administer funds that have been administered well for years.
- The focus on ANZAC Square management skill requirements is to the detriment of providing advice on Veteran Matters to government and administering support grants for Veterans.

This is not a Veterans' Council.

## WHAT IS THE REQUIREMENT?

**Management of ANZAC Square.** There are two elements to this:

- The end purpose of the Square is grounded in its cultural heritage significance as a State monument and the end purpose is the provision of the on-going services to the community. The on-going services to the community associated with ANZAC Square and the responsibility and knowledge of the cultural heritage significance of ANZAC Square are very much in the experience domain of veteran community and organisations.
- To enable the end purpose to be achieved, requires the ongoing management to maintain, preserve and develop the physical infrastructure of the State's War Memorial. The experience needed for these are specific and while found in the general community, are also available in the broader veteran community.

**ANZAC Trust Fund.** The whole purpose of the Trust Fund is to provide support to ex ADF Members and their dependents. The assessment of claims for grants to meet veteran and veteran family needs is totally in the experience domain of the veteran community and organisations.

**Advice to Government on Veteran Matters.** Advice to government on Veteran concerns and on veteran issues raised by the Minister, requires experienced veteran and veteran community advice which is not filtered or reinterpreted by persons who have no knowledge of veteran matters.



## WAYS AHEAD

**Veteran Membership of the Council.** The QVC comprises eight members only two of whom are Veterans. The Veteran membership of the council must be increased to over 50% to achieve any credibility amongst the veteran community and indeed, the general public.

- The number of Veterans nominated from the veteran community, as Councillors on the QVC should be increased to 4 as a minimum, preferably 5 to give credence that this is a “Veterans’ Council”. Ideally, all other appointed councillors should be veterans. It is noted that the equivalent Veterans Council Act in Victoria specifies *“In outline, this Act—*
  - (a) creates the Victorian Veterans Council to promote issues of concern to veterans and to advise the Government of Victoria in relation to such issues;*
  - (b) provides that the ex-service community are to make up the majority of the membership of the Victorian Veterans Council;”*
- Administration of the ANZAC Day Trust must be exclusively by the nominated Veteran councillors. Placing decisions concerning the support of veterans in the hands of those not experienced in veteran matters, increase risk to veteran welfare which is the exact opposite of the intent of the Trust.
  - Four Veterans is the minimum number required and to achieve the balance from the diverse veteran community, the process of appointment should remain as per current practice, i.e., each appointment selected by the Minister from a panel of 3 names submitted by the relevant ESO organisations:
    - 1 from the RSL Qld and 1 from Legacy.
    - 2 nominated from other ESO. These should be nominated by the Veterans’ Reference Group from the veteran community. This involves those smaller ESO which face greater financial challenges than the larger ESO and more aware of challenges faced. It is suggested that in the Transitional period, the two should be nominated from the existing QVAC.
  - Only councillors nominated by the veteran community should be involved in administration of the trust, i.e., making decisions on veteran applications for support. This could be as a sub-committee of veteran councillors of the QVC. The QVC, as a whole, should have a husbandry role and assist the Trustee councillors on issues as required.

- The inclusion of a departmental executive or employee in a voting capacity on the QVC is questioned. As an employee, subject to government policy direction, there is a conflict of interest in voting on and the provision of independent advice on Veteran issues which may be at odds with government policy. Their presence on the QVC should be to provide advice on government policies and departmental practices and navigation to assist the QVC business. The conflict of interest should not be imposed on the employee or executive and should not put at risk the veracity of independent advice on veteran issues to the government.
- If BCC and government department employees are to be on the QVC, they should be non-voting. The inclusion of two other appointments with the physical infrastructure management expertise specified in the tabled Act is questioned. The QVC has an oversight role, providing guidance and direction, not day to day operational management of physical infrastructure management. Any technical advice could be sought from the appropriate operational and executive staff.
- As a principle, consistent with the intent of a veterans' council, the councillors selected for the specific skillsets, if these are necessary, should be sought from the veteran community. The Act should be worded to give clear preference to those with veteran experience. Applications should be encouraged from suitably qualified Veterans or those with experience with the ADF or veteran support.

**Chairperson.** The Chairperson of the QVC must be a veteran. To have a non-veteran as chairperson would be a total vote of no confidence in Veterans' being able to fill such a role and would bring into question the credibility of the QVC and intent of the Act.

## **SUMMARY**

While there has not been time to consult with all 18 ADSO members in making this submission, those we have consulted share DFWA concerns regarding the composition of the QVC and selection of councillors. Other ESO not members of ADSO, also share these concerns.

While supportive of the QVC concept, DFWA considers that the proposed governance structure is flawed in that it is "Non-Veteran" and has been skewed by a focus on issues related to ANZAC Square. In doing so, the Veteran involvement on veteran welfare issues has been reduced. This places veteran welfare at risk. At a time when State and Federal governments are working together to improve the lives of veterans, through the Veteran Ministers' Round Table and the announced Royal Commission, veteran advice to

government is filtered by the proposed composition of the QVC, denying the Qld government clear independent advice and support regarding veterans.

Please consider the concerns expressed and the recommendations on how these could be addressed.

*John Lowis*

**PRESIDENT**  
DFWA (Qld)