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Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Tasmanian Government Submission

Adaptive sport programs for Australian Defence Force veterans' inquiry

The Tasmanian Government values the wellbeing of Tasmania's estimated 17,515 veterans and has invested in programs and services to support their health and wellbeing, and to support their transition out of service into employment. The investment has focused on areas where the best outcomes can likely be achieved for our veterans and complements the programs and services that are the responsibility of the Australian Government.

While the Tasmanian Government does not specifically fund services for adaptive sport programs, the Government is actively involved in supporting the wellbeing of veterans including through physical activity, which are outlined in more detail below.

Tasmanian Government support to veterans

Since 2018, the Tasmanian Government has funded a range of programs and services for veterans. These include:

- Funding the State Branch of the RSL as the peak body for Tasmania's veterans and providing annual funding for projects;
- Delivering the Teddy Sheean VC Memorial Grants Program, available to RSL sub-branches and other ex-service organisations for repairs and maintenance to their facilities, small equipment, and infrastructure purchases as well as memorial construction, repair and maintenance. From 2021, wellbeing initiatives are also eligible for funding;
- Funding the Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia – Tasmania Branch to establish the Veteran Retreat (the Retreat) in Tasmania's Central Highlands. The Retreat is an accommodation facility for veterans and their families to use to support the wellbeing of veterans, recognising that time to recover, heal and reconnect or connect can be critical to their long-term health;
- Providing funding to the Tasmanian Headstones Project to enable it to continue its work across Tasmania;
- Providing annual funding to Hobart and Launceston Legacies to support their work with the families of veterans; and

- Proving funding to support the 100th anniversary celebrations of Legacy in 2023.

Veterans can also access services provided by the Tasmanian Government as needed. There are currently 37 veterans in receipt of an income payment from Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) who have a Public Housing Agreement with Housing Tasmania, representing 34 households.

The Tasmanian Government also offers eligible veterans a range of discounts and concessions including discounts on electricity, transport, education, health, housing, licences, property, water, and land tax, parks and heritage, and vehicles. DVA Pensioner Concession Card (PCC) and Health Concession Card (HCC) are eligible for concessions. Veteran Gold Card holders also receive some concessions.

Veterans' Reference Group

The Tasmanian Government established the Veterans' Reference Group (VRG) in 2018 to provide a link to Tasmania's Veterans. VRG members give advice and insight on a wide range of veteran related issues. The Terms of Reference outline the following key functions:

'VRG members will provide advice, information and insights about issues affecting ex-serving personnel locally and nationally (particularly matters raised through the Commonwealth, States and Territories Committee convened by the Department of Veterans Affairs) including:

- Employment and training for ex-ADF personnel;
- Data collection about ex-serving personnel living in Tasmania;
- Health and wellbeing of ex-serving personnel;
- Housing and homelessness;
- Incarceration of ex-serving personnel; and
- Recognition of service including commemorative events and community education.'

The VRG has actively contributed to:

- The development of the Veterans' Active Recreation Program;
- Assessment for the Teddy Sheehan VC Memorial Grants Program;
- Provided advice to the Tasmanian Government, including on the development of the Australian Government's Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and National Action Plan; and
- Provided input into the themes for consultation for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

The current key focus for the VRG is supporting the development of the Veteran Employment Strategy for the Tasmanian State Service.

Supporting Tasmanian veterans to be physically active

The Tasmanian Government currently funds two programs specifically aimed at supporting veterans and ex-service personnel to be physically active:

- Veteran Wellbeing Voucher Program, which provides a contribution towards the cost of participating in sport and active recreation activities; and
- Veterans' Active Recreation Program.

Veterans Wellbeing Voucher Program

The Tasmanian Government has established a program to make health and wellbeing vouchers available to veterans for gym or sporting club membership.

Under the Program, eligible veterans can apply for a voucher of up to \$100 to go towards the costs of registration or membership fees for registered gyms and sporting clubs. Veterans may use the voucher to participate in adaptive sports programs. As at 16 January 2023, sports with adaptive programs such as archery, golf, sailing and bowls have registered as providers.

To be eligible for the Program, a person will be:

- A veteran;
- Have a card issued by the Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) (either gold, white or general) or a card or identification number issued by the Australian Government Department of Defence (DoD) when the veteran was in the ADF;
- Be living in Tasmania; and
- Be participating in an eligible gym or sporting club that requires the payment of an annual fee or charge to participate.

To be an eligible provider, sports clubs must be:

- incorporated;
- a provider of a sport recognised by Sport Australia; and
- affiliated to the relevant state or national sporting organisation.

Gyms must:

- be a registered business with an ABN;
- have at least one staff member with a Certificate 3 or 4 in Fitness; and
- have insurance.

As at 11 January 2023, there have been:

- 167 vouchers issued to veterans with 103 used and 64 issued and available to be used; and
- 64 activity providers registered (14 gyms and 50 sports clubs in 12 different sports).

Veterans' Active Recreation Program

The Veterans Active Recreation Program, which is administered by outdoor adventure company Point Assist, provides outdoor recreation experiences to our returned service men and women.

Created for veterans by veterans, this three-year program delivers a series of 5-day small group events providing unique outdoor experiences and career pathways in the adventure and ecotourism industry. The Program harnesses the positive relationship that exists between social participation, outdoor recreation and psychological wellbeing. Under the guidance of veteran mentors, participants utilise the skills and experience gained throughout their military careers to plan and complete a remote Tasmanian wilderness activity.

Point Assist has run five wilderness treks for veterans since 2020 with over 25 veterans participating. Participants have provided positive feedback on their experiences and four now are actively engaged in work the eco-tourism industry.

The most recent trek was held from 14-18 November 2022, with a further trek planned for April 2023.

Support for sport and active recreation participation

The Tasmanian Government provides substantial support to the sport and recreation sector more broadly through a range of competitive grant programs, funding initiatives and programs to develop the sector. There is clear evidence of the benefits in participating in sport and active recreation for all members of the community, including veterans.

The Government is particularly keen to work with the sector to provide opportunities for all Tasmanians to participate in a safe and fair manner, and to engage with groups who face barriers to participation.

Concluding comments

The Tasmanian Government supports consideration of further opportunities for veterans to participate in adaptive sport programs through this Inquiry. This will further support veterans transitioning from the Australian Defence Force.

The Tasmanian Government recognises that adaptive sport programs should provide for participation at a range of levels, from community clubs through to the elite level. A focus on elite level sport only will minimise opportunities for others to gain the clear benefits from participating in a safe and welcoming sport at a level that suits them.

We support consideration of the establishment of a centralised agency in responding to the needs of veterans in this area.

We look forward to the outcomes of the Inquiry, including learning of any initiatives which the Australian Government puts in place to support our veterans.

Yours sincerely

Hon Guy Barnett MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs