



**Veterans'
Review Board**

**Annual Report
2023–24**



Hon Matt Keogh
Minister for Veterans and Defence Personnel
Minister for Defence Personnel
Parliament House CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

I am pleased to present to you the 2023–24 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 centered on the page.

Jane Anderson
Principal Member
2024

About the VRB

We are a specialist, high volume tribunal. We are innovative, responsive and seek to improve access to justice for all veterans, current serving members and their families by resolving applications at the earliest possible opportunity in a cost effective and efficient way.

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 and Defence Personnel a report, as required under the VEA. It provides an account of our activities from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024.

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

Message from our Principal Member and National Registrar



Photo taken by Marcus Fillinger.
Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial.

Ms Katrina Harry PSM, National Registrar and Ms Jane Anderson, Principal Member.

We are pleased to introduce the Veterans' Review Board annual report for 2023–24.

VRB 2023–24 performance

In 2023–2024 the Veterans' Review Board (VRB) delivered its best performance to date. For a sixth consecutive year, the VRB had no backlog and further reduced its processing times; - results that were achieved in a year that saw the VRB receive the highest number of applications in a decade.

A decade of dispute resolution

2023–2024 also marked an important milestone for the VRB: - a decade of dispute resolution. Starting as a trial in 2014, Alternative Dispute Resolution is no longer 'alternative'. Rather, it's a permanent fixture at the VRB and is now used for all veterans' applications. Shaped by user experience, VRB dispute resolution has evolved and adapted over the last 10 years, with a focus on being relevant and responsive to the current, future and emerging needs of veterans, serving ADF members and their families.

More than 80% of applications continue to be resolved by dispute resolution, an indication that the majority of veterans who seek VRB review are receiving outcomes with which they are satisfied, and in respect of which they have the opportunity to play an active part.

VRB hearings before a panel of three VRB members also continue to be an integral part of VRB review. With the benefit of prior VRB dispute resolution, issues are narrowed, and a veteran is not required to 'start from scratch' at hearing. In addition, familiarity with the VRB environment and the ability to have their cases listed for hearing immediately means that veterans do not face protracted delays in receiving decisions.

Therapeutic Jurisprudence

In February 2024, the VRB published a new General Practice Direction. With input from experts in therapeutic jurisprudence from the Flinders University of South Australia and the University of Sydney, the Direction covers the entire range of review processes and VRB operations generally.

The General Practice Direction sits alongside the VRB Vulnerable Veteran Protocol – a framework applied to veterans identified as being at risk - and complements the trauma informed training and mental health first aid the VRB provides to its members and staff. These measures highlight the VRB's continuous commitment to promoting emotional and psychological wellbeing and best practice in communicating with vulnerable veterans and their families.

VRB member appointments

The VRB's task is to take a fresh and independent look at a veteran's case and make the correct and/or preferable decision. This core function of merits review is conducted by members of the VRB; individuals appointed by the Governor-General to fulfill this important statutory responsibility.



In December 2023, 16 new VRB members were appointed, and 13 existing members were reappointed to various locations across the country. The VRB membership comprises high levels of expertise across a range of areas, including law, medicine, and military service. Relevantly, more than 80% of VRB members are veterans themselves, with extensive experience across all arms and periods of service; - from the Vietnam War through to contemporary operations. This valuable experience and specialist knowledge base of the VRB remains critical, especially with the diversity of its applicants; - from widows of veterans of the Second World War, children of all ages, and serving members in both permanent and Reserve service. These member appointments ensure the VRB can deliver a specialised review mechanism for the wide range of applicants who come before the VRB.

VRB Conference

In May 2024, the VRB held its national conference. The conference provided important professional development opportunities for VRB members and staff, with a focus on dispute resolution, questioning techniques, and hearing skills. The conference also engaged discussion led by pre-eminent experts on important topics, including veterans' law, legal decision-making and procedural fairness, contemporary military service and current issues affecting veterans. Amongst the speakers on the conference program, we were delighted to host Lt Gen Sir Nicholas Pope KCB CBE via video-conference from the UK, as well as The Hon. Justice Michael Lee of the Federal Court of Australia, The Hon. Justice Julie Ward, President Court of Appeal Supreme Court of NSW, and Vice Admiral Mark Hammond AO, Chief of Navy.

VRB Performance outcomes

2023–24 was productive for the VRB, with 3034 applications received and 3054 applications finalised. This clearance rate (100.7%) meant that there was no backlog of applications in the reporting year, consistent with previous years' outcomes.

In addition, in 2023–24 the VRB met all of its key performance indicators. Of the matters finalised, on average all applications (including those proceeding to hearing) were finalised in 3.8 months. In respect of applications finalised by dispute resolution alone, on average applications were finalised in 3.2 months. These impressive outcomes reinforce the VRB's strong and consistent commitment to timeliness and efficiency in the administration of justice.

Veterans' legislative reform

In July 2024, the Australian Government will introduce the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024. This legislative reform anticipates important changes to veterans' review, by enabling veterans to lodge their applications directly with the VRB; - the first time in the VRB's history and a reinforcement of its independence.

The legislative reform also provides for expansion of the VRB's remit, with the introduction of a single appeal pathway broadened to include service under the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988 (the DRCA). For the first time, all veterans - regardless of their period of service - will be able to seek review by the VRB, providing a holistic approach for those wishing to exercise their appeal rights.

The legislative reform provides an exciting opportunity to enhance public trust and confidence in the VRB's independence, and its ability to deliver fair and just decisions for those who seek review.



The year ahead

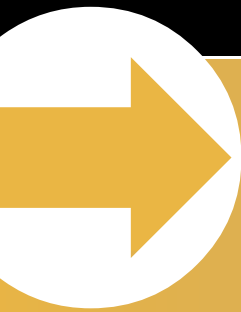
The excellent outcomes outlined in this Annual Report are due to the cooperation, collaboration and efforts on the part of all of the VRB's stakeholders. A special thanks to the members and staff of the VRB whose hard work and dedication highlight the VRB's capacity to continuously strive for excellence in the administration of justice.

To the veterans, serving members and their families, we extend our thanks and appreciation. In a challenging year for many in these communities, we acknowledge those who have entrusted the VRB to deliver a review system which is fair, just, accessible, informal and quick.

We are honoured to be leading the VRB in the next phase of its operations, acutely aware of the 100-year history of specialist veterans' review. With an expanded remit and new lodgement process, we look forward to shaping the VRB as a contemporary, responsive and accessible tribunal for current and future veterans, serving ADF members and their families.



OUR EVOLUTION



1914

The right to seek a review of veterans' pensions and entitlements was included in the *War Pensions Act 1914*

1917

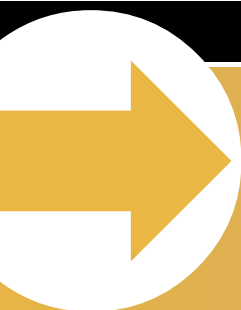
The right of appeal to a Board came into existence in the *Australian Soldiers Repatriation Act 1917*

1920s

Ex-service organisations complain about the absence of an independent right of appeal.

1929

The first external appeals tribunals – the *War Pensions Entitlement and Appeals Tribunals* are established by the *Australian Soldiers Repatriation Act 1920*.



2011

The VRB starts its digital transformation and parties are able to provide documents to the VRB electronically – including section 137 reports.

2012

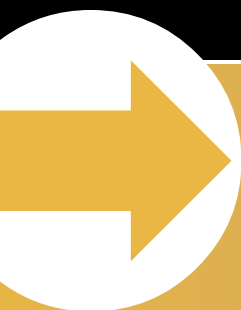
The VRB releases a handbook for advocates and representatives appearing before the VRB.

2014

The VRB launches two super registries in Sydney and Brisbane, designed specifically to meet veterans' needs including hearing rooms with technology to support videoconferencing.

2015

The VRB introduces Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). Important changes are made to enhance the VRB's case management powers. ADR events are conducted digitally.



2021

The VRB launches Online Dispute Resolution (ODR), the first of its type and starts to resolve certain applications in under 3 weeks.

A new website and the VRB Justice Portal are launched – allowing parties to upload

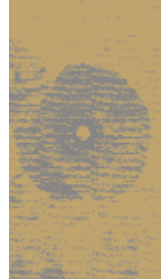
documents directly to the VRB and live-track the status of cases throughout the whole review process.

The VRB expands its Vulnerable Veteran Protocol to include online triage of applications involving veterans

at risk enabling a quicker and more tailored resolution of applications.

The VRB releases a new online guide for self-represented applicants and advocates appearing before the VRB.

The VRB enhances its online hearing platform to support complex applications with multiple participants.



1945	1979	1984	2004
The number of appeal tribunals is increased to deal with an influx of applications at the conclusion of World War 2.	The appeals tribunals are replaced by the <i>Repatriation Review Tribunal</i> .	The Veterans' Review Board was established by the <i>Repatriation Legislation Amendment Act 1984</i> .	The VRB's jurisdiction is expanded to include appeals under the <i>Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004</i> .
2017	2018	2019	2020
The VRB expands its ADR program and concurrent with a Senate Inquiry into suicide by veterans and ex-service personnel, the VRB commences a triage process for applications concerning vulnerable veterans.	The VRB launches a new IT case management system, which streamlines processes and transitions the VRB to fully digital files.	The VRB launches a 'decisions on the day' program; a 'fast-track' review process for incapacity payment applications, and formalises the Vulnerable Veteran Protocol.	In response to the COVID19 pandemic, the VRB provides a digital platform for virtual hearings, ensuring no hearing or ADR is cancelled in the face of the pandemic.
2022			2024
The VRB is increasing accessibility even further, with a focus on delivering a review mechanism tailored to the needs and expectations of its users. This includes offering a hybrid hearing model combining in-person and remote participation	in a single hearing. As well as harnessing the specialist expertise of its members across the country, a hybrid model offers veterans and their representatives greater flexibility in the way they participate in VRB hearings.	The VRB is recognised for its ODR program, winning the Courts and Tribunals ADR Group of the Year at the Australian Disputes Centre ADR Awards for 2021.	The VRB published a new General Practice Direction concerning therapeutic jurisprudence as part of its ongoing commitment to promoting emotional and psychological wellbeing and best practice in communicating with vulnerable veterans and their families.

Delivering justice: a snapshot

Our services	2022-23 (\$'000)	2023-24 (\$'000)
Clearance rate	107.5%	100.7%
ADR resolution rate	83.9%	83.9%
Time targets met	✓	✓

Feedback on our services	2022-23 (\$'000)	2023-24 (\$'000)
Compliments rate	2.7%	1.3%
Complaint rate	0.3%	0.2%

Our People	2022-23 (\$'000)	2023-24 (\$'000)
Members	42	41
Staff (full time equivalent employees)	23.6	22.75

Our Finances	2022-23 (\$'000)	2023-24 (\$'000)
Our budget	4,893	5,271

At a glance

Highlights 2023-24		
We improved access to justice resolving more than 83.9% of all applications using dispute resolution.	We cleared 100.7% of our case holding, with no backlog of applications awaiting listing for a dispute resolution event or hearing.	We continued to improve timeliness , resolving all applications on average in 3.8 months.



Overview of the VRB



Overview of the VRB

Delivering justice for veterans: your right to be heard

We are a specialist, high volume tribunal that is innovative and responsive to its users. We seek to improve access to justice for all veterans, current serving members and their families by resolving applications at the earliest possible opportunity in a cost effective and efficient way.

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 2024, there were 41 members of the VRB. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the membership by category is set out below.

Table 1: VRB membership, 30 June 2024

CATEGORY OF MEMBER	TOTAL (WOMEN)
Principal Member, full time	1 (1)
Senior Member, full time	1
Senior Members, sessional	11 (3)
Services Members, sessional	14 (5)
Members, sessional	14 (2)
TOTAL	41 (11)

Members perform a variety of VRB work, including conducting online and 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. She was appointed for a second term on 31 January 2023 for a period of three years. Ms Anderson holds a 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 2024, there were 22.75 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 Jacqui Skerman
- North West and South Australian Registry headed by Jodi Ross, and
- 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 and Carolyn Gordon is the VRB's Business Systems Manager.

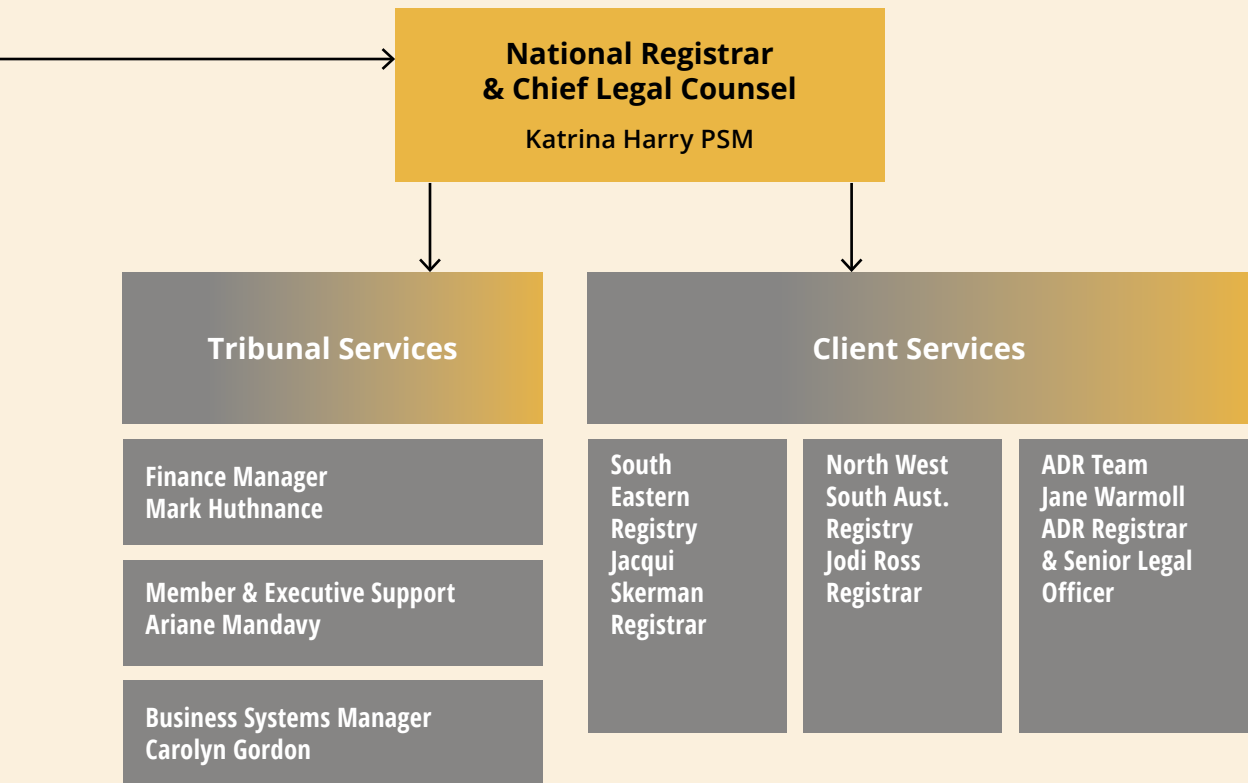
Staff in our client service teams:

- provide a dedicated single point of contact for each veteran, ensure applications are 'event- ready' and facilitate the listing of 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 dispute resolution processes.

Figure 1 Organisational structure

VRB organisational chart as at 30 June 2024









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 2023–24, how quickly we resolved them, and the key factors affecting the delivery of these services.

Year in review

Key points		
We cleared more than 100 percent of our case holding, ensuring no backlog of applications awaiting hearing or dispute resolution events.	We improved our time targets , with all applications taking (on average) less than 3.8 months to be resolved.	We improved access to justice , resolving more than 83.9% of applications by dispute resolution.

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.

Targets	Results
Finalise more applications than received (3034 in 2023–24)	✓ Target met: The VRB finalised 3054 applications in 2023–24, 0.7 per cent higher than the target.

Applications finalised within time

This is an indicator of how quickly the VRB deals with applications. The VRB measures time taken for the stages within its control. It includes applications finalised within our dispute resolution programs, as well as applications that proceed to a hearing.

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 dispute resolution 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.

Target	Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ADR applications: average number of applications finalised within 6 months 	<p>✓ Target met: on average, applications in the ADR program were finalised within 3.2 months. This is a 0.3 month improvement on last year</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All applications: average number of applications finalised within 12 months 	<p>✓ Target met: on average all applications were finalised in 3.8 months. This is a 0.6 month improvement on last year.</p> <p>The VRB is committed to continuing to improve its timeliness. In the reporting year, we continued to refine and develop our case management approach. The increase in the number of applications finalised by dispute resolution this year contributed to the overall reduction in the time taken to resolve applications.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less than 10 per cent of applications adjourned at hearing 	<p>✓ Target met: 4.5 per cent of applications were adjourned at hearing. This is a reduction of 2.2 percent from the last reporting year.</p> <p>The VRB's dispute resolution process is designed to ensure matters are 'hearing ready' and provide applicants with clear guidance on how to prepare for a hearing. This results in smoother proceedings, with less delay and fewer adjournments.</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.

Targets	Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less than 10 per cent of decisions made by the VRB in 2023–24 appealed to the AAT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Target met: Appeals to the AAT in 2023–24 amounted to 1.5 per cent of decisions made by the VRB in 2023–24. This is a reduction from the 2022-23 figure of 2.4 per cent.

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"> Dispute resolution is available to all applicants and is the preferred option for resolving appeals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We resolved 83.9% of applications by dispute resolution. This is the same as last year.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide accessible and welcoming venues across Australia, including regional areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We conducted hearings in-person and online and also offered 'hybrid' hearings, with a mixture of in-person and remote participants at a single hearing. Overall, we conducted 486 hearings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance digital capability to support dispute resolution events and hearings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We established 'virtual hearing suites' and continued to upgrade our hearing rooms to support hybrid and remote hearings. This work will continue in 2024. ✓ We made upgrades to our digital case management system including refreshing end-to-end digital workflows, which assisted us to continue to speed up processes significantly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the veteran community's awareness of the VRB's role and services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We continued to update and refresh information on the VRB website to increase awareness of the VRB's role and services. ✓ We conducted online advocates' forums across Australia in 2023-24, and participated in a variety of stakeholder events.

Analysis of our performance against our purpose

The VRB operates in a dynamic environment. In the year ahead, we anticipate a growth in demand for VRB review as the Department of Veterans' Affairs progresses initiatives to finalise the backlog of claims. At 30 June 2024, there were 3395 applications for VRB review (received by the Department), which is the highest level reached in a decade.

In the context of increasing numbers of applications, the VRB remained responsive, successfully achieving all performance goals in the reporting year. A clearance rate of 100% was maintained, indicating there was no backlog of applications awaiting hearing or dispute resolution events. Additionally, application resolution times were reduced, further enhancing operational efficiency.

VRB dispute resolution continued to resolve the clear majority of applications. However, hearings remained a vital part of the VRB's review process, and in 2023-23 the VRB held over 480 hearings, both online and in-person within VRB registries.

In 2023-24, work was undertaken to upgrade remote hearing capabilities and establish virtual hearing suites in the VRB's Perth and Adelaide locations. In 2024-2025, the VRB will commence work to establish a number of micro registries. This initiative will enable veterans in every part of Australia have access to a modern and informal hearing environment, as well as harness the specialist expertise of VRB members located across the country.

Throughout the reporting year, awareness of the VRB's role was enhanced by the holding of regular stakeholder forums. These events provided valuable opportunities for engagement and dialogue, sharing of feedback and promotion of the VRB's statutory objectives.

Budget efficiency

In 2023-24, our results were delivered within the budget allocated by the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

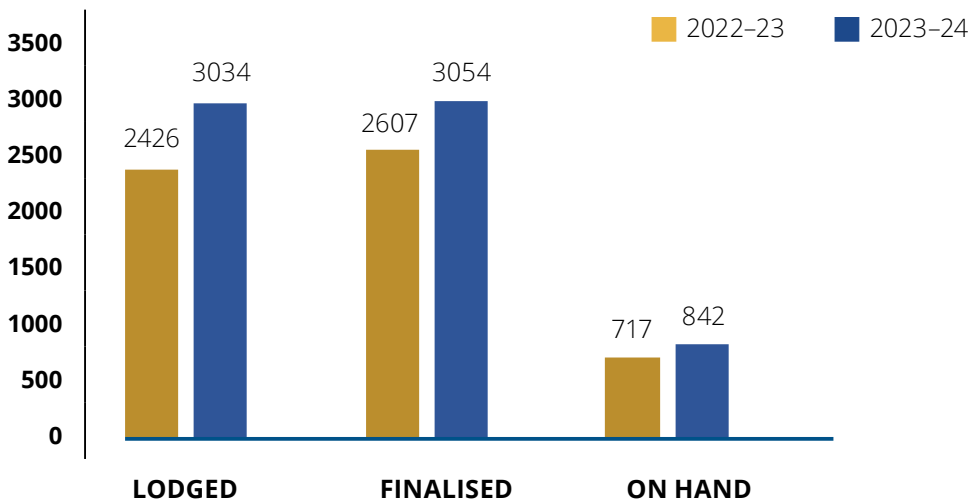
Caseload overview

The number of applications lodged with the VRB rose to more than 3,000 in 2023-24, driven by the increase in primary claims lodged with the Department of Veterans' Affairs. This number of applications was the highest since 2013-14.

The VRB cleared more than 100 per cent of its case holding and as at 30 June 2024 there was no backlog of applications awaiting a hearing or dispute resolution event.

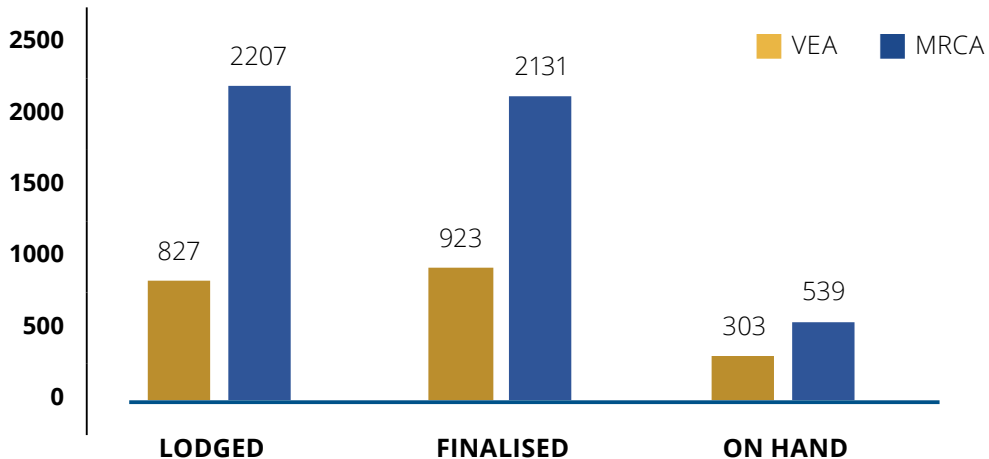
Currently, there is no mechanism for applicants to appeal directly to the VRB. Rather, applicants wishing to appeal to the VRB are required to lodge their applications with DVA (or the MRCC). As at 30 June 2024, more than 1200 applications for VRB review were being held by DVA or the MRCC for section 137 report preparation. This equates to around 20 percent of the VRB's caseload for the reporting year. On average, section 137 reports were provided by DVA or the MRCC to the VRB more than 10 weeks after lodgement with DVA or the MRCC.

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



Our jurisdictions

The workload in each of our jurisdictions remained similar to the previous reporting year: 72.7 per cent of applications were made in relation to the MRCA and 27.3 per cent in relation to the VEA..



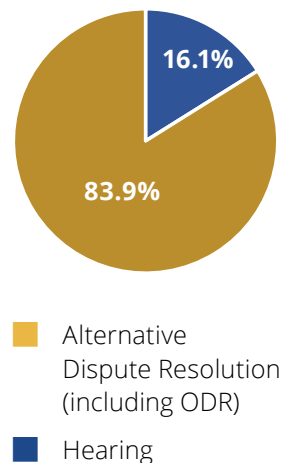
How we resolve applications

We resolve applications in different ways. In 2023–24, we resolved the majority of applications by a dispute resolution process (83.9%). This can include online dispute resolution, a decision being made on the papers (without a full hearing), a decision being made by the VRB which reflects an agreement between the veteran and the Commission, or a veteran choosing not to proceed further with an application for review. In 37.3 per cent of applications resolved by dispute resolution an outcome was reached that was favourable to the veteran.

In the remaining applications that could not be resolved by a dispute resolution process (16.1%) the VRB conducted a hearing and made a decision following the hearing. In 27.4 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 1.3 per cent of cases that were resolved in ADR and 0.2 per cent of cases that went to a hearing. These outcomes remained similar to the previous reporting year.

Chart 3.3 Mode of finalisation of applications for review of decisions, 2023–24



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 2023–24

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.

The table below shows the number of AAT appeals lodged in 2023–24 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 1.5 per cent of all VRB decisions which could have been appealed to the AAT.

Year	AAT appeals lodged	Proportion of total VRB decisions	Finalised	Percentage of cases where AAT at hearing decided differently to VRB*
2022–23	63	2.4%	65	0.3%
2023–24	46	1.5%	67	0.3%

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

Court Decisions 2023-24

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. One Federal Court decision was handed down in the reporting year, *Shafran v Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs* [2024] FCA 621.

Freedom of information 2023–24

In 2023–24, we received three requests for access to documents under the *Freedom of Information Act*. Three applications were finalised during the reporting year. Additionally, we received one request for an internal review which was also finalised during the reporting year.

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 2023–24

In 2023–24, there was one complaint and one request for review made about our operations to the Office of the Information Commissioner concerning a review of a decision made by the VRB.

In relation to Freedom of Information, no complaints were made to the Commonwealth Ombudsman, and no complaints were made to the Australian Human Rights Commission.

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 2023–24.

Services to veterans

Each application is different and we work with the parties to find the best way to resolve an application. Options for resolving applications include – Online Dispute Resolution, Dispute Resolution (outreach, conference or appraisal) or a VRB hearing.

Dispute Resolution

Our review processes are designed to resolve applications using dispute resolution.

The processes are also designed to ensure that those matters that are unable to be fully resolved via dispute resolution can be finalised at hearing informally and without undue delay.

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

Outreach is the first step in the VRB's dispute resolution program. Outreach is about helping the parties resolve applications.

The VRB Conference Registrars and Members are dispute resolution experts who will guide the parties through process. They are also independent.

At an outreach, the applicant and their advocate can talk to an independent VRB Conference Registrar or Member about the decision they have received from DVA. The VRB will contact applicants and advocates to set up a time for this discussion. It can take place by phone, video or face-to-face.

The VRB Conference Registrar or Member will explain the review process and ask the applicant or their advocate to explain why they are unhappy with the decision. They will also help the applicant and advocate to identify the issues in the case and discuss the next best steps to resolve it.



Outreaches are private, confidential sessions and the VRB Conference Registrar or Member will not disclose anything an applicant or advocate has said without their consent.

In some cases, the VRB Conference Registrar or Member may recommend that an application be resolved by a favourable decision 'on the papers'.

If the case can be resolved in this way, the parties will be sent a copy of a draft decision.

If the applicant accepts the draft the VRB will make a final decision, a copy of which will be sent to the parties.

Online Dispute Resolution

The VRB's Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) program increases 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.

ODR lets current serving members, veterans and their families resolve applications when and where it's convenient for them. This could be at home, at work or on a phone.

What are the benefits of ODR?

ODR further advances the benefits of the VRB's current dispute resolution program ('offline dispute resolution'). ODR sits alongside offline dispute resolution, providing an easy and accessible process whereby VRB Conference Registrars facilitate the early resolution of applications. ODR broadens 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 does VRB ODR provide greater choice and flexibility, it also alleviates some of the pressures placed on the volunteer advocates who support veterans.

How it works

There are three steps involved:

1. Request ODR

After a person's application is with the VRB, the person ("the applicant") can ask for ODR by using the VRB Justice Portal.

2. Facilitation

A Conference Registrar will help the applicant to resolve their application online.

3. Decision

If an application can be resolved by ODR, the applicant will be given a binding decision, delivered online.

How does an applicant request ODR?

ODR provides an applicant with an opportunity to resolve their application fairly and quickly. It is the applicant's choice to request ODR.

There is no form required. An applicant can simply upload a document (e.g. a screen shot or word document) into the VRB Justice Portal saying, "I would like my application to proceed to ODR". An applicant should do this after:

- an application for VRB review has been lodged with DVA
- DVA or the MRCC provides the application and the Section 137 report to the VRB
- an applicant tells us if they have a representative, and
- the applicant (or their representative) have registered for the VRB Justice Portal.

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 dispute resolution program. This will be appropriate in those cases where further evidence gathering needs to be undertaken and is 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 dispute resolution; or (3) proceed to a hearing (including the option of a virtual hearing) before a panel of 3 VRB members.

Hearings

We encourage all veterans to participate in their hearings. Attending a hearing may seem daunting, but VRB hearings are much less formal than a traditional legal hearing. VRB hearings are held in private, online or in person and they are not open to the public. A representative from the Commission will generally not attend VRB hearings. Applicants are welcome to bring a friend or support person to their hearing, regardless of whether they are represented.

Our hearings generally take less than one hour.

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 the Commission 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 the relevant Commission.

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.

