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# PORT STEPHENS VETERANS NETWORK ANNUAL REPORT 2016



Port Stephens Veterans Network  
Post Office Box 130  
Tanilba Bay NSW 2319

Telephones: 0408863546 or 0429517394  
Email: [psvnadvocate@hotmail.com](mailto:psvnadvocate@hotmail.com)

Website: [www.psvn.com.au](http://www.psvn.com.au)

Office Location  
33 King Albert Avenue  
Tanilba Bay NSW 2319

*The Port Stephens Veterans Network provides the means to link serving and ex-serving ADF personnel, veterans, war widows and their families with the resources available to assist in advocacy, pension and compensation claims and welfare entitlements.*



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## OVERVIEW

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### ROLE

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The role of the Port Stephens Veterans Network (PSVN) is to qualify practitioners under the Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP) guidelines, support the work of Ex-Service Organisation's (ESO) pension and welfare practitioners, improve the quality of claims submitted to the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) and nurture a collaborative approach to improve communication between ESOs about services available to the veteran and defence communities in their areas.

*"Practitioners work for their respective ESO, not PSVN."*

### AIM

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The aim of PSVN is to provide our participating practitioners and clients with the resources available to assist in pension and compensation claims, welfare entitlements and advocacy.

### OBJECTIVES

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In January of 2016 PSVN management committee set the following objectives to be achieved over the 2016 calendar year:

- Promote the services provided by PSVN and assist clients in developing their DVA and other entitlement claims under SRCA, VEA, MRCA and other relevant Acts and Legislation.
- Improve the quality of primary claims presented to DVA and other service providers.
- Support Returned Services League Headquarters (Defence Care) and Sydney Legacy Advocates in the compilation and management of appeals to the Veterans' Review Board (VRB) and Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT).
- Provide welfare advice, assistance and service provider referral to clients utilising the skills of our qualified and authorised volunteer and salaried welfare practitioners.
- Manage round 17 and round 18 Building Excellence in Support and Training (BEST) Grants in accordance with the program grant agreements, performance objectives and the code of ethics.
- Train and mentor PSVN volunteer pension and welfare practitioners to ensure their qualifications are updated and all are qualified and authorized under ADTP and Veterans Indemnity Training Association (VITA) guidelines.
- Seek salary funding for the PSVN Administrative Support Officer (ASO) position as a full-time Pension Officer / ASO.
- Investigate a more permanent relationship with Port Stephens Veterans and Citizens Aged Care Limited and pursue options for purpose built office space.
- Promote inclusion to other willing ESOs to join the Network and encourage younger legatees and veterans to train and be mentored as pension officers to become part of a succession plan to maintain PSVN's viability into the future.

- Promote the concept of on-line Claims and ADTP training as these are rolled out.

## GENERAL

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PSVN pension and welfare officers continue to provide an increasing and successful service to the enrolled members of Port Stephens Legacy Group, Tilligerry RSL Sub Branch, Karuah RSL Sub Branch, Raymond Terrace RSL Sub Branch and other ex-members of the Defence Force and their dependents. The range of client localities being primarily the Port Stephens Local Government Area, often the general Hunter Region and occasionally other areas of NSW and other states and territories.

The increasing need to provide advocacy services to serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) members referred to PSVN by Williamtown RAAF Base, Singleton Infantry Centre and Bullecourt Barracks Adamstown Transition Centres, DVA on Base Advisory Service (OBAS), “word of mouth” and the PSVN Website has markedly increased the workload of PSVN in the calendar year 2016. PSVN managed 344 pension and compensation claims, including 44 Multi- Act Claims plus 113 other entitlement claims in 2016. Management of this case load involved 1662 action items by practitioners. It is essential to highlight this marked increase in the productivity of the Network in our round 19 BEST grant application in arguing the case for increases to our salary budget to provide a full-time advocate / ASO. It is unlikely PSVN will be able to sustain this increase in clients seeking our assistance unless further support is forthcoming.

