

ABN 627 485 586 87  
Incorporation # A1041448D



Sailing On Inc.

## **Sailing On Submission - [Adaptive sport programs for Australian Defence Force veterans – Parliament of Australia \(aph.gov.au\)](#)**

### **Our Association**

Sailing On is a relatively new initiative that covers off on three target areas being Health & Wellbeing, Learning and Community Participation for veterans and serving members to aid their mental health.

Sailing ON is designed to help improve mental health and reduce suicide through learning new skills, being part of teams, training and being an active part of the sporting community.

As a retired Army Major of 25 years, I experienced firsthand the healing power of sailing. The suicide rate among veterans was much too high and losing too many friends, so wanted to do something positive to help. Sailing ON, an incorporated Not for Profit, was created to improve the mental health of serving members, veterans and their families through sailing and being on the water communicating. We currently have 42 members and our group is growing.

The focus of Sailing ON is to repair disused yachts and form teams to sail them. The model chosen emulates the act, belong, commit, approach and is aimed at getting our members active in the community while looking after each other. This is achieved through veterans learning new skills repairing boats; typically learning how to fibreglass, rigging skills and boat maintenance. Formal sailing courses are conducted through South of Perth yacht Club where members learn how to crew yachts and then sail any time on our yachts, engaging and developing as teams, learning more sailing skills and



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communicating in a relaxed environment. We are looking to purchase and restore another two yachts.

Sailing On has achieved a great deal, in the short space of eighteen months, since its inception. In that time, we have formed the incorporated association, raised funds, bought and repaired our first yacht, set up MOU's with South of Perth Yacht Club and other organisations, conducted open days, run training and now have over 42 members sailing and growing each week.

The demography of our membership has proven to be a mix of veterans and currently serving military. Consequently, many of our members are employed and they have little time to sail during weekdays. Our yacht is sailing on average at least 1-2 times per week, mostly on the weekend and evenings but can sail weekdays as well.

### **Why Sailing - current evidence on the benefits of adaptive sport**

There is existing evidence on the benefits of sailing for improved mental health. Both the British Defence Force and Israeli Military have previously set up sailing programs to assist their veterans mental health.

"A 2007 Israeli study found that sailing can help reduce the symptoms in people with PTSD. Researchers say they observed a decrease in depression and functional problems, along with improved self-esteem." They have set up a group called The Boat is Sailing.

Some of their member comments are:

"Sailing gives me hope, happiness and a sense of freedom which many drugs couldn't do."

"Here on the ship, it is the only place where I can get rid of the post-trauma," he said, "I feel peace and calm on board, and I found great new friends."

Turn To Starboard, the British sailing group state: When two boats are heading straight towards each other, they avoid collision by following a simple rule of



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sailing – turn to starboard (**turn to the right**). We use sailing to help Armed Forces personnel and their families make the right turn.

At Turn to Starboard we regularly witness that it is easier to share experiences with others who have served in the Forces. By grouping these individuals together, we allow them to begin their journey of readjustment.

Some of their member comments are:

“My daddy came back from Afghanistan but when we went sailing, he really came back.”

“Unbelievable experience, the mixture of being on the water and chatting with like minded people was better than any counselling session”

At Sailing On we have a three-pronged approach for our members mental health. To learn new skills, to communicate in a peaceful likeminded environment and to become part of the sporting community. We think our model achieves this.

### **New Skills - the role of sport in supporting individuals' transition**

We have an agreement with Men's Shed and are in discussions with TAFE WA to see what qualifications can be gained from our members learning how to repair boats. Formalising these skills would be a great step towards our members gaining new employment. We are being helped in the transfer of skills by Men's Shed, as well as TAFE, and several of our members have joined this group becoming part of community.

Once our members are trained, they can crew for any other yachts as well as us. This cross pollination gives them the opportunity to mix with other crews and boat owners; often people who are influential in industry.

Learning to sail increases skill sets, builds self-confidence, and helps to build teamwork. All these properties are helpful in securing new work opportunities. Learning new skills such as fibre glassing, rigging and boat maintenance may be



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an excellent lead into new jobs, but the important part of transition is being mentally ready. Being mentally agile, belonging to a team and feeling socially comfortable are all important to being in the right state of mind to transition into something else. Sailing ON is an excellent conduit for this.

Not only because it helps mental health but also because it offers the opportunity to connect with people of influence within the wider community that may assist with introductions or placements.

### **Why Us - gaps in services**

Several military establishments, Navy in particular, previously had their own yachts available for service people to sail. Most if not all of these vessels have been disposed of largely due to insurance costs and there is nothing available in Western Australia; and so, the need for Sailing ON.

### **Funding - equitability of current funding for adaptive sport**

We have applied for several grants including government, defence, veteran and lotto sources. So far, we have been unsuccessful in all of them. All of our funding has come from finding commercial sponsors such as Programmed Maintenance, Boats Online and Trans Dev. We have also received small amounts of funding from other associations such as ROTARY. We have received generous support from boat companies for spare parts and are very grateful for everyone's help.

We understand that there are many ESO organisations competing for funding and there are several varying priorities; but we would appreciate any financial support that could be given.

### **What we Need - support**

We need funding to purchase and rebuild more yachts for our members to sail. This project will cost an estimated \$14,000 and include the boat purchase, all repair materials, rigging and safety equipment as well as some sailing training.



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This project is designed to bond new members into teams and develop the satisfaction and pride in seeing a project completed while learning new marketable skills.

We only charge \$60 for annual membership to ensure all veterans have the opportunity to join. Keelboat sailing training courses cost \$330 per head, advanced courses much more. Given that we have annual operational costs, such as annual pen fees, boat insurance, association insurance, maintenance, safety equipment and rigging repairs; we find it hard to fund course. Some funding of sailing courses for veterans would be greatly appreciated to get them started and to advance others.

### **Links - centralised authority**

We have established links with the Head of HMAS Stirling, Head of SASR, Head of JLUW, Head of RAAF Base Pearce and with 13 BDE. We have had meetings with all of these units and they are aware of our organisation and what service we provide. They have all allowed us to advertise within their organisations and were very helpful in promoting our earlier Open Day. We have serving members, as part of our association, from each organisation. We have links with all the ESO's, including RSL WA, and we are working closely with them as well as many external service organisations. We connect through these units and organisations to recruit our young veterans and service people as members.

Despite our links, we are just now finding out about other organisations like us such as the work being done in Adelaide and Saltwater Veterans group. I think a centralised authority for all adaptive sports programs for veterans would be a great help. A centralised authority would ensure consistency of services provided, enhanced communication and an excellent synergy in the use of resources.



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## Conclusion

The suicide rate among veterans is much too high. Sailing ON was created to improve the mental health of serving members and reduce suicide through learning new skills, being part of teams, training and being an active part of the sporting community. Any progress in adaptive sports to help veterans through PTSD or other issues would be a huge step forward.

