



Veterans' Review Board





Veterans' Review Board

Annual Report 2019–20

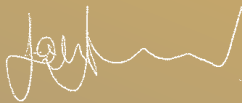


The Hon Darren Chester MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Minister for Defence Personnel
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

I am pleased to present to you the 2019–20 Annual Report of the Veterans' Review Board, as required by subsection 215(4) of the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986*.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Jane Anderson', is positioned above the printed name.

Jane Anderson
Principal Member

18 September 2020

About the VRB

We are a specialist tribunal that delivers justice to veterans. We listen to veterans and make decisions about their applications for review.

The law that establishes the VRB and governs our operations is the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* (the VEA).

About this report

Each year we must give the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel a report, as required under the VEA. It provides an account of our activities from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020.

This report is prepared for the Minister for Veterans and Defence Personnel and the Parliament of Australia, the veterans who use our services and the organisations that support them.

VRB Vision and Values

VRB vision

To deliver justice by listening to veterans and making high quality decisions in a timely, cost effective and efficient way.

VRB values

Fairness, professionalism, integrity, impartiality, independence, efficiency, accessibility and respect for the service of all veterans.

Our goal

To be an innovative and responsive tribunal that provides a specialist service to meet the unique needs of the veteran community.

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The year in review

Principal Member's Review



Ms Jane Anderson, Principal Member

I welcome the opportunity to deliver the VRB Annual Report for 2019–20.

Like all organisations, the VRB was impacted by the global COVID19 pandemic.

The second half of the financial year saw the VRB act swiftly and decisively to ensure the health and safety of veterans, current serving Defence personnel, advocates, VRB members and staff—while continuing to deliver all of its core operations without disruption or delay.

The VRB paused in-person attendance on VRB premises, and commenced full use of its innovative digital platforms to enable its people and users to work and participate remotely.

Keeping justice alive for veterans

Our most significant achievement this year has been keeping justice alive for the veteran community. In late March 2020, we moved to remote operations. And we ensured that no hearing or Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) event was cancelled in the face of the public closure of our registries. Our resolve and commitment to continue to provide a mechanism of review for veterans during this challenging time was evidenced by a record number of finalised cases. This year we finalised more than 3,400 cases, our highest on record. We delivered these outcomes on average within 6.5 months—an improvement of 4.5 months on last year's results.

The majority of applications (76.5 per cent) were finalised by ADR, demonstrating that the VRB's ADR program continues to meet its aim of resolving applications with mutually acceptable outcomes for parties. This is further reflected in the low number of appeals of VRB decisions. Less than 3 per cent of VRB decisions were appealed during 2019–20, representing more than a 38 percent reduction from the previous year.

While 2019–20 was one of our most challenging years, it was also one of the most significant. We retained our skilled and highly valued staff team. We provided further opportunities for VRB members from different locations around Australia to collaborate, and in so doing effectively harnessed our member expertise—providing greater diversity of panels and tailored targeting of experience. We invested in specialised professional development and refreshed the way we correspond with veterans and the Department of Veterans' Affairs. We embraced innovation to deliver online hearings and progressed our online Justice Portal—enabling parties to deal more directly and conveniently with the VRB and our registry staff.

Our video or 'virtual' hearings have provided increased opportunities for engagement with health professionals, leading to more accessible ways of securing expert evidence for veterans to support their cases. These actions have avoided veterans' applications being delayed in the face of limitations on face-to-face medical appointments during COVID19.

Importantly, veterans with mental health concerns have been able to take part in informal and accessible settings—including from their own homes, reducing the stress for them and their families as they navigate the review process.

Face-to-face hearings remain critical to the VRB and will resume when safe to do so. However, the success of virtual hearings has demonstrated how remote operations also have an important place in the VRB hearing landscape, and will continue to operate alongside in-person hearings as a cost effective and efficient way of resolving applications into the future.

VRB Membership

2019–20 saw the departure of longstanding VRB members, including Colonel Leslie Young OAM (Retd), Commander Gary Barrow RAN (Retd), and Mr Christopher Keher. Each of these Senior Members made a significant contribution to the VRB and to the veteran and current serving communities more broadly. Their knowledge and experience over many years helped to shape the VRB and its culture and commitment to public service.

As at 30 June 2020, the VRB had 42 members, one of the highest levels of membership in recent years. The excellent results achieved by the VRB in the reporting year highlight the benefits of a larger membership and the diversity of skills and expertise it brings. Almost 30 per cent of VRB members were appointed for the first time in the last 18 months. As newer members develop their experience in this unique jurisdiction and engage in the various types of review processes, it is anticipated VRB productivity will increase further in the year ahead.

To this end, member professional development remained a strong focus. VRB members participated in monthly sessions as a part of our Learn and Connect program. The program sees members receive training in legal, medical and service related topics and issues. Relevantly, members have been provided with ongoing training to support the VRB's digital reform and transition to virtual hearings during the COVID19 pandemic.

As well as ongoing professional development, in 2019–20 member appraisals were conducted, supporting members to conduct fair hearings and resolution processes, as well as make high-quality decisions.

Engaging our stakeholders

At the VRB, we are committed to engaging with the broad range of stakeholders who access our services. This commitment includes ongoing liaison with key Ex Service Organisations and the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Regular forums were held for practising advocates across Australia, with more recent forums being held in an online format.

In addition, in response to the needs of our users, we continued to refresh and modernise the way we communicate with parties. By using plain English and simplifying our documents (including VRB reasons for decision) our revised correspondence assists veterans and widows to more easily understand the complex legislative framework in which the VRB operates. It has also enabled DVA staff to readily identify the basis upon which certain decisions are set aside by the VRB, consistent with an important objective of administrative review which is to improve the standard of primary decisions.

Looking ahead

One of the few certainties arising out of the COVID19 pandemic is that it will have a lasting impact on the VRB's operations into the future. 2020 has provided an opportunity and an imperative to use technology and digital innovation to broaden access to justice for VRB users, ensuring that those who seek our review are put at the front and centre of the process.

However, it is not only the VRB's commitment to technology that makes it well placed to continue to deliver a high quality mechanism of review. Importantly, the challenges of 2020 have validated the VRB's investment in its people. It has highlighted the capability and agility of VRB staff and members, each of whom has responded to new ways of working and has been willing to develop a wide range of skills and expertise. It is because of the hard work and efforts of its members and staff that the VRB has been able to deliver its core services efficiently, producing the excellent results outlined in this report.

In 2020, the VRB remains a unique, specialist tribunal with expertise across all arms of military service and with high levels of legal and policy experience. The VRB is made up of people—many of whom are veterans themselves—who acknowledge and understand the realities of military service and the issues affecting veterans. We do what we do because we believe that veterans and their families deserve to access a system of justice that treats them fairly and respectfully. A system that listens to them and provides an environment where they can be heard and understood. A system that is responsive to their needs and expectations, both current and future.

I was privileged to lead the VRB as it rose to the challenges and embraced the opportunities presented in 2019–20, and I look forward to continuing to do so in the year ahead.



Jane Anderson, Principal Member

National Registrar's review



**Katrina Harry PSM, National Registrar
& Chief Legal Counsel**

The Principal Member has outlined the key issues faced by the VRB as we sought to deal with the global COVID19 pandemic, as well as acknowledging the results achieved by VRB members and staff in 2019–20 in providing high-quality merits review to thousands of veterans, current serving members and their families across Australia.

No hearing or ADR event was cancelled or delayed in the face of the public closure of our registries and as the Principal Member has noted above the VRB produced its strongest results in the last four financial years. We resolved 32.5 per cent more applications this year than we received. Importantly, we also improved our time targets by 41 per cent and operated within the resources provided to us achieving a balanced budget.

Pandemic productivity & virtual veteran-centric service

Well before the pandemic was declared we recognised that the VRB is about providing veteran centric services; it is not just a place where we hold hearings. We had harnessed technology and designed new processes to deliver access to justice in a new era where veterans did not need to be physically present in our hearing rooms to resolve their applications. This important work included the rollout of our ADR program nationally, the transition to a paperless environment and the implementation of an improved case management system to speed up internal processing of applications by streamlining and automating complex business processes from end-to-end.

Additionally, at least six months before the pandemic was declared, our members and senior staff were using surface pro devices to access the VRB's case management system remotely. This important work and planning allowed us to move almost immediately to virtual hearings when the pandemic was declared without delay or interruption for veterans and their families.

Significant productivity gains were made following our move to completely virtual services in March 2020. During March-June our productivity increased by 44 per cent and our time taken to finalise applications improved by 46 per cent. Most importantly, veteran satisfaction also improved following our move to virtual services. During March to June we received 45 per cent of our compliments for the entire financial year.

At the VRB we are clear that people are our most precious asset in providing essential services to veterans. When the pandemic was declared we were one of the first tribunals to move our staff and members immediately to remote work arrangements. Significantly this did not disrupt our veteran-centric services. During our remote operations we have continued to provide veterans with a dedicated Client Service Officer, as well as personalised scheduling of events.

Importantly, we also established a dedicated Virtual Hearing Support Officer. Prior to any virtual hearing advocates are able to contact our Virtual Hearing Support Officer to test their equipment, including with the veteran who may be in a different location and any witnesses. Additionally, we developed publically available tip sheets and guides to support veterans and their advocates in a seamless transition from in-person to virtual hearings.

Pleasingly, this year we were also able to continue other planned veteran-centric service reforms including the launch of our single phone number 1800 550 460.

Driving digital innovation to transform access to justice

Beyond virtual hearings, the centrepiece of our digital transformation in 2019–20 was the public trial of our Justice Portal. Digitally-connected veterans and current serving communities expect to do business with us through easy-to-use, intuitive, online services. They expect to be able to do this from any device, at any time of the day or night.

The VRB Justice portal engages veterans and advocates with our case management processes allowing the provision of documents online, viewing application status, history and filed documents and receiving notification of events such as ADR or hearing dates. Plus, the VRB Justice Portal also allows group management for Ex Service Organisations with multiple practising advocates.

The VRB Justice Portal received exceptionally positive feedback following user testing. Participants in the trial including advocates from Ex Service Organisations and staff of the Department of Veterans' Affairs welcomed the benefit of quicker, easier and more seamless interaction with the VRB. The portal will become publically available to all veterans, current serving members and advocates early in the 2020–21 financial year. Veterans, current serving members and advocates will be supported in registering and using the portal by the VRB's dedicated help desk.

To complement our Justice Portal, we also refreshed the VRB website. The new look website provides a streamlined and user-friendly experience to assist veterans and current serving communities in accessing the information they need about the VRB. It includes easier access to about how to apply with DVA and more effective communication about our processes. Our website remains in "BETA" stage as we continue to seek feedback on the site.

Online Dispute Resolution

The VRB's appetite to actively explore how digital technology can deliver more personalised and efficient services for veterans and current serving communities was prominently displayed in the reporting year in the design of our online dispute resolution program. The program is core to the VRB's service values and aims to increase access to justice for veterans and current serving communities by providing faster, effective dispute resolution. Veterans will have greater control in resolving their dispute, regardless of where they live. While VRB hearings are cost-free, ODR will help to reduce indirect costs for veterans who are working and current serving members who will be able to avoid the need to take time off work to attend an ADR event or hearing.

Online Dispute Resolution will be a game changer for many veterans and current serving members. This simple faster service will be offered by the VRB from mid-September 2020.

Skilled for the future

The world after the pandemic will be different, the VRB will be different, and many of our members and staff will themselves be different as a result of their experiences during the crisis. To date our staff and members have shown their ability to learn, adapt and change quickly to better provide services to the veteran and current serving community. As we emerge from the crisis the VRB will be focused on harnessing the opportunity to redesign our learning systems including induction and mentoring of new members and staff, plus our biennial member conference.

The VRB's arrangements during the pandemic have been an excellent test case of remote home based work. To date the increase in productivity and reduction in time take to process applications support a case for remote work arrangements being a part of the VRB's post pandemic work environment.



I would like to acknowledge the staff leadership group within the VRB who have supported our teams to achieve these strong productivity results. Our team leaders have reset team expectations to ensure effective individual contributions and collaboration, focussing on outcomes rather than process. Importantly, our team leaders have built social connections to ensure our staff remain connected to each other while working remotely. Critically, our team leaders have promoted the positive sharing compliments and constructive feedback with our remote based staff. This is significant as for all of our team leaders it was the first time they had worked remotely themselves and in tandem managed a team of wholly remote staff.

Focus on the future

During COVID19 it has been imperative to digitally transform our traditional ways of providing hearings to operate effectively and serve the veteran community. If there is one benefit from COVID19 it has been the ability to fast-track the VRB's digital transformation. Our key focus in 2020–21 will be creating a new strategic plan for the VRB to not only capture the lessons we are learning but to give us a clear pathway to provide better veteran centric services as the next normal takes shape.

I would like to thank the staff and members of the VRB who are unwavering in their commitment and willingness to transform the service we provide to veterans and current serving communities. Thanks must also go to our receptive and supportive stakeholders who positively support our innovative work and reforms. It continues to be an enormous privilege to serve veterans and the community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Katrina Harry".

Katrina Harry PSM
National Registrar & Chief Legal Counsel

Delivering justice: a snapshot

Our services	2018–19	2019–20
Applications lodged	2791	2587
Applications finalised	3321	3427
ADR resolution rate	72.8%	76.5%
Time targets met	✓	✓

Feedback on our services	2018–19	2019–20
Compliments rate	0.9%	1.1%
Complaint rate	0.9%	0.5%

Our People	2018–19	2019–20
Members	46	42
Staff (full time equivalent employees)	22.4	22.4

Our Finances	2018–19	2019–20
The budget we are allocated	6,004	5,516

At a glance

Highlights 2019–20

Kept justice alive for veterans and current serving communities during COVID19

Fast tracked digital transformation and introduced virtual hearings, a trial of the VRB Justice Portal & a refreshed website

Designed a pilot for Online Dispute Resolution to commence in early 2020–21



Overview of the VRB

Overview of the VRB

Delivering justice for veterans: your right to be heard

We deliver justice for veterans, current serving members and their families seeking to challenge decisions that affect their interests and, more broadly, we contribute to improving the quality of government decision-making.