Of the 344 claims managed only 14 went to appeal of which 10 appeals were successful. This is evidence that PSVN is achieving the BEST grant objectives of improving the quality of claims at the primary determining level and assisting ESOs in achieving this objective, as well as reducing the rate of appeals to the Veterans’ Review Board and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

PSVN uses the Veterans Practitioners Activity Database (VPAD) to record and track the progress of all pension and entitlement claims of our clients. This data is critical for the application and acquittal of BEST grants and forecasting, tracking and auditing the use of resources used in providing services to our clients. It has been noted and reported to DVA that there are inconsistencies in the reporting formats of VPAD and the requirements of BEST applications and reports. This report has overcome this by transposing all records and data from VPAD to the BEST format. We have also brought to the notice of DVA that VPAD is unable to report welfare activities in a requested time frame. We have overcome this by constructing spreadsheets to record PSVN salaried and volunteer welfare activity.

A complete desktop audit and comparison of Legacy, RSL and other client databases to VPAD was conducted as at November 2016. Further audits and comparisons will be ongoing to maintain the integrity of our databases.

The training and accreditation requirements currently being developed and rolled out by the ADTP organisation for pension and welfare officers and advocates are becoming more demanding. They require ESO resources to monitor and comply. Some ESOs may not be in a position to do this. The implication is that they may in the future be unable to meet the standards required to provide pension and welfare advice and assistance to their members and the wider ADF family. These changes therefore must be balanced against the need to ensure that local volunteer members of ESOs are motivated and incentivized to support local veterans, widows and their families. PSVN and like entities

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*“We are all here with the same goal: to ensure every eligible client receives his/her full entitlements. Not one bit more. But, not one bit less. Achieving this objective needs ESOs, DVA and ADTP working in partnership.”*

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are ideally situated to support these objectives and the ADTP organization should work closely with them.

While we are very appreciative and coping with the office space provided at no cost by Port Stephens Veterans and Citizens Aged Care Ltd, the ability to interview and service more than one client at a time in a private environment is becoming an issue. Our increasing amount of office equipment, need for storage space and security of member's files, requires that the issue of discreet interview rooms and office space needs to be progressed to accommodate newly qualified and authorized practitioners to be able to service multiple clients on our given work days.

The Sponsor for PSVN current BEST Grant is Newcastle Legacy Incorporated and is known in the grant agreement as the Grantee. Under the terms of the agreement the Grantee warrants that it has, and will maintain:

- public risk/liability insurance for not less than \$10,000,000 per claim covering liability owed to another person who suffers loss or damage by reason of the Grantee's activities under this Agreement,
- professional indemnity insurance for not less than \$5,000,000 per claim covering acts or omissions of the Grantee in the exercise of its trade or profession that give rise to liability (for example: negligence), and
- appropriate levels of contents insurance to meet the replacement costs of PSVN equipment including equipment or amenities purchased with this grant.

The Grantee agrees to provide certified copies of certificates of currency, including details of limits on cover to the Delegate upon request, including details of limits on cover. The Grantee agrees to maintain adequate insurance for the duration of the agreement and provide the Commonwealth with proof when requested. PSVN therefore is of the opinion that its practitioners are adequately covered under the Grantee's insurance policies. Furthermore, our affiliated RSL Practitioners are covered under the terms and conditions of VITA.

The total amount of the BEST Grant for Round 18 is \$91,466.04 with PSVN allocation being \$43,211.58. The terms and conditions of the grant state that an audit certificate is required of the Grantee if the grant amount exceeds \$100,000 or is required by the Commonwealth.

As Newcastle Legacy's grant is below \$100,000, PSVN is of the opinion that a grant acquittal report and not a formal audit is all that will be required by DVA for round 18 as at 30 June 2017. PSVN round 17 BEST grant has been acquitted and the report submitted to DVA as at 30 June 2016. A copy of the round 17 acquittal report is available on request.

## MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS 2016

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- Expanded the PSVN BEST management committee membership to include all qualified and authorized pension and welfare officers and a representative of Soldier On.
- Acquitted the BEST Round 17 Grant - 2015/2016.
- Successful application under BEST Round 18 - 2016/2017
- Promoted the concept of and complied with the guidelines of ADTP as the roll out continues
- Managed and reviewed the pension status of all enrolled PSLG widows & dependent children.
- Managed and reviewed the pension status of all financial members of Tilligerry RSL Sub Branch.
- Mentored pension officers of Karuah RSL Sub Branch in lodging and managing primary claims and appeals as required.
- Mentored pension and welfare officers of other affiliated RSL Sub Branches in managing claims and appeals as requested.
- Established mutually beneficial relationships with RAAF Base Williamtown, Infantry Centre Singleton and Bullecourt Barracks Adamstown Transition Centre and DVA OBAS.
- Developed and lodged claims for clients not enrolled in ESOs, including current serving members.
- Managed and reviewed the pension status of all Legatees.
- Managed and reviewed the pension status of all members newly enrolled.
- Maintained a pension and welfare database of all veterans and widows using VPAD and spreadsheets.
- Sponsored TIP refresher and ADTP courses for pension and welfare officers including mentoring and On the Job Training (OJT).
- Formal presentations of PSVN organization and objectives to other ESOs and forums.
- Attendance at major forums and seminars.
- Upgrade and maintenance to PSVN website.
- Replacement of laptop computers and upgrade software and antivirus applications on all PSVN computers.
- Maintained registers and records under BEST guidelines and other legislative requirements.
- Submitted reports & returns – monthly & annual, including BEST reports, audits and applications.

DETAILS OF ALL PRACTITIONER CLAIMS ACTIVITY FOR THE  
REPORT PERIOD

ACTIVITY

Number of Multi Act Claims: 44

**VEA**

Number of lodged Primary Claims: 76

Number of lodged AFI Claims: 18

No of lodged S31 Appeals 8

Number of lodged VRB appeals: 14

Number of lodged AAT appeals: 1

**MRCA**

Number of lodged Claims: 90

Number of lodged Reviews: 3

Number of lodged VRB Appeals: 1

**SRCA**

Number of Claims: 92

**INCOME SUPPORT**

Number of lodged Claims: 19

**OTHER ENTITLEMENTS**

Number of lodged Claims: 113

**CLAIM & ENTITLEMENT MANAGEMENT**

Number of Events / Actions 1662

**FINALISED CLAIMS**

All Acts – compensation / pension and entitlements 443

## DETAILS OF PAID PRACTITIONER (ASO) CLAIMS ACTIVITY FOR THE REPORT PERIOD

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**ACTIVITY**

Number of Multi Act Claims: 17

**VEA**

Number of lodged Primary Claims: 30

Number of lodged AFI Claims: 6

Number of lodged S31 Appeals 3

Number of lodged VRB appeals: 2

Number of lodged AAT appeals: Nil

**MRCA**

Number of Lodged Claims: 35

Number of Lodged Reviews: 1

Number of Lodged VRB Appeals: Nil

**SRCA**

Number of lodged Claims: 35

**INCOME SUPPORT**

Number of lodged Claims: 7

**OTHER ENTITLEMENTS**

Number of lodged Claims: 43

**CLAIM & ENTITLEMENT MANAGEMENT**

Number of Events / Actions 665

## BEST ACTIVITY


 Veteran Practitioner  
 Activity Database

There are 1573 claim management action items between 01 January and 31 December 2016.

A Printout of all actions is available if required.

