From the traditional to the virtual: Ex-service organizations, advocacy and lobbying in the 21st century

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Abstract

The Australian Defence Community (ADC) comprises numerous ex-service organizations (ESOs) and individuals who strive to represent the interests of the members and former members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and their families. The ADC is a largely ill-defined concept despite the long history of the more traditional ESOs which have a lineage going back 50-100 years. This community has a proud history of advocacy and lobbying. This research follows a qualitative design involving an on-going two-phase process. The first phase seeks to identify the changing composition of the ADC and the evolution of the issues being addressed: and the second explores past and current practices and experiences of organising for advocacy and lobbying. In Phase 1 data was sourced from a retrospective review of the magazine of the Australian Defence Welfare Association (DFWA) 'Camaraderie'; existing published studies of ESOs; and one researcher's lived experiences. For Phase 2, data was sourced from semi-structured interviews with members of ESO advisory bodies supplemented by a small email survey of informants from internet-based groups. The data is being woven together into a descriptive account and a thematic analysis. To date, the research has identified three eras of advocacy and lobbying that encompassed the evolution of the ESO community and their practices from WW1 to the present day: the 'traditional', the 'contemporary' (including 'reconnaissance', 'main body' and 'mop-up') and the 'virtual'. The eras are not in a strict chronological sequence rather they follow the development of the Australian defence capability through the nation's development and involvement in war and conflict and the make-up of the various forces used. Thematically, the research is beginning to identify that 'leadership'; 'organisational agility' and effective 'representation' of the issues that reflect the aspirations of the members of the ADC are the missing ingredients across the ADC in the 21st century.

Introduction

The Australian Defence Community (ADC) is comprised of organizations and individuals with a shared interest in the welfare of veterans, ex-service personnel and currently serving members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), and their families. This community has a proud history of advocacy and lobbying.

It is difficult to identify the exact number of individuals and organizations in the ADC. Estimation is made difficult by debates over eligibility criteria for entitlements from the Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA); variable and specific membership criteria for particular veteran, ex-service and current service organizations; and the changing nature of military forces and campaigns in Australia (Ryan 2013). In the case of individuals, there were 221, 635 people in receipt of DVA treatment and support as at December 2013 (DVA 2013). It should be noted that this figure is trending down with the loss of some 18,000 DVA ageing clients in the period December 2011 to December 2013. These figures do not include the unknown number of members and former members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) who are not known to DVA yet who may or may not be members of the various organisations.

There are variable estimates of the number of organizations in the ADC, known as ex-service organizations (ESOs). The Australian Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) defines an ESO as: "… an organisation whose members include veterans throughout the Commonwealth and/or persons throughout the Commonwealth who are receiving or eligible to receive pensions under Part II of the VEA as dependants of veterans. The organisation's objectives will include that of representing those persons throughout the Commonwealth" (DVA 2014). This bland and bureaucratic definition fails to transmit the nuances of what precisely the numerous grassroots-level entities of the various ESOs do. These entities are variously referred to as sub-branches, social centres or clubs and their brief ranges from being places for comradeship between members that may or may not have a shared service experience; pension and advocacy advice and support for those in need of such services; welfare or the care of those in need; and the sharing of information between individual members and their families (Kearney 2013).

In a broad sense ESOs are member-based organisations (Lyons 2001) formed to advocate for and to assist those who have served, or in some cases are still serving, in the Australian Defence Force, and their families. While the DVA definition refers to "veterans receiving or have eligibility to receive pensions" there are organisations that are now recognised as ESOs but whose members are not veterans. These include the *Partners of Veterans Association* (PVA) and the *National Servicemen's Association* (NSA) with this latter association comprised primarily of men conscripted but who did not serve overseas. In 2009 DVA recognised 54 "organisations of a nationally based nature with either a formal National/State Branch structure or those with branches at a state level" (DVA 2009). Today DVA recognises 14 of what it terms "major ex-service organisations" (DVA 2014); which seems to suggest a tightening of recognition in what is generally accepted as a cluttered market place of organisations.