What we do

We are less formal than a court. Where possible, we help veterans or their family members resolve their applications by talking through the issues at an 'outreach' with a Conference Registrar or at a conference with a Commission representative. If an application cannot be resolved, our members will decide the case at a hearing.

We can only hear cases where the law gives us this authority. The types of decisions that we most commonly review relate to:

- Claims to accept liability or entitlement for a service injury, disease or death
- Applications for increase in disability pension
- Compensation for permanent impairment or incapacity for work
- Claims for war widow(er)'s or orphan's pension

Our powers

In reviewing a decision, we take a fresh look at the facts, law and policy relating to that decision. In many cases, new information is provided to us that was not available to the original decision maker. We consider all of the material before us and decide what the legally correct decision is or, if there can be more than one correct decision, the preferable decision. We can exercise all the powers and discretions available to the original decision-maker. We have the power to:

- affirm a decision (the original decision is unchanged)
- vary a decision (the original decision is changed in some way)
- set aside a decision and substitute a new decision (we make a new decision), or
- remit a decision to the decision-maker for reconsideration (we ask the decision maker to reconsider the whole decision again, or some aspect of it).

Our objective

Whilst the VRB is an independent statutory tribunal, we are not a separate Commonwealth entity under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*. Rather, we are considered a Secondary Australian Government Body, receiving our funding and corporate services from the Department of Veterans' Affairs. As a result, we do not have a budget allocation in the Portfolio Budget Statements.



Our objective is set out in law. In carrying out our functions, we must pursue the objective of providing a mechanism of review of administrative decisions that:

- is accessible
- is fair, just, economical, informal and quick
- is proportionate to the importance and complexity of a matter, and
- promotes public trust and confidence in the decision-making of the VRB.

Who we are

Our need for specialist expertise is met by the appointment of appropriately qualified and experienced members in the categories of Senior Member, Member and Services Member. Each member is appointed by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the Minister for Veterans and Defence Personnel. Additionally, to be considered for appointment, Services Members (who have military experience) must be nominated by an ex-service organisation. Members of the VRB are statutory appointees and are not public servants employed by the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

All our members must have:

- a high level of integrity
- sound judgment
- legal, military, health or other professional skills
- excellent communication and interpersonal skills
- the ability to conduct hearings
- a capacity to make fair decisions quickly.

At 30 June 2020, there were 42 members of the VRB. The table below shows the breakdown of the membership by category.

VRB membership, 30 June 2020

CATEGORY OF MEMBER	TOTAL (WOMEN)
Principal Member, full time	1(1)
Senior Members, sessional	15(8)
Services Members, sessional	11(5)
Members, sessional	11(8)
TOTAL	42 (22)

Members perform a variety of VRB work, including conducting alternative dispute resolution processes, providing opinions in the form of Case Appraisals and Neutral Evaluations, and sit on panels for VRB hearings.

Principal Member

Our Principal Member is Ms Jane Anderson. Ms Anderson commenced as Principal Member of the VRB on 31 January 2018 for a term of five years. Ms Anderson holds the VRB's only full-time statutory appointment.

National Registrar

Our National Registrar is Ms Katrina Harry PSM. Katrina also performs the role of the VRB's Chief Legal Counsel. The National Registrar's statutory function is to assist the Principal Member in managing the functions of the VRB across Australia.

Staff

The National Registrar is supported by VRB staff, employed under the *Public Service Act 1999* and made available by the Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs. The VRB does not have any Senior Executive Service positions. At 30 June 2019, there were 22.4 full time equivalent staff at the VRB. Staff are organized into two groups: client services and tribunal services.

Client Services teams include:

- South Eastern Registry headed by Louise Povolny (acting)
- North West and South Australian Registry headed by Andrea Flanagan PSM; and
- Alternative Dispute Resolution team headed by Jane Warmoll, who is also a Senior Legal Officer

The Tribunal Support team includes member support, financial management and internal communications. Mark Huthnance is the VRB's Finance Manager.

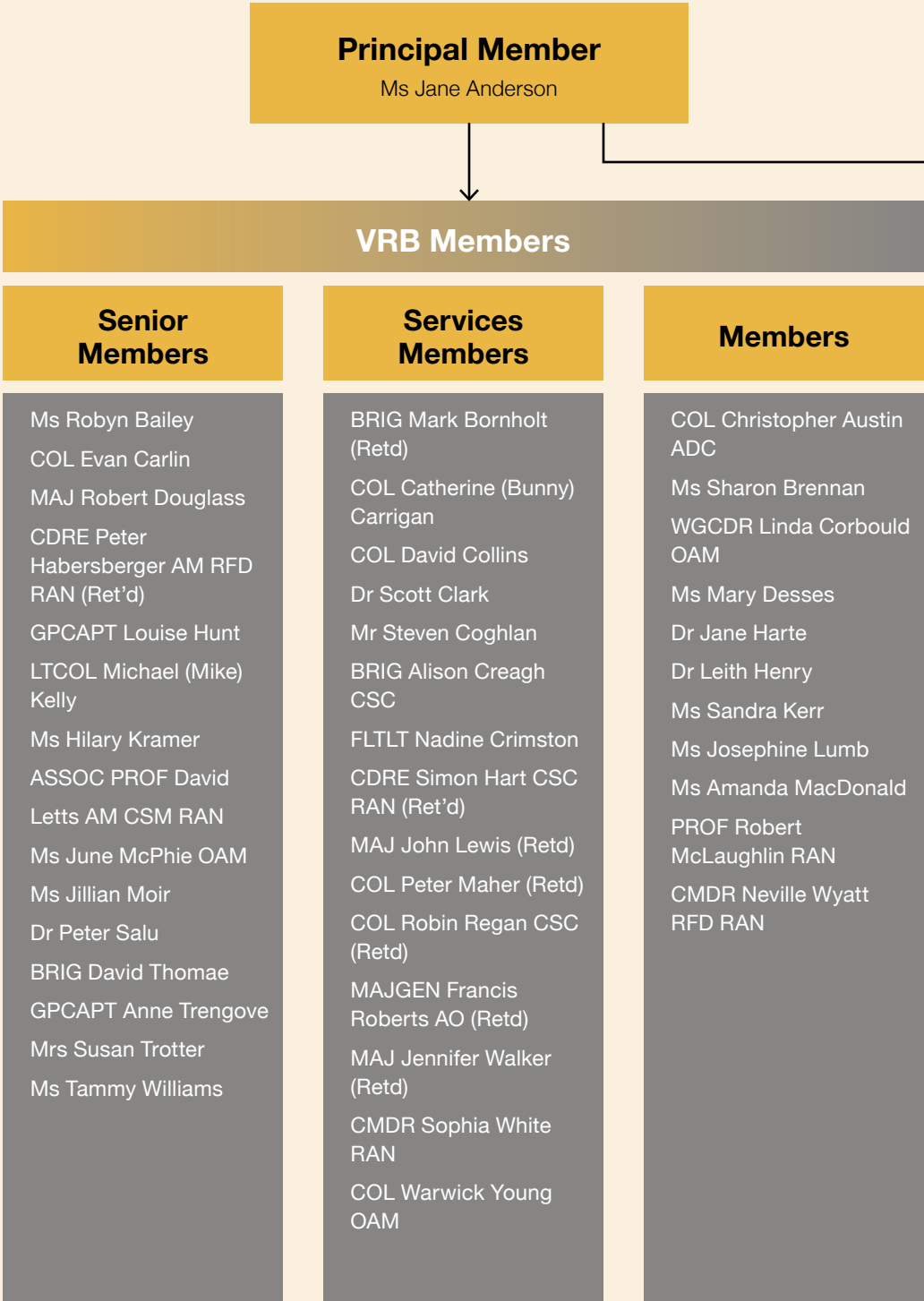
Staff in our client service teams:

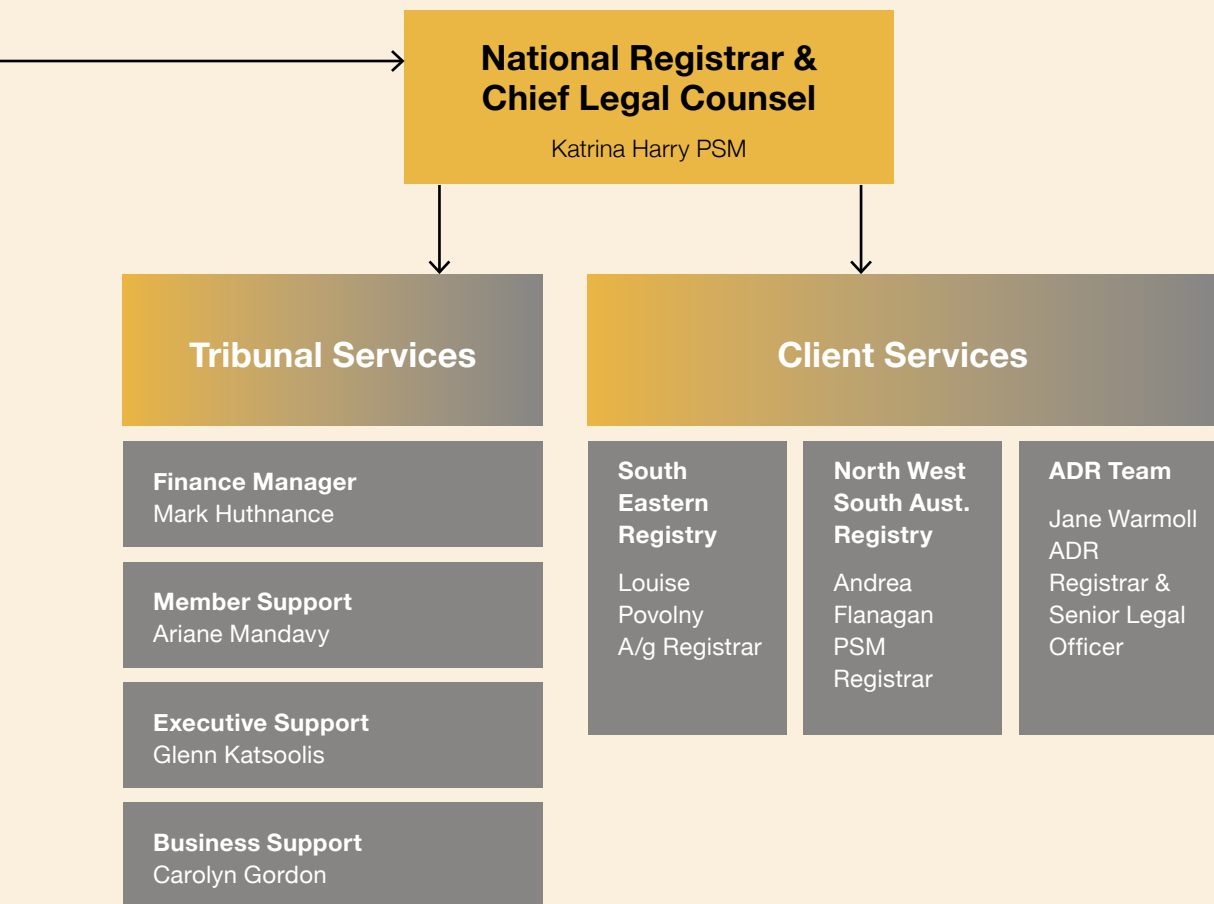
- provide a dedicated single point of contact for each veteran, ensure applications are 'event- ready' and facilitate the listing of alternative dispute resolution processes and hearings;
- liaise with veterans and advocates about their cases and give them information, and
- provide support services to conference registrars and members. Conference registrars conduct VRB alternative dispute resolution processes.

Conference registrars conduct VRB alternative dispute resolution processes.



VRB organisational chart as at 30 June 2020









Delivering justice

Delivering justice

The VRB serves veterans and their families by listening and making decisions about their applications for review.

In this section of our annual report we provide detailed information about the number of veterans' applications we handled in 2019–20, how quickly we resolved them and the key factors affecting the delivery of these services.

Year in review

Key points		
Resolved a record number of veterans' applications compared to the last four years	Significantly improved our time targets	Achieved more than 100 percent clearance rate of our caseholding

Number of applications finalised

This is an indicator of how the VRB is carrying out its role of delivering justice for veterans, current serving members and their families.

Target	Result
Finalise more applications than received (2587 in 2019–20)	Target exceeded: The VRB finalised 3427 applications in 2019–20, 32.5 per cent higher than the target. Additionally, the VRB also finalised 3 per cent more applications than in the previous year.

Applications finalised within time

This is an indicator of how quickly the VRB deals with applications. The VRB measures time taken for the stages that are within its control. It includes applications finalised within the ADR program, as well as applications that proceed to a hearing or were in transition (ie. lodged prior to the introduction of ADR).

Targets	Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADR applications: average number of applications finalised within 6 months • All applications: average number of applications finalised within 12 months • Less than 10 per cent of applications adjourned at hearing <p>The time taken to finalise applications can depend on a range of factors including the availability of the parties (particularly volunteer advocates to participate in ADR events and hearings, the nature and complexity of the applications, and the overall level of VRB resources available. A target based on an average figure takes these variables into account.</p>	<p>Target met: on average applications in the ADR program were finalised within 5.5 months. This is consistent with our results last year.</p> <p>Target met: on average all applications were finalised in 6.5 months. This is a 4.5 month improvement on last year.</p> <p>Target met: 5.9 per cent of applications were adjourned at hearing. This is a small increase of 0.4 percent compared to last year.</p> <p>A number of applications before the VRB require additional, new information in order to be resolved. These applications can be time-consuming and complex. The VRB can direct the Department to obtain further information (called a section 148(6A) request). However, due to factors including the availability and timeliness of medical specialists or other experts, this process can sometimes take three months or longer. The VRB will seek to obtain new evidence through streamlined measures such as utilising tele-health or similar, in an effort to avoid the need for a veteran to attend additional medical appointments, and or endure lengthy delays awaiting specialist reports.</p> <p>The VRB is committed to continuing to improve its timeliness. We anticipate further improvement following the introduction of Online Dispute Resolution next year.</p>

Proportion of appeals to the AAT

This criterion indicates the extent to which the VRB is providing a mechanism of review that is fair and just and that promotes public trust and confidence in its decision-making.

Target	Result
Less than 10 per cent of decisions made by the VRB in 2019–20 appealed to the AAT	Target met: Appeals to the AAT in 2019–20 amounted to 2.8 per cent of decisions made by the VRB in 2019–20. This is a decrease of 1.7 per cent from the previous year.

Accessible to the veteran community

This criterion indicates how accessible the VRB is to the veteran community.

Targets	Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ADR to all veterans across Australia as the preferred option for resolving applications• Provide accessible and welcoming venues across Australia, including regional areas• Enhance digital capability to support ADR events and hearings• Increase the veteran community's awareness of the VRB's role and services	<p>All veterans across Australia could access ADR to resolve their applications.</p> <p>We conducted virtual hearings via MSTeams and ensured no hearing was cancelled following the public closure of our registries in response to COVID19.</p> <p>We conducted 835 hearings in all locations across Australia, including in regional areas. We used digital capability in the majority of ADR events and 40 per cent of hearings.</p> <p>We conducted advocates' forums and training across Australia in 2019–20, as well as participated in a variety of stakeholder events</p> <p>Trialed the VRB Justice Portal to make it easier to do business with us anytime, anywhere.</p> <p>Developed an online dispute resolution model as a quick and informal way for veterans to resolve applications, regardless of where they live.</p> <p>Completed a major content development project to simplify the VRB's decision and reasons templates.</p> <p>Refreshed the VRB website to increase awareness of the VRB's role and services.</p>

Budget efficiency

In 2019–20, we finalised a record number of applications, and improved our time and other performance targets while operating within the resources provided by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. We achieved a balanced budget.

Summary of our performance

During 2019–20 we fast tracked our digital transformation to keep justice alive for veterans and the current serving community during COVID19. Key priorities included the commencement of virtual hearings using MSTeams, the trial of the VRB Justice Portal, the refresh of the VRB website and design of the VRB's Online Dispute Resolution model. These projects required the engagement of members and staff working remotely across Australia. We achieved our strongest result in over four years, finalising more applications and reducing the time taken to finalise applications by 4.5 months. Despite the challenges presented by the global COVID19 pandemic we improved our productivity by 44 per cent and delivered our core business of resolving applications for veterans without delay or interruption. As a result of our work in 2019–20, veterans and the current serving community were able to continue to exercise their rights of review of decisions affecting their interests.



Caseload overview

We resolved 3.2 per cent more applications than in the previous year, which had been a record breaking year itself.

We received around 7.3 per cent fewer applications this year.

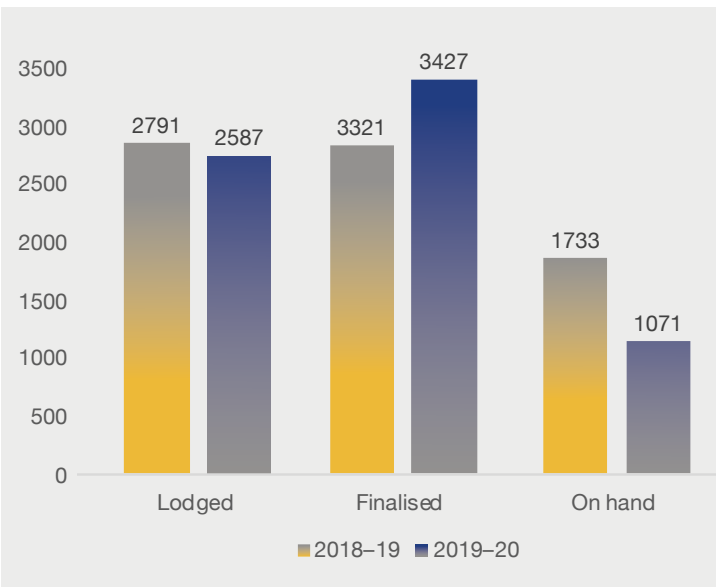
However, at the end of the reporting year over 300 applications for review to the VRB remained with DVA for report preparation. On average section 137 reports were provided by DVA to the VRB more than 10 weeks after the veterans' application for review had been lodged with DVA.

In terms of our jurisdictions applications under the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004* (MRCA) increased significantly (36.7 per cent).

The overall number of applications on hand at 30 June 2020 (1071) was 38 per cent lower than it was as at 30 June 2019 (1733).

Chart 3.1 illustrates the number of applications lodged and finalised in the last two financial years, and the number of applications on hand at 30 June in each year.

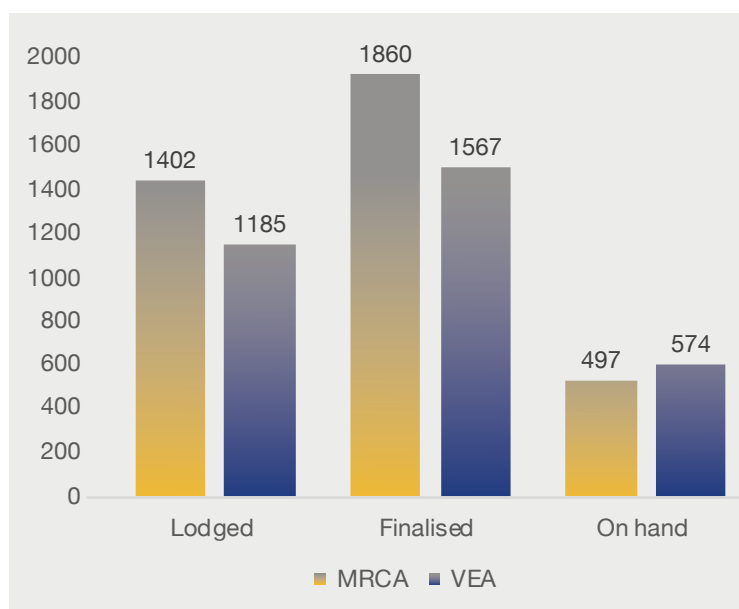
Total applications lodged, finalised and on hand, 2018–19 & 2019–20



Our jurisdictions

The size of our workload differs slightly between jurisdictions: 54.2 per cent of applications were made in relation to the MRCA and 45.8 per cent in relation to the VEA. Our clearance rate for the MRCA jurisdiction was 132.7 per cent and for VEA it was 132.2 per cent.

Applications lodged, finalised and on hand, 2019–20 — By jurisdiction



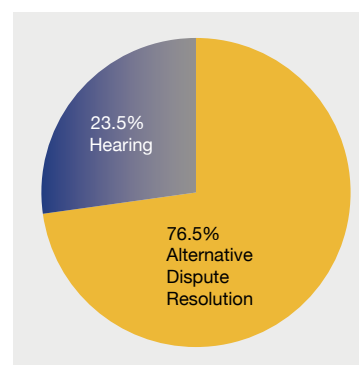
How we resolve applications

We resolve applications in different ways. In 2019–20, we resolved the majority of applications by an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process. This can include a decision being made on the papers (without a full hearing), a decision being made by the VRB which reflects an agreement made by the veteran and the Commission, or a veteran choosing not to proceed further with an application for review. In 57.8 per cent of applications resolved by ADR an outcome was reached that was favourable to the veteran.

In the remaining applications that could not be resolved by an ADR process (or were transitional cases that had commenced prior to the introduction of ADR) the VRB conducted a hearing and made a decision following the hearing. In 40.7 per cent of these applications, the VRB made a new decision that was favourable to the veteran.

Overall, as a proportion of the number of primary decisions made by the Commissions that could have been reviewed by the VRB, the VRB made a different decision in 2.1 per cent of cases that were resolved in ADR and 0.5 per cent of cases that went to a hearing.

Mode of finalisation of applications for review of decisions, 2019–2020



External Scrutiny

Our operations are subject to external scrutiny through various mechanisms. Our decisions can be appealed to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal or the courts. We can also receive requests made under the *Freedom of Information Act*, complaints to the Commonwealth Ombudsman and other bodies, audits by the Australian National Audit Office. We can also be called to attend senate estimates hearings.

Appeals

If a veteran is unhappy with a VRB decision, he or she can appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) for a review “on the merits”. This means the AAT will take a fresh look at the relevant facts, law and policy and arrive at its own decision.

A veteran may also seek judicial review of certain decisions made in the course of the review process and in respect of certain final decisions under the *Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977*. There were no judicial reviews of VRB decisions in the reporting year.

The table below shows the number of AAT appeals lodged in 2019–20 as a proportion of VRB decisions and the number of cases where the AAT, at hearing, made a different decision to the VRB. This amounted to 0.4% per cent of all VRB decisions which could have been appealed to the AAT.

	AAT appeals lodged	Proportion of total VRB decisions	Finalised	Percentage of cases where AAT at hearing decided differently to VRB*
2018–19	149	4.5%	195	0.57%
2019–20	97	2.8%	163	0.4%

* This measure identifies those appeals heard by the AAT and excludes those cases where a consent agreement was reached by the parties.

Court Decisions

While there is no direct right of appeal to the Federal Court from a decision of the VRB, decisions are subject to review by the Federal Court under the *Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977*.

Shafran v Repatriation Commission [2019] FCA 1833 was decided in the reporting year. While the court dismissed the application, it provided guidance on procedures concerning section 137 reports prepared by DVA.

Summary of AAT cases

The case summaries below relate to a sample of matters where the AAT made a decision different from that made by the VRB. In the majority of cases, the AAT had before it new evidence that was not available to the VRB.

Roll and Repatriation Commission (Veterans' entitlements) [2020] AATA 1649

Mr Roll served in the Royal Australian Navy from 6 January 1971 to 5 January 1995 and had a number of conditions accepted as being related to his service. Mr Roll sought disability pension at the special rate. The Commission refused his application and that decision was affirmed by the VRB.

Mr Roll had served in the RAN and a marine engineer. His last paid work as a Chief Engineer was undertaken in 2014 when he was 55 years of age. Mr Roll claimed that he ceased work at this time as he was declared unfit following a workplace medical assessment and as a result of his accepted knee conditions.

The Commission submitted that Mr Roll was not entitled to the special rate of pension because his non-accepted conditions of bilateral wrist osteoarthritis and alcohol use disorder were preventing him from continuing to undertake work. The Commission also submitted that Mr Roll's age and time out of the workforce meant that the alone test could not be satisfied.

The Tribunal accepted evidence that Mr Roll's wrist condition had improved following operations and that his alcohol use disorder was in remission. The Tribunal found that Mr Roll's knee conditions, alone, prevented him from continuing to undertake work as a marine engineer during the assessment period:

"...The Applicant...was declared to be unfit in the medical in 2014 by reason of his knees, with the going up and down of stairs and ladders being an integral part of a ship and therefore of his role as a marine engineer. By reason of the accepted conditions preventing the Applicant from continuing to undertake work as a marine engineer during the assessment period, the Applicant has been suffering a loss of salary or wages or of earnings on his own account that the Applicant would not be suffering if the Applicant were free of that incapacity."

The Tribunal varied the decision under review and found that Mr Roll was entitled to receive the special rate of pension.

Garrard and Repatriation Commission (Veterans' entitlements) [2020] AATA 538

Mr Garrard served in the Royal Australian Navy and rendered three periods of operational service in 1965/66 on HMAS Melbourne. He claimed his hypertension was war-caused. The Commission refused his claim and that decision was affirmed by the VRB.

Before the Tribunal, Mr Garrard submitted that stressful experiences during his operational service resulted in him developing an increased alcohol consumption habit and that this led to him developing hypertension. In particular, Mr Garrard referred to a crash involving a Gannet aircraft in April 1966.

The respondent submitted there were inconsistencies in Mr Garrard's account of alcohol use. However, the Tribunal found that Mr Garrard consumed an average of at least 300 grams of alcohol per week for at least the six months before the clinical onset of his hypertension.

The Tribunal decided that the hypothesis that Mr Garrard's stressful experiences during his operational service resulted in him developing an increased alcohol consumption habit and that this led him to developing hypertension was not disproved beyond reasonable doubt. The decision under review was set aside and in substitution a new decision that Mr Garrard's hypertension was war-caused.

Stanbury and Repatriation Commission (Veterans' entitlements) [2020] AATA 285

Mr Stanbury served in the Royal Australian Air Force from 23 January 1956 to 22 January 1968. The Commission refused his claim for a disability pension on the ground that he was 'not a member of the Forces'. That decision was affirmed by the VRB.

The issue for the Tribunal to determine was whether Mr Stanbury was entitled to a pension as a member of the Forces, having rendered British nuclear test service for the purposes of section 69B of the VEA.

In relation to the question as to whether Mr Stanbury was within the area within 40 kilometres of either of the Buffalo or Antler test sites near Maralinga, Mr Stanbury gave evidence that he was at an airstrip within that area and went to the Maralinga township. Mr Stanbury also provided a document bearing his name described as an identification card as to Australian persons employed at the Maralinga South Australia Atomic Test Site from the National Archives of Australia. Additionally, Mr Stanbury provided a document headed "Internal Memorandum" and "Department of Supply". The document was dated 16 March 1964 and stated that it was from the Regional Security Officer in South Australia. The document stated: "Enclosed for your information is a copy of R.A.A.F. memo. 13/64 dated 12th March, 1964 advising clearance details in respect of personnel who will be posted to your establishment". The document mentions seven persons, with the first person mentioned being: "A15651 AC Stanbury, S.W. Base Squadron Edinburgh 13.4.64 SECRET".

