

Saltwater Veterans Sailing Project

2/32-34 Bonner Ave,
Manly NSW 2095



Adaptive sport programs for Australian Defence Force veterans

Since 2018, our *Saltwater Veterans* brand has served as our community *esprit de corps* toward achieving the common vision - supporting others who, like us (at one time or another) have needed that little help with social re-engagement via the wind-powered, kinetic motion that is sailing. With the support of our sponsors inclusive sailing for veterans and their families - particularly those that are Wounded, Injured and Sick (WIS).

We promote social connectedness and healthy lifestyle for current and former serving veterans and their families through enjoyable community-focused activities. These activities support mental wellness, physical health and a sense of belonging, consistent with the intent of DVA's Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and National Action Plan 20-23

With a "crew" of volunteers and sponsors, our community has spread across the nation (Sydney, Nowra, Adelaide, Sunshine Coast, Newcastle and Perth), has twice competed at overseas regattas (New Zealand and Canada), in 2022 we supported on average 100+ veterans/month in our numerous locations and, we sponsored our first veteran's led sailing team at Hamilton Island Race Week.

A few media clips of our activities

- 7 News Sunshine Coast <https://youtu.be/-veBe0CG540>
- Veterans' Health Week - Z Special Unit https://youtu.be/1M3_Yt5ui98

As of Sept 2022 we celebrated the achievement of an important milestone, of our registration of our, not-for-profit company SWV Ltd (trading as the *Saltwater Veterans Sailing Project*). This serves as our enduring means to pave the way to the future supporting our veterans' sailing community, volunteers and associated activities. In addition, it is a benchmark accomplishment and a key component of longer term vision for our community.

We are now working through the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission requirements to achieve our charity and DRGS status for the *Saltwater Veterans Sailing Project* to best enable applications for sponsorship and grants.

Our Not-For-Profit mission is to promote the prevention and control of physical illnesses (including, but not limited to, physical injury, obesity and ill health) and mental illnesses (including, but not limited to Post Traumatic Stress (PTS), anxiety, depression and social isolation) experienced by Veterans and for that purpose to:

- a. implement and provide targeted support services and programs, including social connection and inclusion opportunities for Veterans who are experiencing, or are at risk of, isolation and physical and mental illness, by principally offering inclusive sailing and other water based sporting programs and activities;
- b. encourage Veterans to be physically and mentally active to overcome feelings of isolation and physical and mental illness;
- c. support the social integration of Veterans through the provision of social, sporting and recreational opportunities;
- d. generate conversation surrounding the prevention of isolation and physical and mental illness experienced by Veterans, as well as to eliminate any stigma surrounding the open discussion of these issues;
- e. provide skill development pathway programs to assist Veterans to rebuild self-sufficiency, leadership skills and connection with community;
- f. create a broad network of support for Veterans through collaboration with other mission aligned organisations supporting Veterans; and
- g. provide a platform and conduit for health professionals and service providers to deliver health promotion and preventative health strategies to improve the health, resilience and quality of life of Veterans.

The establishment of our Not-For-Profit has been generously sponsored by the team at [Minter Ellison Lawyers](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

As co-founder to the SVSP, I am a military veteran of 18 years of service with the Royal Australian Navy, a two-time Invictus Games (2018 and 2022) competitor and, I have participated in multiple veterans (inclusive and adaptive) sailing programs overseas.

Jennifer Reynolds is a co-founder of SVSP, a military spouse and the State Coordinator of the RSL NSW Sports & Recreation program.

TERMS OF REFERENCE ANSWERS

- **Current evidence on the benefits adaptive sport can provide to those with physical and/or mental health impairments, particularly those who have also served or trained in national defence;**

One component important to improving mental wellbeing of veterans is combating social isolation. Participating in sport and recreation activities create avenues for meaningful engagement and psychosocial integration both in the veteran and wider community.

Specifically grassroots-style activities, limited in attendance, within the community, foster social reintegration and rehabilitation for veterans through impactful connection to one another. These activities support current serving, transitioning, and former-serving members and their families of the ADF.

DVA's Transition and Wellbeing Program Key Findings found with respect to social health, that only 27-30% of transitioned veterans were engaging with ESO or other

voluntary organisations. When fostered by ESOs, sport and recreation has the potential of both increasing ESO engagement and, that to the wider community.

The need to improve social connections is highlighted in DVA Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and National Action Plan 2020-2023.

The included research article (M. Gelkopf et al, 2013, "Nature adventure rehabilitation for combat-related posttraumatic chronic stress disorder: A randomized control trial", Psychiatry Research 209 (2013) 485–493) outlines significant measurable benefits of sailing for participants with PTSD, depression, and anxiety.

- **The role of sport in supporting individuals' transition from the Australian Defence Force into civilian life, especially how sport may assist veterans who meet criteria identifying them as being most at risk of suicide;**

Sport is one element that can support transition from ADF to civilian life amongst a range of services and supports that are available to meet the needs of individuals.