Members of the ADC have been and are active in advocating and lobbying on a range of issues. Long standing issues include indexation of pensions and superannuation (Chitham 2013) or those that relate to a particular campaign such as the Agent Orange Issue for Vietnam Veterans (VVAA 2014; VVFA 2014). The general understanding of advocacy within the ADC relates to the activity of 'advocates' – local volunteers specifically trained to support individuals in applications for, and disputes in relation to, eligibility for existing benefits from the DVA. Lobbying is generally understood as approaches to government for change to existing policies and regulations.

Unlike in the period immediately after WW2 when ESOs were very much a part of the fabric of communities across Australia and when some were pivotal players in the national political debate (ABC 1963) as regular contributors to the media and relevant forums, today such organizations are mute in comparison. Today not every ESO sub-branch, social centre or club provides the range of advocacy services that they may have done in the past. Many are facing a declining membership because of the ageing and departure of the WW2 generation and also due to the lack of identification with such organisations by the more recent cohort of veterans and ex-service personnel. This recent generation is seemingly reluctant to become involved in what were historically significant organizations (and forms of advocacy and lobbying) but are now seen as less relevant and from a different age.

The purpose of this research study is to explore the changing ways of organizing for advocacy and lobbying in the ADC. The research study seeks to address the following questions:

What issues have the ADC faced?

How has the ADC organized to advocate and lobby in relation to these issues?

What has been the experience of organizing for advocacy and lobbying in relation to the issues facing the ADC?

How might the ADC organize differently for advocacy and lobbying in relation to the issues facing the ADC in the 21st Century?

This paper reports on emerging analysis in relation to issues addressed; their relationship to different military forces and campaigns; the ESOs active in advocacy and lobbying these issues; and changing advocacy and lobbying practices and relations (within the ADC and with government). The paper began with an indication of the membership and activity of the ADC. This is followed by a brief indication of pertinent literature reviews on advocacy and lobbying and membership organizations; and an account of the approach to the research study. The main body of the paper comprises emergent empirical findings to date and directions for further analysis.

Advocacy, lobbying and membership organisations

Contemporary literature reviews on advocacy; lobbying and membership organisations when considered in combination indicate some key directions and approaches for exploration of ADC concerns, advocacy and lobbying, and ESOs. Three reviews are the primary sources for this indicative scan of pertinent literature: Tschirhart and Gazley's (2014) review of scholarship on membership organizations; Almog-Bar and Schmid's (2014) critical review of advocacy activities of nonprofit human service organizations; and Acosta's (2012) review of advocacy networks and implications for research agendas.

Membership organizations are a large subset of the third sector; vary in relation to purpose, legal form, location, and membership characteristics; yet, according to a recent review of association literature, experience recurring issues (Tschirhart & Gazley 2014). Research on

membership organizations has focused on motivations and retention of members; characteristics of members and issues of exclusion; impact on political engagement and attitudes of members, and other member benefits; explanations for organizational genesis, growth and survival; and outcomes of association (Tschirhart & Gazley 2014). One area of research occupying the interest of historians and other scholars is the transformation of membership associations in line with changing and competing interests and demands (Tschirhart & Gazley 2014). These transformations are likely to be cumulative; multi-dimensional; not always unidirectional; occur in rapidly changing policy environs; and require a more integrative approach to analysis. Hence analyses at a system or field level could reveal more insightful and "robust theoretical and practical findings" (Tschirhart & Gazley 2014: 115).

Advocacy is related to a need to advance the welfare of members, clients or a particular group; can be performed by a range of organizations and individuals; and is not linked to any particular level of organizational formalization (Almog-Bar & Schmid 2014). Advocacy practice can refer to action on behalf of an individual or group within an existing system (individual or case advocacy) or efforts to change that system through "individual or collective action for a cause, idea, or policy" (Almog-Bar & Schmid 2014: 14) sometimes referred to as policy or legislative advocacy, or systemic advocacy (Onyx, Armitage, Dalton, Melville, Casey & Banks 2010). Lobbying practice is a more narrowly defined activity geared towards promoting a particular position on specific pieces of legislation or legislative change to legislators or their staff either directly or indirectly (Almog-Bar & Schmid 2014) requiring high level access to political and institutional elites (Onyx et al 2010).

The convergence of the terms advocacy and lobbying is often seen as a moot point. Such an examination is a distraction as invariably agreement or the lack of it becomes a matter of semantics whereas the more relevant and critical discussion needs to dwell on the manner of advocacy, which is categorised as either direct or indirect. Either way, the end result is to seek political influence and therefore political advocacy can be considered as lobbying (Smith, Vromen & Cook 2012). Accepting then that advocacy is seeking to advance the welfare of members the discussion then becomes one of who needs to be influenced and how it is to be achieved. Direct lobbying involves dealing openly and directly with those able

to advance that welfare and influence change, that is, politicians and the bureaucracy. This is sometimes referred to as persuasive/inside work (Warhurst 2010) and involves putting arguments to politicians and bureaucrats through one-on-one meetings, attendance at committee hearings and dealing directly with points of influence. Indirect lobbying or political/outside work (Warhurst 2010) is the contrary activity and involves the utilization of grassroots activation of the general public or the membership of the relevant organisation to exert personal pressure to influence decision makers.

Advocacy organizations, those organizations with a mandate and core activity of advocacy, are only a small proportion of third sector organizations and advocacy activity is not limited to such organizations (Almog-Bar & Schmid 2014). Advocacy organizations and advocacy activity by organizations are critical to the reconceptualization of particular concerns and the reordering of particular organizational fields and practices. They can facilitate and drive new ways to conceptualize and address issues by giving voice to members' and clients' concerns, and having an influence on public policy (Scott, Deschenes, Hopkins, Newman & McLaughlin 2006). Most important in this endeavor are the active nature of the organizational intervention on behalf of the collective interests they represent, and the explicit goal of influencing public policy or institutional regulation (Onyx et al 2010).

Advocacy networks are coalitions, alliances or co-federations of groups and organizations seeking mandates and developing strategies for advocacy at the systemic level and can involve complex inter-group and inter-organizational relations (Acosta 2012). Such networks seek to garner the necessary flexibility, capacity, access and influence (Acosta 2012) to progress advocacy beyond the remit and means of individual organizations. This requires considerable coordination and ongoing negotiation; and can trigger tensions between organizations, even turf wars. According to Acosta (2012) research on advocacy networks needs to consider the scale of action; the context (especially the culture of the particular organizational field); the underlying logic or structure of the network; network discourse (and contestation around language); and the wider institutional (eco)-system.

Research on changing organizational fields and practices has traditionally been historical in nature (see for example a prior field-level study by one author, Earles 1999) but can be

prospective (see for example Scott et al 2006). In this research we combine an historical view on the transformation of the organizational field that is the Australian Defence Community (ADC) - which historically was, and in current departmental nomenclature still is, called 'Veterans' Affairs' - with a prospective view on ways forward as tentatively indicated by recent changes in organizations within the ADC and advocacy and lobbying practices by the ADC. We take an emergent approach to the categorization of 'advocacy organizations' and 'advocacy activity' within the ADC, with an inclination towards exploring systemic advocacy over other forms of advocacy. We are particularly interested in efforts to address fragmentation and dissonance in the ADC's advocacy (including lobbying) efforts through ESOs, and the evolution of networks of ESOs directed at advocacy. We undertake this research cognizant of the possible influence of the culture of the 'military' context; debate around the term 'veteran' (Ryan, 2013); and with a systemic lens.