The Commission contended that the position of Mr Stanbury had "evolved", with it being a possibility that he had been at Maralinga, but the documentation when viewed as a whole suggests otherwise and places Mr Stanbury at RAAF Base Edinburgh in 1964. The Commission also submitted that there were no contemporaneous records within Mr Stanbury's service records supporting his claims as to (being at Maralinga in) 1964.

Having regard to the oral evidence of Mr Stanbury, together with the identification card and internal memorandum as to his employment at the Maralinga Atomic Test Site, the Tribunal found Mr Stanbury rendered service in the area within 40 kilometres of the Buffalo or Antler test sites near Maralinga in the period from 27 September 1956 to 30 April 1965. As such, he rendered British nuclear test defence service while a member of the RAAF.

The decision under review was set aside and remitted to the Commission for reconsideration.

Woolley and Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission [2019] AATA 1867

The applicant, Mr Woolley, served in the Army from 25 July 2005 to 20 November 2013, including three tours in East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan. Mr Woolley was seeking to have liability accepted for his patellofemoral syndrome of the right and left knees. He claimed the condition was caused by undertaking weight-bearing exercise involving forceful loading of the patellofemoral during his service in East Timor. The Board refused his claim in April 2016 and he applied to the Tribunal for a review. At the Tribunal Mr Woolley gave oral evidence and the Tribunal considered four reports from orthopaedic surgeons (which had not been available to the Board when it heard Mr Woolley's application two years prior). The Tribunal found in the veteran's favour noting:

"I am unable to make a finding that no symptoms of the disease were present in East Timor. The opinion of Dr Johnstone that the military service of the veteran contributed to his chondromalacia patella condition is certainly consistent with the opinion of Dr Hughes who in his letter of 26 February 2015 also made reference to the repetitive lifting, carrying heavy weights and squatting that was routine in the army."

Slight and Repatriation Commission (Veterans' entitlements) [2019] AATA 4948

Mr Slight served in the Royal Australian Air Force from 15 May 1961 to 21 May 1984. His eligible war service (which is also operational service) was from 17 August 1964 to 18 May 1966 in Malaya. He also rendered defence service from 7 December 1972 to 21 May 1984. Mr Slight died at the age of 78 years in 2009 from subarachnoid haemorrhage. Before the Tribunal Mrs Slight argued that her husband's death from subarachnoid haemorrhage was caused his hypertension, which was in turn caused by a service related alcohol habit. Specifically, Mrs Slight argued that her late husband had used alcohol as a means of pain relief for a lower back condition he suffered in 1965 during his operational service.

When the matter had been before the Board, Mrs Slight's representative had conceded that there was insufficient material to support either that the veteran's back condition or the alcohol consumption could be linked to his eligible service. In particular, there was material before the Board which indicated that Mr Slight had suffered a back injury playing volleyball in 1964, just before he commenced the period of operational service.

When the matter was appealed to the Tribunal, Mrs Slight's representative tendered a new report from an occupational physician (which had not been available to the Board), which opined that Mr Slight was hospitalised in 1965 for a new injury suffered as a result of the nature of his duties as an aircraft fitter carried out during his operational service. The Tribunal considered that a reasonable hypothesis was raised on the whole of the material before it and that there was no material which disputed the hypothesis. As such, the Tribunal set aside the decision under review and found Mrs Slight was entitled to a war widow's pension.

Freedom of information

In 2019–20, we received 8 requests for access to documents under the Freedom of Information Act. All applications were finalised during the reporting year. Of those decisions, we received one request for an internal review and we were not notified of any requests made to the Information Commissioner.

Information Publication Scheme

Agencies subject to the *Freedom of Information Act* are required to publish information to the public as part of the Information Publication Scheme. This requirement is in Part II of the Act and has replaced the former requirement to publish a section 8 statement in an annual report. Each agency must display on its website a plan showing what information it publishes in accordance with the IPS requirements. Our plan is on our website.

Complaints to external bodies

In 2019–20, no complaints about our operations were made to the Office of the Information Commissioner, the Commonwealth Ombudsman, the Australian Human Rights Commission or any other external body.

Reports on our operations

Our operations were not the subject of any report by the Auditor-General, any parliamentary committee or the Commonwealth Ombudsman in 2019–20.

Productivity Commission Inquiry into Compensation and Rehabilitation for Veterans

During the reporting year, the Productivity Commission handed down its report following its inquiry into the veterans' entitlements and compensation system. The Principal Member provided two submissions to the inquiry and met with Productivity Commissioners and their representatives.



Services to veterans

Alternative Dispute Resolution

Our review processes are designed to resolve applications using Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). The processes are also designed to ensure that those matters that are unable to be fully resolved via ADR can be finalised at hearing informally and without undue delay.

ADR is available to all veterans across Australia. ADR can be faster than a hearing and gives the veteran more control over the outcome.

Over the last four years, we have been focused on creating sustainable ADR, and ensuring its continued integration into the review processes. There are five key elements in our framework of sustainable ADR:

- (1) Independence
- (2) Flexibility
- (3) Accessibility
- (4) Certainty
- (5) Economy

Independence is a key element of sustainable ADR. Prior to an application for review being considered by the VRB, a veteran will have had correspondence with the Department of Veterans' Affairs; both in respect of the primary decision made by the Repatriation Commission or Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (the Commission) and the internal review or 'screening' conducted by the Commission. On these occasions, the veteran has been informed that the Commission has made a decision, for example, to refuse his or her claim, and that there are no grounds to overturn that decision.

Often there is a natural progression in the evolution of the veteran's dispute, which can include the invocation of wider complaint mechanisms. By the time the matter reaches us, the involvement of a VRB member or Conference Registrar (who is independent of the parties) can help to address the concerns, give the parties trust and confidence in the process, and an understanding that the application will be considered afresh; objectively and fairly.

During an ADR process, a VRB member or Conference Registrar will assist the parties to understand if their assumptions about the case are right or wrong. Reality testing the parties often allows them to reach a common position and agreement. This approach risks being compromised if there is a perception by a party that the ADR facilitator is not independent.

Furthermore, veterans can be empowered by the private context of the outreach, facilitated by a VRB member who is independent of the parties, to provide further information without the concern that this could be used to their disadvantage at any subsequent hearing.



Flexibility is also a key element in sustainable ADR. Our ADR program recognises that an application for review must be approached in a manner that is both tailored and timely. We are alert to the differing needs of veterans within a diverse community, involving different kinds of matters. In this respect, our ADR program has multiple options to actively facilitate a resolution that is acceptable to both parties, as well as assisting the parties to find their own solutions to their issues. Our ADR program continues to evolve and adapt to the needs of its users, consistent with its broader remit.

Complementing flexibility, ADR procedures need to be **easy to understand and easy to access**. We invest and allocate resources to ensure parties not only are properly informed about available ADR options and outcomes, but can be active participants in the review process.

We continue to ensure ease and access by providing veterans with a dedicated Client Service Officer for their matters. In this respect, every single ADR event, including an outreach, is scheduled one-one-one with the veteran or his or her representative to ensure their participation via an acceptable method (e.g. telephone, video-conference, or face-to-face) at an appropriate date and time. For example, it is not uncommon for us to schedule an ADR event for current serving members on operational deployment; which requires special listing considerations.

Importantly, we do not issue notices to attend ADR events without consultation with the veteran or representative. This is a unique service, not generally offered by other courts or tribunals. Whilst resource intensive, it is an essential component of our operations, and is consistent with the specialist nature of the VRB and the specialist mechanism of review it provides.

In addition, we recognise that a veteran's ability to access and participate in review processes will sometimes be affected by mental health concerns. Consequently, we have prioritised and affirmed our commitment to veterans' mental health and individual wellbeing. In 2019, we entered into a learning and development partnership with Phoenix Australia Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health. The expertise of Phoenix Australia will assist VRB staff and members in better understanding veterans' mental health and to engage in best practice in every aspect of VRB work; be it on the reception desk or in the hearing room.

Certainty and finality are also key elements in the VRB framework of sustainable ADR. Resolution of disputes via a decision on the papers or following terms of agreement—avoids the time delays associated with those disputes that progress to hearing. Veterans' participation in ADR allows veterans to have a closer understanding of the issues in dispute, and to have more control over the outcome of their applications.

Economy is a final key element in sustainable ADR. Veterans are not charged any fees to access the VRB. If any costs are incurred in obtaining further material required during the VRB review process, these are usually borne by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Generally, the costs incurred by the Commission during our review process are also low. For the majority of our ADR events and hearings, a Commission representative is not required to attend. The prohibition of lawyers appearing at VRB hearings means that legal costs are also avoided. On average, applications proceeding through the VRB's ADR program are resolved within 1.5 outreaches, representing approximately 25 to 45 minutes of total time taken in scheduled ADR activity.

Similarly, those matters that proceed to hearing are listed for one hour and generally do not involve the attendance of expert witnesses. As such, witness costs are also avoided.

Online Dispute Resolution

The mission of the VRB is to deliver justice by listening to veterans and making high quality decisions in a timely, cost effective and efficient way.

The VRB will soon be trialling online dispute resolution (ODR) to increase veterans' access to justice by providing a modern, simple, efficient, user-friendly and accessible forum for veterans, current serving members and their families seeking review of decisions that affect their interests.

What is Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) at the VRB?

Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) at the VRB uses online digital technology to assist veterans, current serving members and their families resolve their applications for review.

What are the benefits of ODR?

ODR further advances the benefits of the VRB's current ADR program ('offline ADR'). ODR sits alongside ADR, providing an easy and accessible process whereby VRB Conference Registrars facilitate the early resolution of applications. ODR will broaden veterans' access to justice by:

- giving greater choice and flexibility to veterans to resolve their applications;
- providing a more accessible and informal way of resolving certain applications;
- removing restrictions on the time at which the VRB online processes can be used;
- avoiding veterans having to travel lengthy distances (particularly from regional locations) to participate;
- avoiding veterans needing to take time off work;
- enabling veterans to participate from their homes (or places where they feel most comfortable) and alleviating the need to attend the VRB in person;
- veterans not being restricted to being in the same locations as their representatives;
- providing an immediate start to the resolution process, allowing veterans to resolve their applications as quickly as possible;
- allowing veterans to communicate at a pace that suits them; rather than communicating 'on-the-spot'.

In addition, not only will VRB ODR provide greater choice and flexibility, it will also alleviate some of the pressures placed on the volunteer advocates who support veterans.

How does ODR at the VRB work?

The ODR process starts when (1) the respondent submits a section 137 report via the VRB Justice Portal, and (2) the veteran elects (via the VRB Justice Portal) to proceed through ODR.

The application then moves to a process of facilitation before concluding in a VRB decision.

Facilitation

A Conference Registrar will start the facilitation process within a week of receipt of the veteran's election to proceed via ODR. Online Conference Registrars will have a facilitative, inquisitorial role and provide evaluative assistance to veterans from the start of the ODR process.

The veteran will not be asked to submit evidence until requested by the Conference Registrar. This will avoid the scenario where applicants who are uncertain as to the material required to support their cases, often upload documents in large quantities, many of which may not be relevant to the application.

Any request by the Conference Registrar for additional material will be made online, and if any such material is obtained, it will likewise be required to be submitted online, via the VRB Justice Portal.

The time to resolve an application will depend on the complexity of the application and the issues involved. However, the VRB has set a relatively short timeframe of two weeks for the provision of material through the ODR process in order that applications can be progressed without undue delay.

If a veteran is required to provide additional evidence and they cannot meet the short time frame, the application can be referred out of ODR and into the VRB's offline ADR program. This will be appropriate in those cases where further evidence gathering needs to be undertaken and an opportunity for a veteran to have more time to prepare his or her case.

A VRB decision

Once the facilitation process is complete, a VRB member will be assigned to the application within 3 days. If the VRB Member considers the application can be resolved by a decision, a draft decision will be communicated to the parties.

If the veteran consents to the draft decision, the application will proceed to a virtual hearing before the VRB Member who will deliver the reasons for the decision orally online to the parties. The veteran and a representative of the respondent will be notified of the hearing and invited to attend. Given the 'virtual' nature of the hearing, either party can participate in the hearing from any location with internet access.

If an application can't be resolved via ODR because the veteran has not consented to a decision, within a specified short timeframe he or she can elect to (1) discontinue their application; (2) have their application referred to offline ADR; or (3) proceed to a hearing (including the option of a virtual hearing) before a panel of 3 VRB members.

Decisions on the day

In the previous reporting year we implemented our 'decisions on the day' program following a successful trial.

Where possible, VRB members will make their decision on the day of a hearing and tell the veteran and his or her advocate the reasons for their decision. The veteran, the advocate and DVA will also receive a written copy of the VRB's decision.

VRB decisions and reasons are not published or made public. They are only provided to the veteran, the representative (if applicable) and DVA.

Composition of hearing panels

In most review hearings, the VRB is made up of three members. One of the three members is a Senior Member, who generally has legal qualifications and presides over the hearing. Another is a Services Member, who has experience in the Australian Defence Force. The Services Member does not need to be from the same arm of service as the applicant seeking review, but whose general knowledge and experience of military service assists the panel in interpreting the material before it. The remaining panel member is a Member, who has relevant qualifications within the community and/or professional sector, for example, a health professional.

The three-member multi-disciplinary panel is one of the most important features of the VRB. The combined knowledge and experience of each category of membership provides an appropriate setting in which veterans, current serving members, or family members are able to tell their stories.

In some less common situations, a veteran (or other applicant) may not wish to attend a VRB hearing to give oral evidence, or participate at all in the VRB hearing. In this circumstance, a hearing may be conducted by a single VRB member sitting alone. In appropriate cases, a single member may also conduct a short hearing where there has been an adjournment following a hearing.

Information about our review process

This year we launched a refreshed BETA website to increase awareness of the VRB's role and services.

The website contains information about:

- How to apply;
- The types of decisions the VRB can review; and
- Steps to resolve an application at the VRB including online dispute resolution.

Veterans and the serving community can access the VRB Justice Portal from our website.