High profile events such as the Invictus Games have significant cost to facilitate and, in terms of Australian veterans, serve a very small population of our veteran community. Acknowledging the "ripple effect" that high profile activities can have in terms of educating the wider population, the following needs to be considered:

- The ADF's (and Invictus Australia) delivery of the Invictus Games needs to be morally and ethically reviewed to ensure that the rehabilitation of veterans (both current and former serving) remains at the forefront of planning and delivery, including the appropriate selection of facilitation/support staff.
 - The below studies highlight both positive and negative aspects of high profile, competitive sporting activities for veterans
 - Stress impact on Invictus Games athletes
 - <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01934/full> -
 - The positive impacts of non-competitive activities on PTSD
 - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1469029213001027>
- **Whether there are any gaps in services and demand for adaptive sport by the veteran community, and, if so, how these gaps can be addressed;**

The gap exists for veteran specific sport in the range of inclusive, non-competitive options. Veteran specific options in these areas create a pathway to options within the community that already exist for all Australians. The existing gap, therefore, is within connecting veterans to purpose built options for them.

Geographically isolated veterans often receive little opportunity to participate. Dedicated funding needs to be identified. "Remote to..." activities are immensely important in fostering connection and ensuring that these veterans are not geographically disadvantaged in participating and/or support.

In our community there is a lack of faith and/or mistrust in the large organisations and, often these organisations are not always facilitating events that are reflective of the

veteran community needs or wants. This is evident with the number of asymmetric and grassroots veterans' groups and not-for-profit/ESO that have formed. Veterans are creating community groups out of perceived need. Such groups include, surfing, sailing, horse riding, video gaming, photography. Unfortunately the large organisations (at some stage) often seek to "stamp" or brand these small (often unfunded groups) with their perceived support whilst offering very little resource / financial support to the club, group or organisation that is facilitating. The outcome is these large organisations will often be awarded more funding on their perceived support.

- **The equitability of current funding for adaptive sport, and how the accessibility of adaptive sport can be improved for veterans who are not a part of Invictus programs;**

Currently, veteran sport is inequitably funded. Outside of Soldier On and Invictus Australia, access to funding for sport programs is on a case by case basis, often through (competitive) grants process. Creating an avenue where equitable, accessible funding supports the inclusion of many other organisations that exist to support veterans in this space, thus multiplying the potential impact in our veteran community. In addition, access to funding would allow year-on-year growth for attendance and connection within our veteran community, based on reliability of program funding.

The grants process is often complex and lengthy to complete. Large organisations have dedicated (often professional) grant writers which definitely elevate their submissions over grassroots, community groups; despite these groups having their own significant, direct and positive impact to their respective veteran communities.

Large organisations such as the RSL, RSL Lifecare, Soldier On and, Invictus Australia have vast access to funding, corporate sponsorship and aggregated wealth. The awarding of easily accessible grants and funding should be asset tested to encourage large organisations to spend their own raised funds over applying for more grants, and thus reduce the potential of depriving grassroots organisations. Large financial organisations should be discouraged/not permitted to apply for small grants such as Veterans Health Week or DVA Wellness funding as this funding is better served to encourage/support smaller, asymmetric veterans groups.

Not every organisation is an ESO or charity – many community groups, clubs and businesses are having profound impact on supporting the veteran's community, and often with little to no funding support. Such organisations would benefit from greater support.

- **The potential for a centralised authority to play a role in coordination or resourcing to provide access and where appropriate, enable consistency, in the use of adaptive sport to support rehabilitation, transition or reintegration for serving members and veterans around the nation and across support services and organisations;**

If a centralised authority is to be considered, it needs to be independent of any of the large ESOs and specifically that have a vested interest in their own funding. The large ESOs often portray the "veteran" as a commodity that can be owned. These ESOs concentrate their efforts on the public perception of "helping", and growing their own fundraising opportunities.

One body controlling all sounds very risky.

- **Whether eligibility for the Australian Sports Medal, or similar recognition, should be extended to teams that participated in the Invictus Games prior to 2018 and other veterans' teams representing Australia in international events; and**

Perceived or actually inequitably can have a profound impact on veterans' mental health. Whatever is decided needs to be fair and sustainable whilst not detracting from the significance of the award.

- **Any other related matters.**

Some organisations are locking down support through through MOUs which has the effect of creating a monopoly on support, access to activities and venues, and funding/sponsorship. Is the intent to build an empire or actually support the veteran and their families.

In addition to adaptive sport, it is important to look at the role inclusive sport plays in supporting transition of those veterans who may not consider themselves in need of adaptive options. There is a large segment of the veteran population that is also at risk from mental health impairments. The term adaptive sports often is associate with modifying equipment and rules of an activity. The term inclusive sports associates with integrating participants with the widest community possible thus reducing social isolation.

Warm regards

Scott Reynolds
Co-Founder Saltwater Veterans Sailing Project

Checkout <http://saltwaterveterans.org>
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