Methodology

This qualitative study (currently in process) involves a two-phased design: the first identifying the changing composition of the ADC and the issues of concern; and the second exploring past and current practices and experiences of organising for advocacy and lobbying. One researcher is an insider to the ADC, an active member of a number of ESOs and accordingly draws on the insightful practice of "reflection on actual and immediate experience" (Fook 1996: 194). The other researcher is not active in any ESOs, providing an outsider perspective to analysis. The research is informed by a constructivist perspective that acknowledges the co-constructed and situated nature of knowledge; the importance of everyday practice wisdom; and the sharing of experiences as a means of knowledge creation (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba 2008).

For Phase 1, data was sourced from a retrospective review of the magazine of the Australian Defence Welfare Association (DFWA) *Camaraderie*; existing published studies of ESOs; and one researcher's lived experiences. The DFWA magazine *Camaraderie* commenced publication in 1960 and continues to be the voice of that increasingly significant ESO. It is a rich source of information on the ever-evolving issues and challenges that the ADC has faced

through a period of almost constant change, on-going deployments, and changes in governments and government policy toward the ADC.

There is a dearth of existing studies available on ESOs and their practices in Australia. Three significant studies have been published on the Return Services League (RSL), the more prominent of the ESOs, in its 97-year history. *The Returned Sailors and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia – Its Origin, History, Achievements and Ideals* (Hills & Dene 1938) is more a litany of facts and achievements than a methodical analysis of the organisation; nevertheless it places into context the first 20-years of this robust organisation. *The Politics of Patriotism,* (Kristianson 1966) has been referred to as an assessment of the organisation as a political pressure group rather than an analysis of its social and cultural influence (Crotty 2007). '*Lest We Forget' the History of the Returned Services League of Australia 1916-1986* (Sekuless & Rees 1986) was sponsored by the RSL itself and could be said to be a sympathetic overview of the organisation. There are a number of other papers and theses that seek to highlight particular aspects of the social issues that surround the culture and organisation of the various ESOs and their relationship to what is termed the 'ANZAC story'. *Footsoldiers for Capital* (Gregson 2003) is a study of RSL racism in the interwar period while *ANZAC Memories* (Thomsom 1992) is a critical analysis of the 'ANZAC tradition' which is said to define the Australian discourse.

Author Kelvyn Ryan is a retired Lieutenant Colonel who served in the Australian Army for 23-years which included two tours of Vietnam; service in PNG with the Pacific Island Regiment then with the Special Air Service Regiment; and his penultimate posting was as Commanding Officer of 51 Battalion the Far North Queensland Regiment with responsibility for reconnaissance and surveillance in Cape York and the Torres Straits. Since leaving the Army he has worked in the non-profit sector and devoted himself to working with members of the veteran and ex-service community, veterans' organizations and promoting the successful governance of these same organizations. For five years he chaired the Queensland Forum of Ex-service Organisations [QFE] which brought together 15 of the larger ESOs in the state. His previous research looked at the reasons for the increased number of ex-service organizations in Australia (Ryan 2013).

For Phase 2, data was sourced from semi-structured interviews with members of ESO advisory bodies supplemented by a small email survey of informants from internet-based groups. Twenty-two interviews were conducted via purposive sampling of leaders affiliated with a range of ESOs; active in advocacy and lobbying; and members of advisory or peak bodies (including the *Prime Ministers Advisory Council* (PMAC) and the *ESO Round Table* (ESORT)). The PMAC (MVA-PMAC 2014) is presently focussed on providing advice on the mental health challenges facing veterans. It is nominally chaired by the Minister for Veterans Affairs though in practice is currently chaired by a former Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral Russ Crane. Individual members are selected by the Minister and have a limited tenure in the position. The ESORT brings together 14 ESO representatives and six from the DVA and its aims are to address issues of strategic importance to the ex-service and defence communities and assist in setting strategic directions for the medium to long term (DVA-ESORT 2014). Additional interviews were sourced to ensure inclusion of female ESO leaders. Each interviewee was asked to share their experiences of advocacy and lobbying in relation to the concerns of the ADC; and reflect on how the ADC could have, and should, advocate and lobby in relation to concerns. Sixteen contacts for groups identifying with the ADC with active internet sites were approach to complete an email survey; six have responded to date. The survey asked respondents to provide information on membership criteria and the aims, ideals and roles of the group/site; reflect on the value-added to members and to addressing the concerns of the ADC; identify such groups/sites as adjuncts or alternatives to traditional ESOs; and reflect on their role in future advocacy and lobbying.

Phase 1 data has been analysed chronologically for the nature of the issues addressed; their relationship to different military forces and campaigns; the ESOs active in advocacy and lobbying these issues; and changing advocacy and lobbying practices and relations (within the ADC and with government). The breadth of the emerging analysis is scoped in this paper. Phase 2 data provides additional lived experiences for the chronological analysis, but more importantly this data will be further analysed for themes in relation to tensions and strengths within changing practices (early analysis is flagged in the conclusion of this paper).

Findings: ADC on the March

The development and activity of the ADC are viewed through a prism that refracts three 'eras' of advocacy and lobbying: the *traditional*, the *contemporary* (including *reconnaissance*, *main body* and *mop-up*) and the *virtual.* These conceptual eras are ideal types rather than a strict chronological sequence (Table 1). They differ in relation to the military forces and campaigns they are associated with; the issues of concern; the active ESOs (see Table 2 for full names and year of establishment); the membership of these ESOs and the reach of particular concerns; and the primary means of advocacy and lobbying (Table 1). The eras are not mutually exclusive as some ESOs were, and are still, active in advocacy and lobbying across eras though often using different means over time; and important issues remain unresolved despite the efforts of many ESOs using a range of means. Each of the three main eras is considered in turn in this section.

Traditional era

ESOs active in the traditional era were those that debouched or marched out of the major wars (WW1 and WW2) of the 20th century and subsequently held the attention of the veterans, the governments and the bureaucracies for much of that period. They were the *Returned and Services League of Australia* (RSL) established in 1916, the *Australian Federation of Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Ex-Servicemen and Women Ltd* (TPI) established in the 1940s and the *War Widows Guild* (WWG) established in 1946 (Table 2). Whilst the RSL can rightly be seen as 'the father' of the ADC each in their own way has contributed to the national understanding of the many and varied issues that have confronted the 'war veteran' community. Reference to the 'war veteran' community is deliberate as only individuals with such experience and their widows were eligible to join the traditional ESOs. Such an uncompromising membership criteria with its emphasis on overseas war service continues to have a detrimental impact on the overall cohesion of the ADC in the more liberal and less restrictive 21st century. These ESOs appealed to a broad membership, across the three military services and relied on those who had served overseas only.

Table 1 Eras of advocacy and lobbying by the ADC

Eras	*Traditional*	*Contemporary*			*Virtual*
Sub-eras		*Reconnaissance*	*Main Body*	*Mop-up*	
Forces	Australian Imperial Forces (AIF); Militia	Permanent Military Force (PMF); Militia/ Citizen Military Forces/ Reserves; National Service 1951-1972	Australian Defence Force (ADF)	Australian Defence Force (ADF)	Australian Defence Force (ADF)
Campaigns	World War 1; World War 2	Occupation of Japan; Conflicts in Korea, Malaya, Malaysia, and Borneo; Vietnam War	1972 to 1990s – 'peace years'; 1st Gulf War; 74 UN/NATO & Common-wealth Operations in 68 countries; 1947-present (Peace-keepers)	2nd Gulf War; Iraq; Afghanistan; East Timor; Bougainville, Solomon Islands; UN 'Homeland'	Iraq; Afghanistan, East Timor; Bougainville, Solomon Islands; 'Homeland'
Issues	Repatriation; Gratuity; Pensions; Business loans; Vocational training; War Service Home Loans; Land Settlements	Counselling Centres (PTSD); Agent Orange	Military Super-annuation; Conditions of Service	Conditions of Service	ADF Superannuation Scheme; Veteran's Disability Pensions; Integrated People Support
Examples of active ESOs (see Table 2)	RSL; TPI; WWG	RDFWA (now the DFWA); VVAA	DFWA; RARC; NAA; RAAFA; ASASA; VVFA	ADSO (alliance)	Increased web presence by existing ESOs & new virtual groups
Examples of member-ship or reach	War Veterans; Returned Men; The Totally and Permanent Incapacitated; War Widows	Vietnam Veterans; Professional Service Personnel	Vietnam Veterans; Partners of Veterans; Professional Service Personnel; Peace-keepers	Ex-service organizations	Virtual: reach unknown
Primary means	Institution-building at national level with politicians (also veterans)	'Friends' in parliament and the executive service	Working with 'allies' in opposition and legal action	Alliance-building between organizations	Information exchange and consciousness - raising

The issue of who is a 'veteran' has permeated and consequently dictated eligibility to not only membership but also entitlements for compensation. Much of the debate centers on the correct use of terminology and its application in the provision of appropriate support to veterans and members of the ADC. Such support is considered to be *compensation* (not welfare)*, which* includes the provision of entitlements for applicable pensions, education and treatment (MRCA 2004).

Table 2 List of ESOs, acronyms and year of establishment

ESO	Acronym	Year
The Returned Sailors & Soldiers Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA)	RSL	1916
Naval Association of Australia (Note – a self-help organization of shipmates)	NAA	1920
Royal Australian Air Force Association of Australia (Note – self-help organization for reunions and personal assistance)	RAAFA	1921
Australian Federation of Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Ex-Servicemen and Women LTD	TPI	1940
War Widows Guild	WWG	1946
Regular Defence Force Welfare Association	RDFWA (now DFWA)	1959
Royal Australian Regiment Corporation	RAR	1969
Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia	VVAA	1979
National Servicemen's Association of Australia	NSA	1987
Australian Special Air Service Association	ASASA	1988
Vietnam Veterans Federation of Australia	VVFA	1996
Australian Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Association	APPVA	1997

In the post-WW 2 period these ESOs focused their energies on addressing the many issues of the veterans of the two world wars the memory of which continued to dominate the nation's mind set because of the impact they had on the population as a whole. These issues

included maintaining the relative value of repatriation benefits, national security and membership numbers. The main means of advocacy and lobbying used in this era were direct tactics in promoting the issues of these ESOs with the WWG prompting the RSL into action. Direct lobbying led to conflict between the national leadership of the RSL and the various State Branches with the former seeking to maintain a "degree of cordiality" (in relation to indirect lobbying) with the government while the latter demanded an aggressive campaign (Kristianson 1996: 146). This focus, despite the RSL's internal tensions controlled the agenda of each of the ESOs active in the traditional era to the exclusion of all that was occurring around them.

The post-WW2 period saw a change in the Australian strategic outlook, a developing independence in its military posture and the signing of several international treaties that were to draw it into a greater involvement in the Asian region. This prompted the expansion of the national defence capability from a reliance on militia forces in the pre-war period to the establishment of a Permanent Military Force (PMF) or what is now the Australian Defence Force (ADF). In this changed environment these ESOs ignored the offered expansion of influence and membership opportunities and remained focused on the veterans or 'returned men' of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and their widows. The AIF comprised the largely volunteer forces that served overseas in both WW1 and WW2. In focusing on their rationale for existence the traditional ESOs were ignorant of the evolution that was going on around them.