Additional information and resources are available on the website, along with our Service Commitment and Vulnerable Veteran Protocol.

Service Commitment

Our commitment to you

The Veterans' Review Board (VRB) is a specialist, independent tribunal that reviews decisions affecting veterans, current serving ADF members, and their families. The VRB is committed to providing a mechanism of review which is accessible, fair, just, informal, economical, economical and quick.

Our service commitment

We aim for service excellence by being: accessible, respectful, responsive, timely, impartial, consistent, professional and efficient.

When you contact the VRB you can expect:

- to be greeted in a polite and courteous way
- a dedicated Client Service Officer to manage your application
- answers to your queries from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm on working days
- accurate information about VRB processes.

Your rights

The VRB respects your right to:

- fair and helpful assistance, including appropriate arrangements for people with special access needs;
- be represented in your proceedings;
- a fair and just ADR event and/or hearing;
- timely decisions with reasons provided either orally or in writing.

How you can help us provide excellent service

To assist the VRB to provide high quality service to you we ask that you:

- participate in your hearing
- keep hearing or other appointments, or tell us beforehand if you cannot keep an appointment
- provide us with complete and accurate information
- comply with any directions about your application
- treat staff, members and other parties with respect and courtesy
- understand that we cannot give you legal advice about your application

Vulnerable veteran protocol

This protocol addresses the needs of those veterans and current serving members who face particular difficulties in the review process, and whose ability to understand and effectively present their case or fully participate in the review process may be impaired.

Early identification and priority attention

A veteran may be identified as vulnerable at any stage during the review process. There are various ways in which the VRB can identify a veteran who may be vulnerable, or at risk of self-harm or harm to others. These sources include:

- the veteran or his/her family member
- the veteran's advocate
- treating health professionals
- government departments or agencies, including the Veterans' Affairs and Defence Departments, and law enforcement agencies
- VRB members, Conference Registrars or staff.

It is important that vulnerable veterans are identified as early as possible in the review process and that appropriate action is taken by the VRB as soon as possible to manage their applications. Where the VRB identifies a vulnerable veteran, the veteran's application will be immediately triaged for an on-papers review by one of the VRB's subject matter experts. If the application cannot be resolved on the papers, consideration will be given to arranging an urgent hearing with a full panel or a directions hearing, depending on the particular circumstances. If a veteran is unrepresented, the VRB will assist the veteran to appoint an advocate.

Hearing arrangements

All VRB hearings are held in private. In listing a hearing, the VRB will liaise with the veteran's advocate, treating health professional and/or Departmental Liaison Officer. Consideration of a range of factors include:

- the most convenient/appropriate time for the hearing for the veteran and whether the veteran attends in person, by phone or video conference;
- the attendance of support persons including the veteran's advocate, treating health professional or others such as family members or assistance dogs etc;
- the panel composition (e.g. an all-female or male panel or members with specialist expertise).

VRB members conducting a hearing will be specifically informed of any cases scheduled which involve a vulnerable veteran and that this should be properly taken into account in conducting the review. At any hearing, VRB members are committed to creating an open and supportive environment. Questioning of the vulnerable veteran by members is to be done in a sensitive and respectful manner and questions will be formulated in a way that the vulnerable veteran understands. Additionally, the VRB may consider taking evidence from family members or close friends. During the hearing, the VRB will also ensure any vulnerable veteran is provided with breaks as appropriate. In every case the VRB will endeavour to complete the review without delay.

Notification of the VRB's decision

At the conclusion of any VRB hearing involving a vulnerable veteran, careful consideration will be given as to how the decision should be delivered; i.e. orally on the day of the hearing, or in writing following the hearing. The presiding Senior Member will make this decision after consultation with the advocate, treating health professional or other support person.



If a decision is to be given in writing, either following a hearing or on-papers review, Registry staff will contact the veteran's advocate, treating health professional and/or Departmental Liaison Officer to make arrangements for the decision to be conveyed to the veteran. For example,

a written decision can be delivered to the office of the veteran's advocate or treating health professional. The aim is to ensure that the veteran has appropriate support persons available and accessible to discuss the VRB's decision, whether favourable or unfavourable.

Generally, Registry staff will seek to ensure that decisions are not delivered on a Friday, or prior to a public holiday (or commemorative events such as ANZAC Day), or any other date that may be significant to the veteran. Similarly, the VRB will ensure that hearings for vulnerable veterans are not listed on or around these days.

Immediate threats

If there is an imminent threat at any point in the review process, Registry staff may contact the relevant arm of emergency services in order that a welfare check be undertaken. Additionally, Registry staff will also notify the Department of Veterans' Affairs security team with a view to an incident assessment being undertaken.

Support services

The VRB will encourage any vulnerable veteran to seek appropriate counselling or other support services after a hearing, or will recommend to the veteran's advocate that such services be sought. In locations where the VRB is co-located near Open Arms, Registry staff, where appropriate, will endeavour to arrange an immediate referral or support.



Obtaining evidence

Types of evidence

The VRB commonly receives the following types of evidence:

- Medical evidence: including service medical records, hospital notes or surgery reports and doctors' expert opinions.
- Documentary evidence: including service records, unit diaries or other published historical or contemporary accounts of events that took place during service.
- Witness statements: including those of fellow service personnel who can confirm the details of incident/s, participation in a sporting activities/occupations, or postings or deployments.
- The veteran's own story that describes the details of the disability, incident, or service event.

The veteran's own personal story is often the most important evidence the VRB receives.

It may be new evidence that the Department did not have when the primary decision was made. A veteran's own story is often an important factor in the VRB making a favourable decision for a veteran. As such, the VRB encourages veterans to participate in their appeals by participating in ADR events and attending VRB hearings.

How evidence is obtained

As is the case for many Tribunals, the VRB does not apply the strict rules of evidence. Rather, the VRB encourages the parties to obtain relevant and probative material in a manner that is informal, economical and quick. In order to avoid unreasonable costs to the parties and reduce the risk of unreasonable delay to the finalisation of veterans' applications, the VRB requests the parties to consider:

- Where appropriate, obtaining oral evidence from a doctor or specialist (who has reviewed the veteran) over the telephone during a hearing or ADR conference, rather than requiring the veteran to undergo a further medical assessment and obtain a full medical report. The oral evidence can be confirmed in a follow up email following an ADR outreach event;
- Where a medical report is required, the examination of the veteran is conducted by video or telephone conference, to avoid unnecessary travel, expense or delay;
- Witness statements provided by colleagues or other persons by email;
- The parties agreeing to obtain reports jointly, using a collaborative approach.

A veteran or representative is welcome to ask a Conference Registrar in an ADR event (or Registry staff prior to a hearing) if evidence can be obtained via one of the ways noted above.

Assistance in obtaining your own evidence

Rather than asking the respondent to obtain material, it may be quicker and more economical for veterans to obtain their own medical evidence. It also gives the veteran more control over the choice of health professionals, location and timing of appointments, including the option of using tele-health where appropriate.

A veteran or representative is welcome to ask a Conference Registrar in an ADR event for help in drafting a schedule of questions for a health professional. The schedule of questions can be included in the direction that is issued following the ADR event.

Reimbursement for veterans

If a veteran chooses to obtain his or her own material for the purposes of the application, the Department of Veterans' Affairs will reimburse the costs of obtaining medical evidence up to a maximum amount of \$1000.00 per claimed condition.

Additionally, reimbursement of reasonable travelling expenses incurred in obtaining such medical evidence (and travelling expenses for those of an attendant) to a maximum of \$500 may also be paid.

Complaints

During 2019–20, 0.5 per cent of complaints were made for every application we resolved. The rate of complaints decreased in comparison to the previous year.

	2018–19	2019–20
Applications finalised	3321	3427
Percentage of complaints per applications finalised	0.9%	0.5%

Compliments about our service

During 2019–19, 1.1 per cent of compliments were made for every application we resolved. The rate of compliments increased as compared to the previous year.

	2018–19	2019–20
Applications finalised	3321	3427
Percentage of compliments per applications finalised	0.9%	1.1%

Engagement

We are committed to engaging with the broad range of external stakeholders who use our services. By seeking feedback, we are able to continue to improve our services and build public trust and confidence in our decision-making.

The Principal Member and National Registrar met with a range of people and organisations in 2019–20, including the Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs and other members of the Repatriation Commission and Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission. Our senior staff worked closely with the Department during the reporting year on matters such as our membership and budget.

In addition, the Principal Member and National Registrar continued liaison with advocates across Australia, and attended and presented at various events hosted by ex-service organisations. Due to the COVID19 pandemic, much of the stakeholder engagement in the reporting year was undertaken online.

Prior to the declaration of the COVID19 pandemic, the Principal Member and National Registrar conducted a series of in-person advocates forums. A second round of online advocates forums were scheduled to be undertaken early in the new reporting year. Advocates can express their interest in participating in these forums via the VRB website.

Feedback about our service



User feedback

We regularly ask our users to evaluate the level of service we provide and seek their views on how we can improve our services. Recent feedback to the VRB has included some of the following comments:

"...well done to all the VRB for providing outstanding services for veterans under extremely arduous and enduring circumstances."

"Please pass on my heartfelt and sincerest thanks to the VRB team for supporting me during what has been a turbulent time."

"Thank you all for your continued support as we move through these busy days. You and your hard work never go unnoticed."

"I just wanted to say thank you for your assistance over the duration of my case. Your support and the amount of effort you have placed into myself is monumentally appreciated. I'm in disbelief of how much genuinely care about the people you help. Thank you so much."

"Many thanks to the VRB for this outstanding result and the veteran is very happy."

"Thank you so much for your assistance yesterday. You truly are a great asset to Advocates."

"...We...like all ESO's are forever grateful for all the decisions you, DVA and all the associated parties make on our behalf. Sure some do not go our way and so be it. While we can we will always support the Veteran Community and their dependants."

"...I would like to thank the Board for their time, patience and understanding in their deliberation and decision in respect of the client's appeal. I would also like to take the opportunity to also thank all of the support staff as well, in the preparation and compilation of all the documentation and their time and patience in dealing with the administrative matters in relation to this appeal."

"Your work is appreciated and valued and I admire how we all jump in to help one another – it makes every bit of a difference to those we assist in our community."

"It's been such a stressful time and this result is such a relief for our family. My sincerest thanks. We really do appreciate you for getting this done so quickly."

"All my dealings with you have been handled with compassion, empathy and understanding. It makes me feel good knowing the next Digger who comes along and needs to deal with your Department will be treated with the same dignity as I have experienced."

Other feedback mechanisms

VRB Justice Portal

The VRB Justice portal engages veterans and advocates with our case management processes allowing for the provision of documents online, viewing application status, history and filed documents, and receiving notification of events such as ADR or hearing dates. Plus, the VRB Justice Portal also allows group management for Ex Service Organisations with multiple practising advocates.

During the reporting year we trialed the VRB Justice Portal with staff from the Department of Veterans' Affairs and key advocates and Ex Service Organisation (ESO) representatives.

The VRB Justice Portal received exceptionally positive feedback following user testing. Participants in the trial welcomed the benefit of quicker, easier and more seamless interaction with the VRB. The portal will become publically available to all veterans, current serving members and advocates early in the 2020–21 financial year. Veterans, current serving members and advocates will be supported in registering and using the portal by the VRB's dedicated help desk. Feedback from the trial included the following:

"We have found it [the portal] really good and working very well and love what it is all about. It is an excellent tool and thank you for us being able to trial it."

"It has been invaluable in the past couple of months with the virus problem..."

"I have no complaints. I have been using the portal as much as I can..."

Practice notes and VeRBosity

We continue to issue our journal VeRBosity, along with regular practice notes to promote the availability of information about our decision-making and provide current information about the VRB. Practice notes also include short, plain English summaries of recent decisions from the AAT and the courts. These resources continue to be well received by our stakeholders. In the new reporting year we will be releasing a refreshed handbook for self-represented applicants and advocates appearing before the VRB.



Management and accountability

Our governance

Senior Management

We are established by the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* (Cth). This is the principal law that governs our operations. Under this law, the Principal Member is responsible for ensuring the expeditious and efficient discharge of our business and for managing the administrative affairs of the VRB. The National Registrar assists the Principal Member in managing our administrative affairs.

Risk management

Risk management is an integral part of delivering services to veterans and being accountable. We apply the Department of Veterans' Affairs (the Department) Risk Management Framework to identify and manage strategic and operational risks. Further information in relation to risk management can be found in the Department's Annual report.

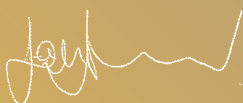
Fraud control

We are committed to preventing, detecting and dealing with fraud in relation to our operations. We apply the Department's Fraud Control Plan and fraud policies. Fraud control awareness forms part of the induction program for new staff and members. Staff participate in the Department's online learning module on fraud control.

Certification of our fraud control arrangements

I, Jane Anderson, certify that the VRB:

- has fraud risk assessments and fraud control plans;
- has in place appropriate mechanisms for preventing, detecting incidents of, investigating or otherwise dealing with, and recording or reporting fraud that meet the specific needs of the VRB, and
- has taken all reasonable measures to deal appropriately with fraud relating to the VRB.



Jane Anderson
Principal Member
18 September 2020

Maintaining ethical standards

We promote and encourage the maintenance of appropriate standards of ethical behaviour in a range of ways both for members and staff.

A Guide to Standards of Conduct for Tribunal Members, published by the Administrative Review Council provides guidance on appropriate conduct and professional behaviour for members.

Our staff are required to work in accordance with the APS Values, Employment Principles and Code of Conduct. Information relating to the APS ethical framework forms part of our induction process and ongoing awareness-raising activities are also undertaken. During the reporting year, specific APS Code of Conduct training was offered to all staff through the Department.

Our people

Our members and staff are integral to our functions as a specialist, independent merits review tribunal. Our need for specialist expertise is met by the appointment of appropriately qualified and experienced members in the categories of Senior Member, Member and Services Member.