<b>Code</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Claim Management Hours</b>	<b>Administration Hours</b>
ASO	Paid	886	442
JH	Volunteer	1440	210
MP	Volunteer	768	85
TM	Volunteer	58	94
JB	Volunteer	5	150
BF	Volunteer	44	15
JM	Volunteer	44	5
JK	Volunteer	45	7
RS	Volunteer	33	6
ML	Volunteer	-	96

## WELFARE REPORT 2016

DETAILS OF VOLUNTEER PRACTITIONER WELFARE ACTIVITY

	VETERANS	WAR WIDOWS WIDOWERS	DISTANCE	NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER HOURS
Number of Enquires	915	8580		
Number of Interviews	832	7800		
Number of Referrals to other Organisations	32	80		
Number of Metropolitan Home Visits	Nil	Nil		
Number of Country Home Visits	832	7800		
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>43160</b>	<b>4310</b>

Welfare advice, assistance and referral to other service providers was provided to all PSVN clients during the reporting period by our qualified and authorised volunteer pension and welfare officers of all affiliated ESOs. The table above includes all welfare activities conducted less the activities of CSO and ASO as paid part time employees. Their activities are recorded in the following pages.

## DETAILS OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICER WELFARE ACTIVITY

Legacy's Community Support Officer (CSO) continued to provide bereavement support, information, and advocacy to clients and their families in the Port Stephens area. On-going communication with external service and aged care providers was a focus. This ensured positive interagency working relationships continued to be built and strengthened. Advocacy provided for clients in hospital and liaison with social workers and other key staff took place to ensure clients' needs were met and discharge planning was conducted.

Referrals were made to a number of external agencies. They included DVA Homecare, myagedcare, occupational therapists (Falls Risk, Home Modifications and Vital Call Assessments), ACAT (involving a number of dementia nurse assessments), Vital Call, Harbourside Community Care (Homecare Packages and transport assistance to medical appointments for non-Gold Card holders) and aged care facilities. Significant and on-going contact with external professionals and clients NOK was also maintained to ensure clients' needs were met.

CSO continued to provide support, information and strategies to Legatees who were concerned about clients with complex needs (associated with dementia, anxiety and depression). Considerable support also provided to Legatees who recently joined PSLG.

The monthly Legacy Morning Tea for Younger Women continued to be well attended. The Morning Teas remain a valuable means for women to meet others in similar circumstances, gain support and exchange tips/strategies for learning how to live with their loss while often supporting their children to do the same. A number of close friendships have formed.

New Enrolments: 17

Clients Serviced: 205

Number of Contacts

- Home: 68
- Hostel: 2
- Nursing Home: 12
- Hospital: 37
- Hospice: 2
- Telephone: 399
- Morning Tea for Younger Women: 54
- Other: 9

**Total:** 574

Referrals

- Internal: 0
- External: 24

**Total:** 24

## DETAILS OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE OFFICER (ASO) WELFARE ACTIVITY

	VETERANS	WAR WIDOWS WIDOWERS	DISTANCE Kilometres	NUMBER OF PAID HOURS
Number of Enquires	105	925		
Number of Interviews	10	114		
Number of Referrals to other Organisations	10	25		
Number of Metropolitan Home Visits				
Number of Country Home Visits	4	114		
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>620</b>	<b>82</b>

The table above includes welfare activities conducted less the activities of Volunteers and CSO.

The role of PSVN Administrative Service Officer (ASO) requires multi skills and a thorough knowledge of all services provided by the Network. The roles as described in the BEST grant performance objectives as salaried Pension Officer and Administration Officer / Support Officer would describe some of the skills required of this role. The ASO has developed appropriate skill levels and knowledge of all services provided by the network. In addition to undertaking the tasks described in the grant performance objectives. The ASO also functions as a pension officer and the secretary/treasurer of the PSVN management committee. The ASO has demonstrated a sound knowledge of computer skills, office management, financial management and record keeping during the reporting period and has carried out all duties to an extremely high standard in a very professional manner.