Information about our review process

The VRB 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 dispute resolution 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 dispute resolution 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 a dispute resolution 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 a dispute resolution 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 a dispute resolution 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 dispute resolution 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 2023–24, 0.2 per cent of complaints were made for every application we resolved. This was a small decrease of 0.1% in comparison to the previous year.

	2022–23	2023–24
Applications finalised	2607	3054
Percentage of complaints per applications finalised	0.3%	0.2%

Compliments about our service

During 2023–24, 1.3 per cent of compliments were made for every application we resolved. This was a decrease of 1.4 per cent compared to the previous year.

	2022–23	2023–24
Applications finalised	2607	3054
Percentage of compliments per applications finalised	2.7%	1.3%

Engagement

We are committed to engaging with the broad range of external stakeholders. 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 2023-24, including the Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs and other members of the Repatriation Commission and Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission.

In addition, the Principal Member and National Registrar continued liaison with stakeholders across Australia, and attended and presented at various events hosted by ex-service organisations.

The Principal Member and National Registrar also conducted a series of VRB stakeholder forums.



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. Recent feedback to the VRB has included some of the following comments:

The VRB recently determined a number of my claims in relation to my military service. I would just like to say, how sincerely grateful I am for the wonderful, professional, and compassionate assistance that your staff have provided me with throughout this review process...I would be extremely grateful if you could please pass on my sincere thanks to your online dispute resolution manager....my case manager...who was incredibly helpful to me on the phone today... My sincere and immense thanks to you all, the work that you are all doing is so incredibly important for veterans, I am extremely grateful for your excellent and compassionate care of me during this process.

I'd really like to thank the team at the VRB for their support and guidance through the appeal process. I would also like to thank you at the speed you processed my case...

Thank you for your assistance during this process and please thank the conference register, and other staff who were involved with my appeal and guiding me through the process.

I would like to thank the senior member for making this process that little more helpful... it has taken a lot of the pressure off during my telephone outreaches. Please pass on my sincere thank you. It really does make such a difference.

Can you thank the members who were involved in my VRB hearing yesterday; and of course (the staff member on reception) ... whatever the outcome may be; It was professional, diligent, empathic, honest and sincere.

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.

A guide for self-represented veterans and representatives

The VRB offers a guide for self-represented veterans and representatives. The guide is designed to provide information to applicants who may not have a representative, as well as representatives who assist veterans and their families through the VRB review process.

The guide provides information on:

- what type of applications can be reviewed by the VRB
- what it means to be 'self-represented'
- stages in the process and what happens at each stage, and
- documents the parties need to provide.



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
2024

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 2024, there were 41 members appointed to the VRB. A list of our members is set out below. The Principal Member and Senior Member Robert Douglass are the only full-time members of the VRB.

Name	First Appointment	Appointment expires	State
Principal Member			
Anderson, Jane Elizabeth	12 Nov 2015	30 Jan 2026	NSW
Senior Members			
Byrne, Katherine	31 Mar 2022	31 Mar 2027	VIC
Carlin, Evan	1 Oct 2014	12 Dec 2026	QLD
Desses, Mary	1 Jan 2019	12 Dec 2026	NSW
Douglass, Robert	1 Oct 2014	13 Dec 2026	VIC
Kelly, Michael	1 Jan 2019	12 Dec 2026	QLD
Letts, David	1 Jan 2019	12 Dec 2026	NSW
MacDonald, Amanda	1 Oct 2007	12 Dec 2026	NSW
McCusker, Peter	13 Dec 2023	12 Dec 2028	SA
O'Brien, Glenn	31 Mar 2022	31 Mar 2027	QLD
O'Shea, Gerard	13 Dec 2023	12 Dec 2028	VIC
Smith, Raymond	13 Dec 2023	12 Dec 2028	WA
Wyatt, Neville	12 Nov 2015	12 Dec 2026	NSW

Name	First Appointment	Appointment expires	State
Services Members			
Bornholt, Mark	1 Jan 2011	12 Dec 2026	ACT
Carrigan, Catherine	19 Jul 2018	12 Dec 2026	VIC
Coghlan, Steven	1 Jan 2019	12 Dec 2026	WA
Date, William	13 Dec 2023	12 Dec 2028	QLD
Hill, Mark	13 Dec 2023	12 Dec 2028	NSW
Jugowitz, Katie	13 Dec 2023	12 Dec 2028	SA
Karlovic, Mark	13 Dec 2023	12 Dec 2028	VIC
Kelly, Mark	31 Mar 2022	31 Mar 2027	ACT
Kirton, John	13 Dec 2023	12 Dec 2028	NSW
Mather, Jodi	13 Dec 2023	12 Dec 2028	NT
McConachie, Vicki	31 Mar 2022	31 Mar 2027	QLD
Roberts, Francis	13 Dec 2023	12 Dec 2026	QLD
Rogers, Felicity	31 Mar 2022	31 Dec 2027	NSW
White, Sophia	1 Jan 2019	12 Dec 2026	NSW
Members			
Bragg, Anthony	31 Mar 2022	31 Mar 2027	QLD
Dowsing, Brett	31 Mar 2022	31 Mar 2027	WA
Gill, Gerard	31 Mar 2022	31 Mar 2027	VIC
Glover, Ross	13 Dec 2023	12 Dec 2028	NSW
Hunt, Louise	12 Nov 2015	12 Dec 2026	WA
Jithoo, Rondhir	13 Dec 2023	12 Dec 2028	VIC
Morgan-Short, Kim	31 Mar 2022	31 Mar 2027	QLD
Newman, Troy	13 Dec 2023	12 Dec 2028	QLD
Nottle, Joshua	31 Mar 2022	31 Mar 2027	NSW
Oak, Roland	13 Dec 2023	12 Dec 2028	SA
Seefeld, Scott	31 Mar 2022	31 Mar 2027	QLD
Skidmore, Mark	13 Dec 2023	12 Dec 2028	ACT
Thatcher, Luke	13 Dec 2023	12 Dec 2028	WA



Overview of our staff

At 30 June 2024, 22.75 full time equivalent staff members had been made available to the VRB by the Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Our staff are based in Sydney, Adelaide and Brisbane.

Classification	Salary Range	Salary Range
APS Level 4	4.5	3.9
APS Level 5	2.10	0
APS Level 6	3.6	1
Executive Level 1	3.15	2.5 (and 1 in Adelaide)
Executive Level 2	1	0

Employment agreements and arrangements for staff

At 30 June 2024, all on-going staff were covered by the Department's Enterprise Agreement. Salary ranges available to staff which are set out in the agreement are noted below:

Classification	Salary Range	Salary Range
APS Level 4	\$79,764	\$85,074
APS Level 5	\$88,923	\$92,670
APS Level 6	\$97,735	\$110,982
Executive Level 1	\$122,949	\$135,013
Executive Level 2	\$148,277	\$166,893

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*, *Gender Equity Action Plan 2022–26*, *Disability and Employment Strategy 2021–25* and *Gurru Ngali: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy 2020–24*.

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, include part-time and all staff have access to home based work.

We value diversity in the workplace and at the end of the reporting year 81.3 per cent of the VRB's staff and 29.3 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	3	25%
Male	9	75%
Total	12	100%
Services Member	Number	%
Female	6	40%
Male	9	60%
Total	15	100%
Member	Number	%
Female	2	15.4%
Male	11	84.6%
Total	13	100%
Staff	Number	%
Female	18.5	81.3%
Male	4.25	18.7%
Total	22.75	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.

Notifiable incidents and investigations

No notifiable incidents arising out of the conduct of our operations occurred in the reporting year.