Overview of our members

At 30 June 2020, there were 42 members appointed to the VRB. A list of our members is set out below. The Principal Member is the only full-time member of the VRB.

Name	First Appointment	Appointment Expires	State
Principal Member			
Anderson, Jane Elizabeth	12 Nov 2015	30 Jan 2023	NSW
Senior Members			
Bailey, Robyn	12 Nov 2015	11 Nov 2020	NSW
Carlin, Evan	1 Oct 2014	18 July 2023	QLD
Douglass, Robert	1 Oct 2014	11 Nov 2020	VIC
Habersberger, Peter	1 Jan 2019	31 Dec 2023	VIC
Hunt, Louise	12 Nov 2015	31 Dec 2023	WA
Kelly, Michael	1 Jan 2019	31 Dec 2023	QLD
Kramer, Hilary	30 Jul 1998	31 Dec 2023	NSW
Letts, David	1 Jan 2019	31 Dec 2023	NSW
McPhie, June	12 Nov 2015	11 Nov 2020	ACT
Moir, Jillian	1 Jan 2011	11 Nov 2020	NSW
Salu, Peter	1 Oct 2014	18 Jul 2023	SA
Thomae, David	1 Jan 2019	31 Dec 2023	QLD
Trengove, Anne	1 Oct 2014	18 July 2023	SA
Trotter, Susan	1 Jan 2019	31 Dec 2023	QLD
Williams, Tammy	12 Nov 2015	11 Nov 2020	QLD
Services Members			
Bornholt, Mark	1 Jan 2011	11 Nov 2020	ACT
Carrigan, Catherine	19 Jul 2018	18 Jul 2023	VIC
Clark, Scott	1 Jan 2011	11 Nov 2020	QLD
Coghlan, Steven	1 Jan 2019	31 Dec 2023	WA

Name	First Appointment	Appointment Expires	State
Collins, David	1 Mar 2013	18 Jul 2023	VIC
Creagh, Alison	1 Jan 2019	31 Dec 2023	NSW
Crimston, Nadine	12 Nov 2015	11 Nov 2020	NSW
Hart, Simon	1 Jan 2011	11 Nov 2020	NSW
Lewis, John	19 Jul 2018	18 Jul 2023	SA
Maher, Peter	12 Nov 2015	11 Nov 2020	QLD
Regan, Robin	28 May 1999	31 Dec 2023	VIC
Roberts, Francis	12 Nov 2015	11 Nov 2020	QLD
Walker, Jennifer	19 Jul 2018	18 Jul 2023	QLD
White, Sophia	1 Jan 2019	31 Dec 2023	NSW
Young, Warwick	31 Mar 2008	31 Dec 2023	NSW
Members			
Austin, Christopher	12 Nov 2015	11 Nov 2020	QLD
Brennan, Sharon	12 Nov 2015	11 Nov 2020	VIC
Corbould, Linda	12 Nov 2015	11 Nov 2020	TAS
Desses, Mary	1 Jan 2019	31 Dec 2023	NSW
Harte, Jane	19 Jul 2018	18 Jul 2023	QLD
Henry, Leith	19 Jul 2018	18 Jul 2023	QLD
Kerr, Sandra	12 Nov 2015	11 Nov 2020	VIC
Lumb, Josephine	12 Nov 2015	11 Nov 2020	ACT
MacDonald, Amanda	1 Oct 2007	18 Jul 2023	NSW
McLaughlin, Robert	1 Jan 2019	31 Dec 2023	NSW
Wyatt, Neville	12 Nov 2015	11 Nov 2020	NSW



Overview of our staff

At 30 June 2020, 22.4 full time equivalent staff members had been made available to the VRB by the Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs. In the reporting year, we did not have any Senior Executive Staff or APS Level 1–3 positions. Our staff are based in our Sydney and Brisbane offices only.

Classification	NSW	QLD
APS Level 4	3	4.4
APS Level 5	3	0
APS Level 6	3	1
Executive Level 1	6	1
Executive Level 2	1	0



Employment agreements and arrangements for staff

At 30 June 2019, all on-going staff were covered by the Department's Enterprise Agreement (2019–2022) and one staff member had an individual flexibility arrangement. Salary ranges available to staff which are set out in the agreement are noted below:

Job Classification	Salary Range (reporting year)
APS Level 4	\$71,641–\$76,410
APS Level 5	\$79,867–\$83,233
APS Level 6	\$87,783–\$99,680
Executive Level 1	\$110,428–\$121,264
Executive Level 2	\$133,176–\$149,897

Strengthen workforce diversity

We are committed to reflecting the diversity of the Australian community in our workforce and building an inclusive culture in which employee backgrounds, skills and views enrich our working environment and quality of work. Strengthening workforce diversity includes developing a supportive and inclusive culture. We have contributed to and apply in our recruitment strategies, the Department's *Diversity Strategy 2018–2023* and *Gender Equality Action Plan*.

In implementing the Diversity Strategy we have ensured a range of flexible working arrangements are available to our staff to effectively balance their work, family, caring, other responsibilities and interests. Our flexible working arrangements for staff, including part-time and home based work, have been focused on rethinking how our work can be done in a way that improves service delivery for our users. From April 2020 all VRB staff and members undertook home based work in response to the COVID19 global pandemic.

We value diversity in the workplace and at the end of the reporting year 77.7 per cent of the VRB's staff and 52.4 per cent of our members were women, with strong representation across all classification levels.

Principal Member	Number	%
Female	1	100
Male	0	
Total	1	100%

Senior Member	Number	%
Female	8	53.3%
Male	7	46.7%
Total	15	100%

Services Member	Number	%
Female	5	45.5%
Male	6	54.5%
Total	11	100%

Member	Number	%
Female	8	72.7%
Male	3	27.3%
Total	11	100%

Staff	Number	%
Female	17.4	77.7%
Male	5	22.3%
Total	22.4	100%



Work health and safety

We are committed to providing and maintaining a safe and healthy work environment through cooperative, consultative relationships. We apply the Department's established work health and safety (WHS) strategies and systems that promote continuous WHS improvement and a positive safety culture.

In the reporting year, we participated in regular workplace hazard inspections conducted jointly by managers and trained workplace health and safety representatives. Our staff were also able to access Department sponsored training programs including Accidental Counselling, Mental Health First Aid, Planning and Managing Change and Domestic and Family Violence Awareness. Staff were also able to access annual flu vaccinations, subsidies for eyeglasses and fitness equipment and ergonomic workstation assessments.

More broadly, members and staff are also able to access VRB specific and external training programs that are designed to promote a healthy culture for mental and physical wellbeing. Some of these external training opportunities have included programs by the Council of Australasian Tribunals and the Law Societies of the various states and territories.

Notifiable incidents, investigations and compensation

No notifiable incidents arising out of the conduct of our operations occurred in the reporting year, nor were there any compensation claims.

Skilled to deliver justice

Ensuring our people are properly skilled to deliver high-quality, specialised services continues to be a key priority. In 2019–20, we delivered a wide range of activities to meet the needs of members and staff and strengthen the capability of the VRB.

Delivering targeted skills development for staff and members to meet VRB needs

VRB members and Conference Registrars participate in monthly sessions as a part of our online *Learn and Connect* program. Our most experienced members, staff and external presenters share their expertise with the membership. Highlights to date include writing reasons for decisions, ensuring procedural fairness, service eligibility, incapacity cases and permanent impairment assessments. To support our fast-tracked digital transformation, we also provided members with training to support the transition to virtual hearings during the COVID19 pandemic. Our suite of VRB training webinars also remains available for members and staff to view on an ongoing basis.

Members and conference registrars attended a range of external professional development online seminars during 2019–20, including sessions arranged by the Council of Australasian Tribunals and the Law Societies of the various states and territories.

Members and conference registrars were also provided with further revised decision writing templates and guides. Additionally, a refreshed, regular email update of notable cases from the AAT and court was provided to all VRB staff and members.

We continued to survey our members and staff for their feedback to ensure our learning and development program continues to meet their needs and the needs of the VRB.

Staff performance management program

All of our staff are required to participate in the performance management program established by the Department. The Scheme requires staff to have a performance agreement which sets out capability and behavioural expectations required in their role as well as learning and development priorities. It also covers the processes for reviewing and rating performance, and performance-based salary advancement.

In 2019–20, in addition to the learning activities provided by the VRB our staff were also able to participate in the various training and development programs offered by the Department.

Our staff were also able to access a Studies Assistance Scheme, which offers financial support and/or study leave to develop their own capability, and that of the VRB, through vocational and tertiary education.



Building a united culture to deliver justice

During the reporting year, we strengthened opportunities for greater collaboration and communication across the VRB including twice weekly senior staff and registry discussions, weekly Conference Registrar meetings and monthly ADR forums. These meetings have allowed us to engage members and staff in consultation around our transformation journey and harness a shared vision for how we deliver justice to veterans. During our remote work arrangements in response to COVID19 we have also engaged staff in a daily 'stand-ups' and weekly one on one meetings to ensure that our people continued to feel connected and engaged in keeping justice alive for veterans.

Productivity gains

Significant productivity gains were made following our move to virtual services and home based work in late March 2020. During March–June our productivity increased by 44 per cent and our time taken to finalise applications improved by 46 per cent. Importantly, user satisfaction also improved following our move to virtual services. During March to June 2020, we received 45 per cent of our compliments for the entire financial year.

Additionally, our initiatives to improve case allocation, case management practices and support for members and conference registrars has allowed us to clear more than 100 per cent of our case holding.

The fast-tracking of our digital transformation including the transition to virtual hearings. Online dispute resolution (ODR) will allow us to achieve greater efficiencies in the coming year.

Purchasing

We can access the support provided by the Department's Contract Advisory Unit in relation to procurement and contracting activities in accordance with the Commonwealth Procurement Framework.

Consultants

We may engage consultants where independent research or short-term projects are required; or for specialist knowledge or skills that are not available within the VRB. During the reporting year, we did not enter into any new consultancy contracts.

AusTender

Annual reports contain information about actual expenditure on contracts for consultancies. Information on the estimated value of contracts and consultancies is available on the AusTender website: www.tenders.gov.au.

Financial Information

While we are an independent statutory tribunal, we are not a separate Commonwealth entity under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*, but are considered a Secondary Australian Government Body, receiving our funding and corporate services from the Department of Veterans' Affairs. As a result, we do not have a budget allocation in the Portfolio Budget Statements

In 2019–20, we were provided an allocation of \$5,516M which was a small decrease in funding compared to the previous financial year.

In the reporting year, the majority of our operating expenditure was related to payroll costs for members and registry staff in the direct delivery of our services. Our travel expenditure reduced significantly in the reporting year following the introduction of virtual hearings. Prior to COVID19 some travel costs were incurred to ensure the availability of members to conduct in-person hearings in particular locations including regional areas, as well as other services such as conducting face-to-face advocates forums and training. While the majority of our accommodation costs are met by the Department, a small property cost was also generated pre-pandemic by the hire of hearing and conference rooms in other tribunal premises for in-person hearings, where we no longer have a physical registry presence.

Veterans' Review Board Expenditure

	2018–19 (\$'000)	2019–20 (\$'000)
Salaries (includes superannuation)		
Members	2,627	2,211
Staff (includes o/time & temps)	2,795	2,998
TOTAL	5,422	5,209
Travel (includes fares, accommodation and allowances)	335	120
Supplies and services		
Printing, postage, stationery and other office expenses	128	176
Communication and couriers	2	2
External training	13	9
Advertising	13	-
TOTAL	178	187
GRAND TOTAL	5,913	5,516

Appendix 1

Membership Biographies

Principal Member of the Veterans' Review Board

Ms Jane Anderson

Ms Jane Anderson was appointed by the Governor-General as Principal Member of the Veterans' Review Board, commencing in the role in late January 2018. For two years prior to her appointment, Ms Anderson had served as a member of the Veterans' Review Board.

Ms Anderson is a lawyer with 20 years' experience, including as a former Senior Member of the NSW Civil & Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) and a former Deputy President of the South Australian Guardianship Board, where she presided over legal proceedings involving people with impaired decision-making capacity. Ms Anderson was also a Board member of the Mental Illness Fellowship of South Australia, overseeing the management of a not-for-profit organisation providing advocacy and support for people with mental illness, and their families.

As well as her expertise in administrative law, Ms Anderson previously practised in criminal law, enjoying a career as a senior lawyer with the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions, during which she appeared as prosecuting counsel in criminal courts and provided legal advice to government departments and agencies.

Ms Anderson has a strong interest in human rights and international law, and in 1999 she completed a Master of Law degree in international law at Cambridge University, UK. She is currently an officer of the Access to Justice and Legal Aid Committee of the International Bar Association, a global organisation of legal practitioners, bar associations and law societies.

Ms Anderson has a keen interest in the participation and contribution of veterans and current serving members of the Australian Defence Force, and has family members who are serving, or have previously served, in the Australian Army, the Royal Australian Navy and the Royal Australian Air Force.

Colonel Christopher Austin, ADC

Colonel Austin has served in the Australian Army since 1980. He is currently an Active Reservist holding the rank of Colonel and is posted as the Deputy Adjutant General – Army. He also conducts complex inquiries for the ADF within Australia and overseas and is appointed as an Assistant Inspector General of the ADF. He has experienced operational service in East Timor, the Middle East and the Queensland Floods and is an Aide de Camp to the Governor General. Having enjoyed a corporate career within the building industry for over 20 years, Chris now runs his own consulting business and sits on a number of Boards and Committees. He was appointed to the VRB in 2015.

Ms Robyn Bailey

Ms Bailey holds Bachelors of Law and Arts as well as a Master of Laws degree from the University of New South Wales. After working in private practice she was appointed as a Member of the Guardianship Tribunal in 2007 and to the Consumer Trader and Tenancy Tribunal in 2009. She is currently employed as a Senior Member of the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal and also works as a Mediator in the District Court of NSW, the Workers Compensation Commission and for her own company. She is also facilitator for the Defence Abuse Response Taskforce.