The ASO has attended a range of pension and welfare officer TIP courses and is fully qualified and authorised at Level 2 to submit and manage claims and provide welfare services to clients.

REGISTERS AND REPORTS

**BEST GRANT ROUND 19 - 2017 / 2018**

PSVN is currently developing an application for funding under BEST Grant Round 19 – 2017/2018. The information supporting this report will be used to compile the application. It is planned that a draft application be completed by March 2017. If successful, the grant will be managed by the PSVN management committee under the legislative requirements of DVA.

This application will clearly emphasize the marked increase in the productivity of the Network over the calendar year 2016 compared to past years, due to the increased demand to provide advocacy services to current serving members of Navy, Army and Air Force referred to PSVN by Williamstown RAAF Base, Singleton Infantry Centre, Adamstown Bullecourt Barracks and PSVN website. The volume of pension and compensation claims and welfare activities will be highlighted.

Currently PSVN is operated by volunteers supported by a part- time ASO (part funded – three days per week from current PSVN BEST Grant). The ageing of our volunteers and difficulty in recruiting others highlights the fact that we need to change the staffing mix for PSVN to be operated by full-time salaried staff supported by volunteers. The majority of the workload of PSVN Pension Officers is the submission and management of pension and compensation and entitlement claims. The welfare caseload is mainly our local veterans’ war widows and their dependents. This service is again operated by volunteers supported by a part-time CSO (funded by Port Stephens Legacy Group (PSLG)). To enable PSVN to continue to provide services to our increasing client numbers and to remain viable into the future, we need continuity of support from DVA to achieve the best outcomes for our clients. A goal under consideration for the 2017/2018 application is a salary allocation Increase to provide a fulltime Advocate or Pension Officer / Administrative Officer funded by the BEST grant.

**BEST GRANT ROUND 17 - 2015 / 2016**

PSVN received a total of \$26,205.30 in BEST grant round 17 for expenditure in the last financial year. This grant was managed by the PSVN management committee in our own bank account with oversight by our sponsor Newcastle Legacy. A half yearly report was submitted to DVA in January 2016. An acquittal of the grant and final report was submitted to DVA in July 2016.

**FUNDED ITEMS BEST ROUND 17 – 2015 / 2016**

Expenditure Item	Allocated	Expenditure	Overspend	Underspend	Remarks
Communication Expenses	\$1,000.00	\$860.00		\$140.00	
Computer Hardware	\$1,500.00	\$877.00		\$623.00	
Computer Software	\$300.00			\$300	
Office Supplies	\$5,173.30	\$5967.31	\$794.01		
Salary	\$11,232.00	\$14285.90	\$3053.90		Underfunded
Telephone	\$4,000.00	\$4524.05	\$524.05		
Travel	\$3,000.00	\$2845.09		\$154.91	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$26,205.30</b>	<b>\$29359.35</b>	<b>\$3154.05</b>		includes GST of \$2382.30 <b>Acquitted July 2016</b>

## BEST GRANT ROUND 18 - 2016 / 2017

PSVN received a total of \$43,538.80 BEST grant round 18 for the current financial year. This grant is managed by the PSVN management committee with oversight by our sponsor Newcastle Legacy. A half yearly report is to be submitted to DVA in December 2016. An acquittal of the grant and final report is to be submitted to DVA in July 2017.

## FUNDED ITEMS BEST ROUND 18

Expenditure Item	Allocated	Expenditure	Overspend	Underspend	Remarks
Communication Expenses	\$1,000.00	\$460.00		\$540.00	
Computer Hardware	\$1727.72	\$69.55		\$1658.17	
Computer Software	\$300.00			\$300	
Office Supplies	\$3040.00	\$2228.31		\$811.69	
Salary	\$30471.08	\$30471.08			Cheque #54
Telephone	\$4,000.00	\$2008.70		\$1991.30	
Travel	\$3,000.00	\$946.13		\$2053.87	
					<b>GST of \$327.22</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$43,538.80</b>	<b>\$36183.77</b>		<b>\$7354.53</b>	