Skilled to deliver justice

Ensuring our people are properly skilled to deliver high-quality, specialised services continues to be a key priority. In 2023–24, 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 staff 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. Veterans' mental health has continued to be a key topic of the VRB's professional development program. The VRB has partnered with Phoenix Australia for the delivery of comprehensive mental health first aid training during 2023–24.

In 2024, the VRB conducted new member induction training and a national conference. Speakers included: The Honourable Matt Thistlethwaite MP, Lieutenant General Sir Nicholas Arthur William Pope, KCB, CBE, the Honourable Justice Julie Ward, the Honourable Justice Michael Lee, Vice Admiral Mark David Hammond, AO, RAN, Major General David Thomae AM, Dr John Cooper, Psychiatrist, and AAT Deputy Presidents Bernard McCabe and Peter Britten-Jones.

Members and conference registrars also attended a range of external professional development seminars during 2023–24, including sessions arranged by the Council of Australasian Tribunals and the Law Societies of the various states and territories.

Members and staff also have access to a dedicated resource channel providing access to templates, publications and presentations. Regular e-news bulletins and digital legal updates also ensured our members and staff were informed of relevant developments throughout the year.

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 staff are required to participate in a performance management program. The program 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.

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 fostered a united culture within the VRB through regular staff meetings and collaborative activities. These efforts were aimed at enhancing communication, teamwork and a shared sense of purpose among our staff.

The VRB's hybrid work model has also contributed to building a unified culture by balancing flexibility with regular opportunities for in-person collaboration. This approach has strengthened connections amongst team members and reinforced a shared sense of purpose in delivering our statutory objective.

Productivity gains

Significant productivity gains were made in the reporting year. Our digital transformation and 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. Importantly, there was a decrease in the number of complaints received in the reporting 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

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

In 2023–24, we were provided a budget of \$5,026M.

In the reporting year, the majority of operating expenditure was related to payroll costs for members and registry staff in the direct delivery of VRB services. VRB travel expenditure reduced in the reporting year in the context of the introduction of virtual hearings. While the majority of the VRB's accommodation costs are met by the Department, a small property cost was also generated by the hire of hearing and conference rooms in other tribunal premises for in-person hearings, where the VRB no longer has a physical registry presence.

Table 14: Veterans' Review Board Expenditure

	2022-23 (\$'000)	2023-24 (\$'000)
Salaries (includes superannuation) Salaries (includes superannuation)		
Members	1,608	1,932
Staff (includes o/time & temps)	3,080	3,154
TOTAL	4,688	5,086
Travel (includes fares, accommodation and allowances)	113	98
Supplies and services		
Printing, postage, stationery and other office expenses	77	36
Communication and couriers	5	5
External training	10	23
Advertising	0	23
TOTAL	205	185
GRAND TOTAL	4,893	5,271

Appendix 1

Membership Biographies

Ms Jane Anderson

Ms Jane Anderson was appointed by the Governor-General as Principal Member of the Veterans' Review Board (VRB), commencing in the role in January 2018. Ms Anderson is in her second term as Principal Member, and also served previously as a part-time sessional member of the VRB.

Ms Anderson is a lawyer of 24 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 serious mental illness and impaired decision-making capacity.

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 agencies.

Ms Anderson has a strong interest in human rights and access to justice. She holds a Master of Law degree in international law from Cambridge University, UK, and has served as an officer of the National Executive of the Australian Institute of Administrative Law and the NSW Law Society Human Rights Committee. Ms Anderson is a former Co-Chair (and now Advisory Board member) of the Access to Justice and Legal Aid Committee and an officer of the Forum for Government and Public Lawyers of the International Bar Association, a global organisation of legal practitioners, bar associations and law societies.

Brigadier Mark Bornholt (Ret'd)

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.

Doctor Anthony Bragg

Doctor Anthony Bragg is a Geriatrician and Stroke Physician and currently works as the Director of Rehabilitation and Geriatric Medicine at St. Vincent's Hospital in Lismore. He has research interests in Stroke and Dementia and has a close interest in Veterans health in the Northern Rivers community. Prior to his medical career, Dr Bragg worked in corporate roles, including as a Management Consultant with the Boston Consulting Group and as a Group Manager with Boral Energy. He holds bachelor degrees in Science and Commerce as well as post-graduate degrees in Medicine and Business Administration.

Ms Kate Byrne

Kate Byrne was appointed in 2022 as a Senior Member of the Veterans' Review Board for a period of five years. With a Bachelor of Arts from Monash University, a Bachelor of Laws from the Queensland University of Technology, an Executive Master of Public Administration and mediator qualifications, Kate was admitted as a solicitor in 2000. Kate has extensive experience in senior executive roles in justice and community services and is also a Sessional Member on the Post Sentence Authority in Victoria.

Colonel Evan Carlin

Evan Carlin is a retired regular army legal officer. He served as Chief Legal Officer at HQ Land Command, the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters, Joint Operations Command and, latterly, at Command Legal Officer Forces Command. Colonel Carlin also served as an exchange at HQ Land in the UK and as ADC to the Judge Advocate General of the ADF. He has operational service in NATO, the Balkans (Kosovo), Iraq and Indonesia. He has been a Senior Member since 2015.

Colonel Catherine Carrigan

Colonel Catherine (Bunny) Carrigan is a business consultant, Board Director and senior Army Reserve Officer. She was appointed a VRB Services Member in 2018. Colonel Carrigan has served in the Australian Army (Regular and Reserve) for forty years. She is a logistics officer with a breadth of ADF experience including operational service in Somalia, the Middle East and on domestic operations. She holds a Bachelor of Applied Science, Masters of Defence Studies, Masters of Business, and Australian Institute of Company Directors Diploma.

Mr Steven Coghlan

Steve served as an Army Signals Officer from 1998 to 2006 during which time he saw 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.

Brigadier William Robert Date ADC

Brigadier Bill Date graduated from the Officer Cadet School, Portsea in 1980 and has served in the Army as a regular and active reservist. He currently writes joint doctrine for the Headquarters Joint Operations Command. His command appointments include 11th Brigade and 2nd Combat Engineer Regiment. His operational service includes Bougainville, Iraq and Afghanistan.

He was the Chief Inspector Petroleum and Gas from 2016-2024 responsible to regulate safety and health in Queensland's gas industry including safe coal seam gas production and fracking operations. Brigadier Date holds a Master of Business Administration degree and other qualifications.

Ms Mary Desses

Ms Desses was appointed as a Member of the Veterans' Review Board commencing 1 January 2019 and then as a Senior Member commencing 31 March 2022. 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 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 Brett Dowsing, JP, RAN (Retd)

Brett Dowsing is a career naval officer with 51 years' permanent and reserve service. He qualified as a seaman officer and a helicopter pilot, and has had sea, air and shore commands across all officer ranks held. Recognition has included Vietnam and counterterrorist service along with international duties including in the USA, Republic of Korea, Mongolia and Timor-Leste. Brett serves on several veterans' related boards from Perth, WA and commenced duties with the VRB, this year.

Clinical Professor Gerard Gill RFD MBBS PhD FRACGP FAFPHM FARGP

Gerard Gill RFD MBBS PhD FRACGP FAFPHM FARGP is the retired Professor of General Practice at Deakin University. He spent 37 years as an Army Reserve Medical Officer, deployed to the MEAO in 2008 and has a long involvement with caring for veterans and on DVA committees.