Brigadier Mark Bornholt (Retd)

Mark Bornholt graduated from Officer School Portsea in 1978. He served in the 3rd and 6th Battalions of the Royal Australian Regiment. He was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for his leadership of the 1st Battalion and was commended for distinguished service during

the war against Iraq. His senior appointments included Chief of Staff Land Headquarters and Commandant Royal Military College of Australia. He retired in 2009 and worked as the CEO of a business unit of a publicly listed company until 2014 when he was appointed to the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal. He remains a Chief of Army delegate for Redress of Grievance issues, a Director of the Royal Australian Regiment Foundation and is the Colonel

Commandant of the Australian Army Band Corps. He previously served as a Services Member of the VRB in 2010–2011.

Ms Sharon Brennan

Ms Brennan is an Accredited Mediator and graduate in Arts, Education and Business. She has served in the Citizens Military Forces, as an Intelligence Officer for ASIO and in senior HR roles in the public sector. In 2006 she was appointed as a Member of the Veterans' Review Tribunal and has also worked as a Community Member of the Podiatrists' Registration Board and as an

Independent Merits Reviewer for the Independent Protection Assessment Office. Since 1995 she has been employed as a Conciliation Officer for the Accident Compensation Conciliation Service. She was employed as a Conciliation Officer for the Accident Compensation Conciliation Service for 23 years.

Colonel Evan Carlin

Colonel Carlin holds Bachelor degrees in Arts and Laws. He joined the Australian Army as a Legal Officer in 1987, and has extensive legal experience with the Australian Defence Force, including postings to the UK (NATO), Iraq, the Balkans and Sumatra. Colonel Carlin was appointed to the VRB as a Senior Member in 2014.

Colonel Catherine Carrigan

Colonel Catherine (Bunny) Carrigan has over 30 years' service in the Australian Army and is a currently serving member of the Army Reserve. She served for 20 years as a logistics officer in the Australian Regular Army before transitioning to the Army Reserve in 2005. She saw operational service in Somalia in 1994. On leaving the full-time Army, Colonel Carrigan established a niche supply chain and business reform consultancy which she still owns and manages. She has

been active on several committees and Boards, has been an Honorary ADC to the Governor of Victoria, and is currently the Victorian/ Tasmanian Colonel Commandant for the Royal Australian Corps of Transport. Her qualifications include a Bachelor of Applied Science, a Graduate Diploma in Transport and Distribution, a Masters of Defence Studies, a Masters of Business (Logistics Management), and she is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. She was appointed a VRB Services member in 2018.

Dr Scott Clark

Dr Clark is a Psychologist with a background in both clinical and organisational psychology. He has a particular interest in psychology of old age and has worked in acute, extended care and community services. Dr Clark has served in the Army Reserve since 1990 initially as a Rifleman before becoming a Psychologist in 1997.

Mr Steven Coghlan

Steve served as an Army Signals Officer from 1998 to 2006 during which time he saw operational service in Bougainville and Pakistan. Since transitioning he has held senior management positions within both the telecommunications and broader infrastructure sectors.

He is a graduate of both the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) and Royal Military College—Duntroon (RMC-D) and holds a Bachelor's degree in Politics (UNSW), a Master's degree in International Relations (Macq) and Diplomas in Business, Personnel Management and Administration.

He spends his spare time helping serve the families of our deceased veterans as part of Legacy WA.

Colonel David Collins

Colonel David Collins has served in the Australian Regular Army and the Army Reserve. He holds a Bachelor of Education and Training, Diploma of Law and a Masters of Management and Governance. He has deployed on operations several times. In 2005 he was the Officer in command of the 2nd rotation of the ADF Medical Detachment attached to the US Theatre Hospital, Balad, Iraq. In 2006 the 2nd rotation ADF Medical Detachment was awarded a Meritorious Unit Citation for its efforts in Iraq.

He is currently employed by the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne and St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne. He is also a member of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency's, health performance and professional standards panel. He was re-appointed as a VRB Services member in July 2018.

Wing Commander Linda Corbould OAM

Ms Corbould had full-time service in the Royal Australian Air Force from 1981 to 2011 as an Officer and as a Pilot. Since 2011 she has been acting as an Officer in the Royal Australian Air Force Reserve. She completed a Diploma of Military Studies at the Australian Command and Staff College in 2005.

Brigadier Alison Creagh CSC

Brigadier Alison Creagh CSC was appointed to the Veterans' Review Board as a Services Member for a five-year term in January 2019. She also Chairs the ACT Veterans' Advisory Council, the Board of Governors for The Road Home and The Hospital Research Foundation ICT and Cyber Security Committee. She is a Non-Executive Director of The Hospital Research Foundation, an ACT Defence Ambassador and member of the ACT Defence Industry Advisory Board, a member of the AustCyber Canberra Node Industry Advisory Group and Strategic Adviser for the University of NSW Defence Research Institute. Brigadier Creagh is the Representative Colonel Commandant for the Royal Australian Corps of Signals. Brigadier Creagh retired from the Australian Regular Army in March 2015 after a 30-year career and continues to serve in the Army Reserve. She served on operations in Cambodia East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Mrs Nadine Crimston

Nadine Crimston holds a Bachelor degrees in Business and Law and Masters in Business Administration and Law. Nadine served in the Royal Australian Air Force in logistics. In addition to her role at the VRB she also works as in-house counsel for a medical devices company.

Ms Mary Desses

Ms Desses has been appointed as a Member of the Veterans' Review Board commencing 1 January 2019 for a period of five years. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from Griffith University, a Bachelor of Laws from the University of New South Wales, a Graduate Diploma of Adult

Education, and a Vocational Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution. She was admitted as a solicitor in 1992.

Mary worked as an Associate for two Federal Court judges, a Mediation Officer at the Retail Tenancy Disputes Unit, an advocate for the Repatriation Commission and a Conference Registrar at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

Mary is a nationally accredited mediator with over twenty years' experience as an Alternative Dispute Resolution practitioner.

Major Robert Douglass

Mr Douglass holds Bachelor degrees in Economics and Laws from Monash University and a Masters degree in Arts (Military History) from the Australian Defence Force Academy. He joined the Department of Veterans' Affairs in 1993 and was an Assistant-Director in the Rehabilitation and Compensation Group from 1995 to 2010, before working as a Senior Lawyer in the Legal Services Group from 2010 to 2014. Mr Douglass has served as a Legal Officer in the Australian Army from 2007 and remains an active member of the Reserve. He was appointed a Member of the VRB in 2014 and a Senior Member in 2015.

Commodore Peter Habersberger AM RFD RAN (Ret'd)

Dr Peter Habersberger graduated in medicine from the University of Melbourne in 1965, and subsequently studied overseas in the USA and the United Kingdom. He has been on the staff of the Alfred Hospital since 1966, and presently practices in Cardiology at Cabrini Hospital, Malvern. In 1968 he joined the Royal Australian Naval Reserve as a medical officer, was appointed Principal Health Consultant to the RAN and Director of Reserve Health Support in 1989. In 1998 he was appointed Assistant Surgeon General to the ADF, serving in East Timor as a specialist medical officer in 2000; he was transferred to the RAN retired list in 2006. He continues to see patients for the ADF and the Civil Aviation Safety Authority.

Commodore Simon J Hart CSC RAN (Ret'd)

Simon Hart served in the ADF for 33 years from 1973 until transferring to the Naval Reserve in 2006. Simon's operational background is primarily in guided missile Frigates and Destroyers with extensive Command experience in Destroyers. His two key positions in the Navy Senior Leadership Group were Director General, Navy Personnel and Training Organisation; and Commander, Australian Surface Combatant Force Element Group. He is a graduate of the Royal Australian Naval College; University of NSW; US Navy Postgraduate School (Computer Science); and Kings College, London (International Relations). He is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management and a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Simon was appointed to the VRB as a Services Member in 2011.

Dr Jane Harte

A consultant corporate psychologist in the defence, security, mining, higher education and health sectors in Australia and the UK, Dr Harte has also served in the Australian Army Psychology Corps (Reserve) for nearly 30 years. She has degrees from Australian and Swedish universities and academic appointments with James Cook and Southern Queensland Universities in addition to delivering annual lectures in the Graduate School of Management at St. Andrews University in Scotland. In 2007 Dr Harte was appointed to the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal in Canberra as one of the foundation members, with her tenure completing in 2015. Subsequently she has been appointed as a professional member of the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal and as a researcher member on the Defence and Department of Veterans' Affairs Human Research Ethics Committee.

Dr Leith Henry

Dr Henry is a Psychologist with significant leadership experience in workplace health, including work related illness/injury and workers' compensation. She holds a Bachelor degree in Psychology (with Honours) and a PhD in Organisational Psychology. Dr Henry commenced duties in 1995 as an Army Reserve Psychologist, serving periods of full time service and deploying on operations.

Group Captain Louise Hunt

Ms Hunt is a graduate in Law and holds a postgraduate Master of International Law. She entered private practice as a Solicitor in 1983 and joined the Royal Australian Air Force Reserve Legal Panel in 1984. She is currently a Panel Leader for the Royal Australian Air Force Specialist Reserve Legal Panel. Ms Hunt leads teams conducting military justice audits at Australian Defence Force establishments for the Inspector General of the Australian Defence Force. She was appointed a Services Member in 2015 and a Senior Member in 2019.

Lieutenant Colonel Michael (Mike) Kelly

Lieutenant Colonel Kelly holds Bachelor degrees in Arts and Laws and a Graduate Diploma in Management. He is an admitted legal practitioner and the Director of an incorporated legal practice. He joined the Australian Army in 1986 and has held a range of RAAC regimental, and staff appointments. His service includes operational service in the Middle East Area of Operations.

Ms Sandra Kerr

Ms Kerr has extensive experience as a member of Federal Tribunals having previously been appointed to the Migration Review Tribunal, Refugee Review Tribunal and Social Security Appeals Tribunal. She holds a Bachelor of Laws from the University of New South Wales and a Masters in Law from the Australian National University. Ms Kerr also has qualifications in Medical Imaging and Executive Leadership. She served as a Legal Officer in the Army Reserve and has family members who have participated in various Australian military operations.

Ms Hilary Kramer

She has administrative law experience on the Social Security Appeals Tribunal, Mental Health Review Tribunal, Guardianship Board and in assessing offshore asylum-seeker refugee status claims. She has also undertaken mediation training.

Previously Hilary worked for the Legal Aid Commission representing clients in criminal, prison and mental health law. She has also worked in criminal law research and compiled the report of the Women in Prison Task Force to the Minister for Corrective Services.

Hilary was appointed a member of the VRB in 1998 and senior member in 2006.

Associate Professor David Letts AM CSM RAN

David Letts completed more than 30 years of fulltime service in the RAN at the end of 2012. During his military career David worked as supply officer and a legal officer, as well as holding senior appointments in Navy and Defence. He is now the Director of the ANU College of Law's Centre for Military and Security Law where his academic teaching and research interests centre on the application of the law to all aspects of military legal practice.

Major John Lewis (Retd)

John Lewis is a Barrister & Solicitor in private practice with Lindbloms Lawyers in Adelaide and a graduate of the University of NSW, University of New England and the College of Law. John is a nationally accredited dispute resolution practitioner, an accredited mediator with the Law Society of South Australia, and undertakes pro bono mediations with the Adelaide Magistrates Court. He is also graduate of the Royal Military College Duntroon and his military service included two tours of service with the United Nations in Cambodia. His Unit was awarded a Meritorious Unit Citation in the 2014 Australian Day Honours List.

Ms Josephine Lumb

Ms Lumb holds bachelor degrees in Arts and Law. She has 20 years' plus experience in both legal and policy roles across a range of Commonwealth Government agencies. Ms Lumb worked with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade from 1998–2011, including serving on diplomatic posting in Chile from 2001–2004. She also served on the Defence Abuse Response Taskforce

in 2014–15. Ms Lumb was appointed to the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal as a member in 2017.

Ms Amanda MacDonald

Ms MacDonald has extensive experience working in Commonwealth Administrative Review Tribunals. She was a member, senior member and the Deputy Principal Member of the Migration Review Tribunal and the Refugee Review Tribunal, a member of the Social Security Appeals Tribunal and a Conference Registrar and District Registrar of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. She is currently a part-time member of the Superannuation Complaints Tribunal. She is also contracted to the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources to implement changes to the Commonwealth biosecurity system. She holds a Bachelor of Science and a Masters in Administrative Law and Policy from the University of Sydney.

Colonel Peter Maher (Retd)

Colonel Maher graduated from the Royal Military College, Duntroon in 1973. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Military Studies and a Graduate Diploma in Management Studies, and he is a 1984 graduate of the Command and Staff College, Queenscliff. Colonel Maher has overseas service with the United Nations in Kashmir, the British Army in Germany and the United States Marine Corps at Quantico, Virginia. He was the Deputy Chief of Operations, HQ Multi-National Security Transition Command in Baghdad, Iraq in 2006. He completed his Army full-time service in 2007 as the Commander, Land Warfare Centre, Canungra. Colonel Maher was appointed to the VRB in March 2013.

Professor Robert McLaughlin RAN

Prof Rob McLaughlin is Professor of Military and security Law at UNSW Canberra. He researches, publishes, and teaches in the areas of Law of Armed Conflict, Law of the Sea, Maritime Security Law and Maritime Law Enforcement, and Military Law. He routinely engages in research activities, and course development and delivery, with the ICRC, the Australian Red Cross, the International Institute for Humanitarian Law, and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. Rob joined academia after a career in the Royal Australian Navy as a Seaman officer and a Legal officer.

Mrs June McPhie

Mrs McPhie is a Law graduate with a postgraduate Master of Laws and professional qualifications in Mediation and Physiotherapy. Since 2000 she has been a Director of the University of Sydney Law Extension Committee and Member of the Board for the Faculty of Law at both the University of Sydney and the University of Technology. Having previously served as the President of the Law Society she is currently a Member of their Professional Conduct Committee. She has also been working as the Principal Cost Assessor for the Supreme Court of NSW since 2010.