## TRAVEL SUMMARY

	Distance (Kilometres)	Type	Comment
Total Recorded	58104	Welfare & Claims	
Less			
CSO	8277	Welfare	Funded by PSLG
Less			
Volunteers	43160	Claims and Welfare	Not Claimed (Members Expense)
<b>PSVN</b>	<b>6667</b>	<b>Claims &amp; Welfare</b>	<b>PSVN Reimbursed</b>

A detailed Travel Log as required under the BEST Grant Performance Objectives is available on request.

TIP COURSES & ADTP TRAINING SUMMARY

ADTP FORMAL COURSES

Welfare Advocate Level 1	Compensation Advocate Level 1	RPL and Mentor Training
One Student in Progress	One Student in Progress	EOI Sent two nominations on course in early 2017

The table above is a record of formal courses attended in 2016 either as face to face or on line courses by practioners of PSVN. A detailed history of courses attended and formal qualifications and authorizations of all PSVN practioners is available on request.

ON THE JOB TRAINING

Practioners	Topics	Hours
8	Submission of Claims	268
8	Claim and File Management	88
8	Administration	28
		384

The table above is a representation of practioners normal work load under mentoring based on PSVN office being opened one day per week for 48 weeks of the year. A spread – sheet to record this information formally is currently being constructed by ASO to be used in future reports.

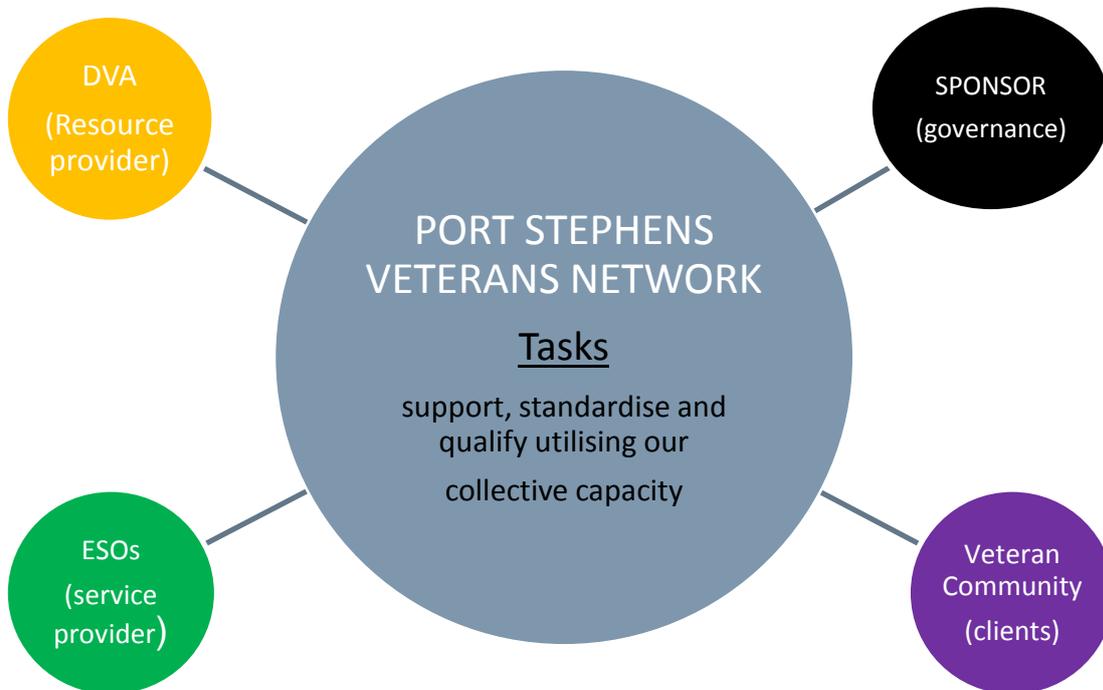
**SEMINARS – PRESENTATIONS – MEETINGS AND INTERACTIONS**