Mr Ross Glover

Ross Glover commenced practice at the NSW Bar in 2010, and has a varied practice including in the fields of administrative law, sporting tribunals, commercial law, insurance and Commonwealth criminal law. Since 2008 he has been a reserve legal officer in the Royal Australian Navy and in 2022, he was appointed as a member of the New South Wales Civil and Administrative Tribunal sitting in the Consumer and Commercial Division.

Rear Admiral Mark Hill AM CSC RAN

Rear Admiral Hill joined the Royal Australian Navy in 1980 where he served for 42 years. During his career he enjoyed Command appointments at sea and ashore and Operational service in East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq. His senior Command appointments include Joint Task Force 633, Maritime Border Command and Joint Agency Task Force Operation Sovereign Borders. He was appointed to the VRB as a Services Member in February 2024.

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. From 2007 to 2021 she was a Panel Leader for the Royal Australian Air Force Specialist Reserve Legal Panel. As an Assistant Inspector General of the Australian Defence Force, Ms Hunt conducts complex inquiries and leads teams conducting military justice audits at Australian Defence Force establishments. Ms Hunt was appointed as a Services Member in 2015 and a Senior Member in 2019.

Dr Rondhir Jithoo

Dr Ron Jithoo is a Neurosurgeon of 25 years experience. He completed his medical degree in South Africa with the Dean's commendation. Neurosurgical training was done at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, and he has worked as a neurological consultant at the Royal Melbourne, the Alfred and Royal Darwin hospitals.

He is an Adjunct Research Fellow of Monash University through the National Trauma Research Institute. He has been elected to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons court of examiners for Neurosurgery and is currently the secretary of the Board of Neurosurgery of Australasia.

He is a past acting head of the department of Neurosurgery of the Alfred Hospital from 2015 to 2017.

He is currently an active specialist reservist at the RAAF with the Rank of Wing Commander, attached to No. 1 Expeditionary Health Squadron based at Amberley. He has deployed on Operation Okra to the Middle East region as principal Neurosurgeon Forward Surgical Group. He has received a meritorious unit citation of the US Army in addition to the OSM (MER) and ADM.

He is also a qualified aviation medical officer from the RAAF Institute of Aviation Medicine.

Ms Katie Jugowitz

Katie is a graduate of the Australian Defence Force Academy and the Royal Military College, Duntroon. She spent 11 years offering full-time service, including with the 2nd Reconstruction Task Force in Afghanistan and the Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Program. She has a Bachelor of Science, a Master of Business Administration and a Graduate Diploma of Counselling and Psychotherapy.

Lieutenant Commander Mark Karlovic

Lieutenant Commander Mark Karlovic joined the Royal Australian Navy as a Reservist Legal Officer in 2010. His military career to date has seen him work in a range of positions including at Fleet Legal, HMAS Cerberus as the Command Legal Officer, Maritime Border Command, Defence People Group and Headquarters Joint Operations Command as well as serving on a range of warships.

In his civilian career he has worked as a senior Human Resources Executive with a range of ASX listed, Multinational and smaller organisations for over twenty years. Mark holds a Master of Commerce, Bachelor of Laws, and Master of Military Law.

Mark was appointed to the VRB in 2024 as a Services Member.

Major General Mark Kelly, AO, DSC

Major General Mark Kelly graduated from the Royal Military College in 1978 and served in the Army for 36 years as an Infantry officer. His senior command appointments include: 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment; 3rd Brigade; 1st Division; Land Command Australia; and Joint Task Force 633. His operational service includes: Zimbabwe/Rhodesia, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan. He also served as the Repatriation Commissioner from July 2010 until June 2019.

He was appointed to the VRB as a Services Member in March 2022.

Michael (Mike) Kelly

Mike Kelly is currently an Active Reservist holding the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He holds Bachelor degrees in Arts and Laws and a Graduate Diploma in Management. He is an admitted legal practitioner and a senior lawyer within 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.

Mr John Kirton

John served over 17 years in the full time Air Force. Initially joining as a navigator, after conducting one tour on the C-130H Hercules he transferred to pilot then returned to fly the C-130. In 2015 he then brought the C-27J Spartan into service. John was posted to 36 & 37SQNs during a very busy period that saw him involved in numerous operations such as the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami, Timor, Solomons and of course multiple tours of Iraq and Afghanistan. John now owns and runs multiple businesses in Sydney and is also the President of the Kirribilli RSL Sub-branch.

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.

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, a member of the Superannuation Complaints Tribunal and a Conference Registrar and District Registrar of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. Amanda is currently contracted to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to design and implement changes to the Commonwealth biosecurity system. She is also contracted to undertake reviews for the Merit Protection Commissioner. Amanda holds a Bachelor of Science and a Masters in Administrative Law and Policy from the University of Sydney. She was first appointed to the Veterans' Review Board in 2007 as a Senior Member and again as a Member from 2018 and a Senior Member from 2022.

Wing Commander Jodi Mather

Ms Mather is a legal practitioner in the Northern Territory (NT) with 20 years post admission experience. She was the former Associate to Chief Justice Brian Frank Martin (dec'd), Prosecutor within the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and Senior Adult Guardianship Officer with the Office of the Public Guardian. Ms Mather currently practices in litigation, possessing an extensive background in Royal Commissions and Inquiries. She holds a current appointment as Legal Member of the NT Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Ms Mather was commissioned as a Specialist Reservist Legal Officer to the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) in 2006 and appointed Head of Panel to the Northern Territory Tri-Service Legal Panel upon being promoted to Wing Commander in 2019. She holds a current appointment as Legal Member of the NT Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Ms Mather also serves as an Aide-de-camp to His Honour Professor The Honourable Hugh Heggie, Administrator of the Northern Territory.

Commodore Vicki McConachie

Commodore Vicki McConachie served in the permanent Navy from 1984 to 2012 undertaking senior roles in both a legal and non-legal capacity, including serving in Iraq. She has served in the reserve since 2012. After leaving the permanent force she served as a non-executive director for Defence Housing Australia. From 2012 until 2020 she served as Chief General Counsel to a Commonwealth government entity. She currently reviews and undertakes complex investigations for the Inspector General ADF among other reserve service. She holds bachelors degrees in Arts and Law and a Masters degree in law.

Mr Peter McCusker

Peter McCusker has been appointed to the Board for 5 years from December 2023.

From 1988, he served as a Judge in the District Court of South Australia. From 1990 he also served as a Judge in the Industrial Court of South Australia and the Industrial Commission of South Australia. He was appointed a Deputy President of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission in 1991. He has served as a Deputy President of the Workers Compensation Tribunal from 1995. On the establishment of the South Australian Employment Tribunal in 2015, he was appointed its first President. He served as the Presidential member on a number of administrative tribunals including the Police Promotions Appeals Tribunal, the Teachers Appeal Board, the Firefighters Disciplinary Appeals Tribunal and the Public Sector Appeals Tribunal.

Before his appointment to the Judiciary, he practiced as a barrister mainly in the areas of administrative law, employment and industrial law, workers compensation and personal injuries law. He appears as such in all jurisdictions, including the High Court. He is a graduate of Adelaide University (LLB).

Dr (SQNLDR) Kim Morgan-Short

Dr Morgan-Short is a medical practitioner who has had a varied career working in many locations around the world, such as the UK, Ireland and Saudi Arabia. She has been an RAAF Reservist for 30 years and has operational service in the Middle East. She also has a Graduate Certificate in Law and a Post Graduate Diploma in Law (Medical Law and Ethics). Much of her working life has been spent as both a uniformed medical officer and a civilian doctor on military bases.