Ms Jillian Moir

Ms Moir holds a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) and Law from Macquarie University and a Bachelor Science (Psychology) from Wollongong University. She was admitted as a solicitor of the Supreme Court of NSW in 1993. Ms Moir has many years' experience in mediation and conciliation in

a number of jurisdictions. In addition to her role at the VRB she is a part-time Senior member (Legal) and mediator at the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT). She was a part-time Legal member of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (formerly Social Security Appeals Tribunal) between 2006 and 2017.

Colonel Robin Regan CSC (Retd)

Colonel Robin (Rob) Regan, CSC has over 34 years' service in the Australian Army. He enlisted as a soldier in April 1964, attended the Officer Cadet School, Portsea in 1966 and was commissioned into the Royal Australian Army Service Corps. He saw operational service with 26 Transport Company in Nui Dat, South Vietnam in 1969/1970. On the disbandment of the Royal Australian Army Service Corps in 1973 he was reallocated to the Royal Australian Corps of Transport and served in a variety of regimental and staff postings including exchanger postings with the British Army and the US Army. He is also graduate of the Australian Command and Staff College and the Joint Services Staff College. In 1988/1989 he commanded the Army School of Transport and in 1990 he was promoted Colonel and served in senior logistics postings until his retirement in February 1998.

In March 1998, Colonel Regan was appointed as a full-time advocate with the RSL Melbourne Branch, representing veterans before the Veterans' Review Board. In August 1999, he was appointed as a Services Member on the Veterans' Review Board, a position he has held since.

Major General Francis Roberts AO (Retd)

Mr Roberts served as an Army Officer from 1970 to 2005. He then held a Senior Executive Service position in the Department of Defence from 2005 until 2013 before undertaking private consultancy work until his retirement in 2014. Mr Roberts has graduated with a Bachelor of Civil Engineering, Master of Science and Graduate Diploma in Management Studies.

Dr Peter Salu

Dr Salu holds a Bachelor of Laws (with Honours) and a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Adelaide. He commenced legal practice as a solicitor in 1988, and since 2006 he has practised as a barrister. Dr Salu was appointed to the VRB as a Senior Member in 2014.

Brigadier David Thomae

Brigadier David Thomae graduated from the Royal Military College Duntroon in 1988 and was appointed to the Royal Australian Infantry Corps. He has commanded a platoon, company and battalion in the Infantry and is currently the Commander of the 11th Brigade, the reserve brigade in Queensland. His operational service has been with the United Nations in Syria, Lebanon, East Timor and Iraq. Since 2003 he has practised as a barrister in Queensland.

Group Captain Anne Trengove

Group Captain Anne Trengove was reappointed to the Board in July 2018 as a Senior Member, having previously served on the Board from August 2014 to February 2018. She also sits as a member of the Defence Force Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal.

Group Captain Trengove is a Reserve Legal Officer in the Royal Australian Air Force and has served since 1997. She holds a Bachelor degrees in Arts (Jurisprudence) and Laws from the University of Adelaide, and a Graduate Diploma in Military Law (with merit) from the Australian National University.

Mrs Susan Trotter

Mrs Trotter holds Bachelors of Law and Commerce from the University of Queensland. From 1989 to 1991, Mrs Trotter worked as an Associate with the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and then worked in private practice as a lawyer for 13 years. Mrs Trotter is currently also a member of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (practising in its Migration and Review, Child Support and Social Security and National Disability Insurance Scheme Divisions) and previously, from 2007, was a member of the Social Security Appeals Tribunal. Further, Mrs Trotter has been a member of the Migration Review Tribunal/ Refugee Review Tribunal and a reviewer for the Independent Protection Assessment Office. Additionally, Mrs Trotter is an accredited Mediator.

Ms Jennifer Walker

Jennifer served 16 years in the Australian Intelligence Corps (Army Reserve) attaining the rank of Major. She holds a Bachelor of Business and a Diploma of Market Research and is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Jennifer has a varied career in technical, management and organisational development roles, spanning over 30 years, in the private and public sectors, working at all levels of government and in a number of jurisdictions. She also

has had extensive experience in consulting including the conduct of board reviews, director recruitment, organization reviews and grievance investigations. She was the CEO of Legacy Australia from 2014 to 2018 and Chaired the Strategic Governance Board of the Advocacy Training and Development Program. Jennifer was initially appointed to the VRB in March 2013 and was reappointed in July 2018.

Commander Sophia White RAN

Sophia White served in the Royal Australian Navy for 16 years, full time, transferring to the Active Reserves in 2018. She has operational experience in Afghanistan, on border protection

operations, in Headquarters Joint Operations Command and served as the Fleet Legal Officer in 2017. She is a lawyer and holds postgraduate qualifications including a Master of Laws (Maritime Law) and Master of Military and Defence Studies. She is a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Ms Tammy Williams

Ms Williams has graduated with a Bachelor of Laws and was admitted in 2002 as a barrister. She began her legal career at the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions in 1997. She has served as a Member of the National Indigenous Council and National Human Rights Consultation Committee before moving into Tribunal work in 2008 with the Children Services Tribunal. She has been a Sessional Member of the Queensland Civil and Administration Tribunal (QCAT) since 2009.

Commander Neville Wyatt RFD RAN

Mr Wyatt served full-time in the Royal Australian Navy from 1981 to 1993. Since then he has continued to serve with the Royal Australian Navy Reserve. He is a graduate in Law and Communications. Since 1993 he has been in practice as a private solicitor. In 1999, he started up his own successful firm now known as Wyatts Lawyers and Advisors, which he continues to run with his legal practitioner wife.

Colonel Warwick Young OAM

Warwick Young has served as an officer in Australian Army since 1991, in both a full-time and part-time capacity. Warwick saw active service in Iraq in 2006 and is currently the Deputy Commander—Training at Headquarters 5 Brigade.

Warwick has a diverse background and is a multi-award winning filmmaker. His films have won multiple awards when screening at several international film festivals.

In 2014 Warwick was instrumental in the design and delivery of the Australian Defence Force Theatre Project, a joint venture between the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and the Sydney Theatre Company.

On Australia Day 2019, Warwick was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for services to veterans and their families. Warwick has been a Services Member of the Veterans' Review Board since 2008.



Appendix 2

Advertising and market research

We did not commission any advertising or undertake any market research in 2019–20.

Grants

We did not administer any grants programs in 2019–20.

Ecologically sustainable development and environmental performance

The VRB does not develop or administer legislation or policy relating to the environment but takes steps to ensure our operations are environmentally sustainable. We work closely with the Department who provides our accommodation to ensure compliance with a range of Australian Government policies, including the Energy Efficiency in Government Operations Policy and the National Waste Policy. More information can be found in the Department's Annual Report.

We also limit our impact on the environment in day-to-day operations by implementing simple measures such as ensuring lights and electrical devices are switched off when not required, encouraging double-sided printing, providing facilities to support staff who walk or cycle to work, and recycling office waste.

Appendix 3

Glossary

AAT	Administrative Appeals Tribunal.
ADF	Australian Defence Force.
ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
ADR processes	Procedures and services for the resolution of disputes, which includes outreach, conferencing, , neutral evaluation and case appraisal.
AD(JR) Act	<i>Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977</i>
Adjournment	Suspension of a hearing.
Applicant	A person or body that has applied for a review (to the VRB or AAT), or applied for an allowance or increase in pension (to DVA).
Applied provisions	Provisions of the VEA that set out the VRB's powers and functions, which are applied by s353 of the MRCA for the purpose of the VRB's review of an original determination under Part 4 of Chapter 8 of the MRCA.
Assessment matter	A case under the VEA concerning the assessment of the rate of disability pension.
Assessment period	Period over which the decision-maker must assess the rate or rates of pension that were payable. It begins on the day the claim or AFI was lodged (the 'application day') and ends on the day the decision-maker determines the claim or AFI, or determines the review.
Attendant Allowance	A fortnightly allowance paid towards the cost of an attendant for a person needing such assistance and who has accepted disabilities involving one of a number of types of amputations or severe types of disability, or an injury or disease similar in effect or severity to a disease of the cerebro-spinal system.
Case Manager	VRB staff member who looks after the administrative matters concerning an application for review.
Case appraisal	The Conference Registrar can request a Case Appraisal be conducted by a VRB member as part of the ADR process. It involves a VRB member examining an application with a view to clarifying the issues, checking that the VRB has jurisdiction and that the applicant has standing, checking sufficiency of information, and readiness for hearing and then providing a non-binding opinion. This is requested to assist the parties to finalise the application.

Certificate of readiness for hearing	A notice to the VRB that all the material on which the applicant wishes to rely has been lodged and the applicant is ready to proceed to a hearing
Claimant	A person who has made a claim for a pension (to DVA) or claim for acceptance of liability and/or compensation (to the MRCC).
CLIK	Consolidated Library of Information & Knowledge: a computer research tool for decision-makers and pension officers and representatives produced by DVA.
Conference	A meeting conducted by a VRB member or Conference Registrar with the applicant and/or their representatives as part of the ADR program. Conferences allow for discussion and clarification of issues, identification of further evidence that would assist to resolve the application, and consideration of whether the application can be settled without the need for a hearing.
Deledio	<i>Repatriation Commission v Deledio</i> (1998) 83 FCR 82. A Federal Court case that established a four step process by which the beyond reasonable doubt and reasonable hypothesis standard of satisfaction is to be applied in the context of cases to which the Statements of Principles regime applies.
Directions Hearing	A hearing conducted by either the Principal Member or a Senior Member of the VRB for the purpose of clarifying issues that are delaying the progress of an application.
DVA	Department of Veterans' Affairs.
Entitlement matter	A case under the VEA concerning whether an injury, disease, or death is war- or defence-caused.
ESO	Ex-service organisation.
FOI	Freedom of Information: the right to obtain documents from a Commonwealth Department or agency under the <i>Freedom of Information Act 1982</i> .
Liability matter	A case under the MRCA concerning whether an injury, disease, or death is service-related.
Member	A member of the VRB appointed by the Governor-General.
MRCA	<i>Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004</i> .
MRCC	Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission.
Neutral Evaluation	An option under the ADR process for the applicant to request that a VRB member provides a non-binding opinion on the likely outcome of a case.
Original determination	A determination of the MRCC or a service chief under the MRCA that is capable of being reviewed by the VRB or being reconsidered by another delegate of the MRCC or a service chief.

Outreach	The first step in the ADR process is one mandatory outreach. The purpose of outreach is to explain VRB practices to unrepresented applicants and to give them an opportunity to consider representation. For all other cases, the purpose of an outreach is to discuss how the application will proceed before the Board.
Principal Member	The member of the VRB appointed by the Governor-General who is responsible for the national management of the VRB, and who must have legal qualifications.
Reconsideration	A new consideration or review of an original determination under s347 or s349 of the MRCA.
Registrar	VRB staff member who manages a State Registry of the VRB. Registry
Respondent	A person or body against whom a claim, application, or appeal is brought; the party that responds to an application brought by an applicant.
s31 review	Review by a delegate of the Repatriation Commission.
s37 documents	Documents prepared by the decision-maker for the purpose of an AAT review (also called 'T-documents').
s137 report	Documents prepared by DVA for the purpose of a VRB review.
s148(1) letter	Letter sent to an applicant by the VRB seeking advice concerning how or if the applicant will appear or be represented at the VRB hearing.
s148(6A) request	Request sent by VRB Registrar as delegate of Principal Member to the Secretary of DVA or MRCC seeking further investigation or documents.
s151 adjournment	Adjournment of a hearing by VRB usually at the applicant's request, but can be for any reason.
s152 adjournment	Adjournment of a VRB hearing in order that the presiding member can ask the Secretary of DVA or the MRCC for further investigation or further documents.
s152 request	The request made to the Secretary of DVA or the MRCC by the presiding member of the VRB panel for further investigation or documents.
s347 reconsideration	Reconsideration of an original determination by a delegate of the MRCC or a service chief at their own discretion.
s349 reconsideration	Reconsideration of an original determination by a delegate of the MRCC or a service chief at the request of a claimant. If such a request is made, the person cannot also seek review of the same determination by the VRB.

Senior Member	A member of the VRB appointed by the Governor-General who usually presides at VRB hearings, and who usually has legal qualifications.
Service chief	The Chief of the Army, the Chief of the Air Force, or the Chief of the Navy.
Services Member	A member of the VRB appointed by the Governor-General who was nominated by an organisation representing veterans throughout Australia, and who usually has broad and extensive military experience.
SoP	Statement of Principles determined by the Repatriation Medical Authority.
Special Rate	The highest rate of disability pension (also called the 'TPI' rate). It is paid if the person is blind due to accepted disabilities, or if the person meets certain tests concerning incapacity for work. One of these tests involves being unable to do more than 8 hours of remunerative work a week due to accepted disabilities.
SRCA	<i>Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988.</i>
Telephone hearing	A VRB hearing conducted by telephone between a VRB hearing room and another location.
TIP	Training and Information Program funded by DVA for training pension and welfare officers and representatives, conducted by ESO, DVA and VRB trainers.
VEA	<i>Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986.</i>
Veteran	A person who has rendered eligible war service under Part II of the VEA.
Video hearing	A VRB hearing conducted by video-link between a VRB hearing room and another location.
VRB	Veterans' Review Board.
War-caused death	A death for which liability has been accepted under Part II of the VEA as related to eligible war service.
War-caused disease	A disease for which liability has been accepted under Part II of the VEA as related to eligible war service.
War-caused injury	An injury for which liability has been accepted under Part II of the VEA as related to eligible war service.

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Veterans' Review Board

Veterans' Review Board Annual Report 2019–2020

Published by the Veterans' Review Board

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ISSN 0-818-0679

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Publication no. P04171

Photos by Boaz Nothman