<b>Event</b>	<b>Timings</b>	<b>Attendees</b>
PSVN Management Committee Meetings	Every three Months	All Pension Officers
Pension Officers Network - Buladelah	October 2016	Legacy & RSL Representatives
NWPON	Monthly	Legacy & RSL Representatives
RSL District Council	Monthly	RSL Representatives
Legacy Meetings	Monthly	PSLG Pension Officers
RSL Meetings	Monthly	RSL Pension Officers
RSL HQ (Defence Care)	As Required	Advocate (Appeal Cases)
Pensions Sydney Legacy	As Required	Advocate (Appeal Cases)
DVA VAN Office & DVA Updates	As Required	Advocate
Local Doctors / Specialists	As Required	Advocate
DVA / ACAT/ OT	As Required	All Pension / Welfare Officers

Travel costs associated with attending these events are attributed to PSVN BEST Funding while accommodation costs are borne by the relevant organizations.

PSVN MANAGEMENT

The purpose of the PSVN management committee is to achieve adequate funding through the DVA BEST program annual grants to provide the resources to support our qualified and authorized practitioners in achieving the best outcomes for our clients.



*“Collective capacity” simply requires a willingness of all ESOs and Service Providers to cooperate and share the available resources to achieve the best outcomes for our clients.*

Some of the ex-service organisations listed in the following section have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) formalizing their cooperation with PSVN. The MOU has no legal force, but signifies the willingness of participants to cooperate in the provision of advocacy services to the veteran community in the Port Stephens Local Government area. For those ex-service organisations that use the resources of PSVN we encourage you to sign the MOU. A copy of the MOU can be downloaded from the web site or by contacting the ASO.

## EX SERVICE ORGANISATIONS WITHIN THE PORT STEPHENS LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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Karuah RSL Sub Branch	Tilligerry RSL Sub Branch
Medowie RSL Sub Branch	Nelson Bay RSL Sub Branch
Port Stephens Legacy Group	Raymond Terrace RSL Sub Branch
Newcastle Legacy Club	Vietnam Veterans Association
Stockton RSL Sub Branch	Department of Veterans Affairs
Port Stephens Veterans and Citizens Aged Care Ltd	War Widows Guild
Partners of Veterans Association	Defence Care
Defence Community Organization	WRAN'S Association
Soldier On	

The Management Committee of PSVN as recorded in the minutes of the meeting of 14 September 2016 approved the following (named) elected members with voting rights:

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| • Chairman                       | Advocate RSL & Legacy                    |
| • Karuah RSL Sub Branch          | Practitioner                             |
| • Tilligerry RSL Sub Branch      | Practitioner                             |
| • Port Stephens Legacy Group     | Practitioner                             |
| • Raymond Terrace RSL Sub Branch | Practitioner                             |
| • Secretary / Treasurer          | ASO                                      |
| • Members                        | All Qualified & Authorized Practitioners |
| • Member                         | JB                                       |
| • Soldier On                     | DJ                                       |

A standing invitation to all ESOs, ADF Transition Officers, Service Providers, Stakeholders and other interested parties is extended to attend PSVN Management Committee Meetings which are held every quarter. Formal minutes are kept of these meetings and all minutes taken in 2016 and advocates monthly reports are also available on request.

SIGNATURES

CHAIRMAN	SECRETARY/ TREASURER	BEST GRANTS
Major James Horton OAM JP	Mrs. Petrina Carpenter	Mr. Tony Mumford
<b>Tel</b> 0408863546	<b>Tel</b> 0429517394	<b>Tel</b> 0401816956
psvnadvocate@hotmail.com	portstephenslegacy1@gmail.com	zapm84@gmail.com

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Dated 14 December 2016