Unfortunately she is a War Widow having lost her first pilot husband in an RAAF F111 crash and also a Legacy Widow having lost her second husband to cancer whilst he was serving a pilot in the RAAF. Her son is also an RAAF pilot. Dr Morgan-Short currently works at Defence Force Recruiting doing medical assessments and she was a former Board Member of Australian War Widows Qld.

Mr Troy Newman

Troy Newman is a barrister in private practice. He holds a Bachelor of Science from Griffith University and a Bachelor of Laws from Queensland University of Technology. Prior to his legal career, Troy was a Queensland Police Officer for 24 years specialising in investigative and prosecutorial roles. Troy was an Army Reserve Military Police member from 2000 – 2002.

Troy serves on the Councillor Conduct Tribunal (Qld) and was appointed as a Member of the VRB in 2023.

Mr Joshua Nottle

Mr Nottle is a barrister in private practice. He has a Bachelor of Laws, Graduate Diploma in Military Law and a Master of Laws from the Australian National University. He served full-time in the Royal Australian Navy from 2003 as a Legal Officer before transferring to the Reserves and commencing practice as a barrister in 2017. He was appointed as a Member of the VRB in 2022.

Dr Roland Oak JP

Roland is a specialist medical practitioner and a fellow of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. He holds a Master of Public Health, Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery and he is an associate fellow of the Australasian College of Health Service Management and graduate of the Royal Military College, Duntroon.

He completed 20 years of service, initially as a soldier, General Service Officer and then pursued a career in medicine. Roland has been posted all over Australia in Artillery, Medical Corps roles and has had overseas operational service. Post service he has worked in General Practice, as the Medical Director for Calvary/Medibank, Director Medical Services in WA Health and as the National Senior Medical Officer for Defence Force Recruiting. Currently he is working as a civilian Medical Officer on military bases, part-time civilian General Practitioner and the Medical Director for locum work around Australia.

Lieutenant Colonel Glenn O'Brien

Lieutenant Colonel O'Brien is a partner in a law firm and a part-time member of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. He was a member and Legal Officer of the Australian Regular Army and holds a Master of Defence Studies.

Lieutenant Colonel Gerard O'Shea

Colonel O'Shea joined the Army in 1999. He has served in the regular and reserve forces as an infantry officer and legal officer. He has served on operations in Australia, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan. He holds postgraduate degrees in Law and Military Studies, and he is a fellow of the Australian Institute of Community Directors. Colonel O'Shea works in private practice as a lawyer and management consultant.

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.

CAPT Felicity Rogers RAN

Ms Rogers joined the Royal Australian Navy as a full time legal officer in 1994. Her postings included Fleet Headquarters and Deployable Joint Force Headquarters – Maritime. She deployed to Dili, East Timor as a legal adviser to HQINTERFET in 1999. She transferred to the Navy Reserve in 2001, when she was admitted as a barrister at the NSW Bar, where she continues to practise.

Ms Rogers holds a Bachelors degree in both law and politics and a Masters degree in International Law. She is also a registered counsellor.

Mr Scott Seefeld

Scott Seefeld is a barrister in private practice in Brisbane. He holds Bachelor degrees in Science and Law, and Masters degrees in Business Administration and Engineering Science. Prior to his legal career, Scott was an RAE officer in the Australian Army. He is a graduate of the Australian Defence Force Academy and the Royal Military College – Duntroon. He has over 25 years' service as both a regular and reserve officer, including operational service in East Timor in 1999 and 2000. Since 2019, he has continued to serve as a legal officer in the RAAF Specialist Reserve.

AVM (Retd) Mark Skidmore AM, BSc, Grad Dip Mil Av, FRAeS, tp

Air Vice Marshal (retd) Mark Skidmore AM is Chairman of Skykraft, Chairman of Seitec, Director of Swift Aerospace Consulting Pty Ltd and also provides support to the International Test Pilot Canada and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Reserves. Mark is a fellow of the RaeS and past President of the Australian division.

Mark has more than 30 years' experience in both civilian and military aviation.

Mark had an outstanding military aviation career, beginning as an F-111 pilot in the RAAF in the early 1980s. A qualified test pilot, he led RAAF research and development squadrons and was promoted to Australia's Air Commander, holding oversight for Australia's air operations, and reached the rank of Air Vice Marshal before retiring in 2012. Mark has also worked in civilian aviation as Director of Aviation Safety and CEO, Civil Aviation Safety Authority, and as a test pilot and business development manager. He has led large teams of operational, technical and administrative support staff providing leadership for operational, training and support functions.

In 2007 Mark was awarded a Commendation for Distinguished Service for distinguished performance of duties in warlike operations as the Director of the Coalition Combined Air Operations Centre in the Middle East Area of Operations. In 2010 Mark was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in recognition of his exceptional service as the Air Commander Australia and in a range of other senior appointments.

Today Mark is part of the general aviation community owning and regularly flying a Globe Swift GC-1B aircraft and an ex-RAAF CT4A.

Mr Raymond Smith

Ray Smith served full-time in the RAAF from 1990 to 2010 as an Intelligence Officer. He saw active service in the Middle East, including as a contingent commanding officer in Iraq. He also served as the Australian Liaison Officer to the United Nations Command and Assistant Defence Attaché in Korea.

After leaving the full-time ADF, he worked for the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva and Kabul, and as a barrister in Victoria and the UK. He has experience as a social security tribunal judge in the UK and as a workers' compensation arbitrator in WA. He is currently a full-time member of the Australian Administrative Appeals Tribunal and a part-time RAN legal officer. He is a graduate of the Australian Command & Staff College, and has bachelor's degrees in politics and law, and master's degrees in business administration, international relations, and strategy and policy.

Captain Luke Thatcher

Luke served as an Australian Army Officer from 2000 to 2010 serving with the Royal Australian Infantry Corps and the Royal Australian Corps of Military Police. Specialising in Close Person Protection (CPP), he saw service in Iraq in 2005 and then again in 2008 as the SECDDET X111 CPP Team Leader. Following his service, Luke was employed with the WA Department of Justice (Corrective Services Division) for twelve years holding various leadership and management positions before transitioning careers to Defence West to help run the Veterans Issues portfolio. Luke was appointed to the VRB as a part-time Member in December 2023.

Mr Scott Warr

Scott Warr is an Army Officer who served for 22 years in the Regular Army and continues to serve in the Reserves. He is a highly effective and capable senior executive leader with a track record for delivering results. He has over 30 years of broad experience in the military, private and public sectors in Australia and overseas. His most recent experience was as national CEO of Legacy Australia Incorporated and Acting CEO of RSL NSW. He was recently appointed a Trustee on the RAAC Colonel John Haynes Trust and is currently the President of the Terrigal-Wamberal RSL sub-branch in NSW.

He brings significant capability and experience in all aspects of the charities and NFP sector, finance and investments, human resource management, and emergency and business continuity management.

Scott Warr was appointed to the VRB as a Services Member in December 2023.

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.

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.

Appendix 2

Advertising and market research

We did commission press advertising worth \$23,158 in 2023–24, which is reflected in Table 14. We did not undertake any market research in 2023–24.

Grants

We did not administer any grants programs in 2023–24.

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

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.

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	Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977
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.
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	Repatriation Commission v Deledio (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 Freedom of Information Act 1982.
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	Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004.
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.
Online Dispute Resolution	An applicant can lodge a request on the VRB Justice Portal for their application to be considered for Online Dispute Resolution.
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	An office of a court, tribunal, or the VRB.
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	Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988.

Telephone hearing	A VRB hearing conducted by telephone between a VRB hearing room and another location.
VEA	Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986.
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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