Contemporary era

Contemporary ESOs on the other hand are those established in the period after WW 2 but in particular after the Vietnam War, which, for Australia, lasted from 1962 to 1975. Two events mark the foundation and growth of the contemporary ESOs in the post-WW 2-period. The first of these was the formation of the PMF in the period immediately after WW 2 primarily for the occupation of Japan but this was then followed by the constant deployment of Australian military forces to conflicts in Korea, Malaya, Malaysia, Borneo and Vietnam. Unlike the nation's involvement in the two world wars of the 20th century where Australian military forces were all volunteers for the duration of the conflict now for the first time

professional service personnel were being deployed. This evolution in Australia's military story spawned, in 1959, the establishment of the *Regular Defence Force Welfare Association* (RDFWA) (now the DFWA) to address the needs of this unique, in the Australian context, force. For the first time the nation had a national organisation focused on issues peculiar to professional service personnel and not necessarily veterans of overseas war service. Such a military force did not meet the membership criteria of the traditional ESOs that deliberately excluded those who had not seen overseas service or had a different political philosophy such as Communists who were denied membership of the RSL (Thomson 1994).

In military parlance the establishment of the RDFWA could be referred to as the *reconnaissance* element for a wave of ESOs and their advocacy and lobbying efforts that were to establish and survive over the succeeding 30 years and in what was a very conservative, change averse social environment. This reconnaissance provided the catalyst for the formation of newer ESOs and the renewal of formerly somnolent singularly focused unit, ship or squadron social organisations which, all too often, presented as conflicting or antagonistic foils to the traditional ESOs.

The second event was the Agent Orange debate of the 1970s and 1980's which was to cause a cosmic shift in what was till that time an almost serene existence for the traditional ESOs and their relationship with the political establishment. It saw the formation of the *Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (VVAA)* in May 1980 from a number of separate state-based groups. The VVAA was launched in this reconnaissance era with a focus on the "welfare of Vietnam veterans and their families" (Crowe 1999: 23) and with two specific aims. These were the establishment of counselling centres to treat the psychiatric consequences of the trauma of war and recognition of the harmfulness of exposure to Agent Orange. The VVAA established and operated its own professional counselling centre in suburban Sydney during the late 1970s and early 1980s and was instrumental in having the government formally and financially take on the task in 1982. The first Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service under the auspices of the Repatriation Commission (now DVA) commenced operations in Adelaide in 1982 (Walker 2014).

Even before the Australian withdrawal from Vietnam it was evident that there were developing challenges with the repatriation and resettlement of the veterans of the conflict back into the community. Fuller discussion is for another time but the simmering antagonism to the war and the nation's involvement prompted hostility and often indifference by many in the political establishment, the media and the general community towards those who had served in Vietnam and made their transition from war service back into civilian life challenging for many veterans. The response of the authorities and the RSL to the developing and evident physical and mental ailments being expressed by the veterans was of intense disappointment to the veterans (Edwards 2014: 278-279).

Agent Orange proved to be the more vexed issue however and for various reasons it continues to resonate to the present day. Reports had been coming out of the USA linking Agent Orange with a range of illnesses being suffered by veterans and reportedly causing abnormalities in children. Agent Orange is the broad term used to cover a range of deadly herbicide combinations that were sprayed across the Vietnamese countryside during the war to defoliate forests and crops to hinder both enemy movement and food production (Walker 1987: 206). The leadership of the VVAA proved to be more highly educated than those of earlier generations of ex-service personnel, less tolerant of government denials nor accepting of government intransigence, Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) rejections and in this case, the RSL's, assurances that the chemicals sprayed in Vietnam were not harmful to their health or that of their children. Indeed the then National President of the RSL, Sir William Keys, commented that such illnesses were in the 'one hundred and one things that can happen to a man or woman on active service' (Crowe 1999: 51). The VVAA carried the fight for transparency and honesty in this issue against government denials that Agent Orange was an issue and the RSL's early equivocation on the matter through to its forcing an in-coming government to establish a major review or Royal Commission (ALRC 2014) to establish the truth. The whole issue finally caused a breakdown in the relationship between the (contemporary) VVAA and the (traditional) RSL with one writer exposing the RSL's growing inflexibility on the matter as it reflecting on "any downgrading of the paramountcy [sic] of their war, World War 2" (Walker 1987: 219). This controversy continues to this day in the context of both the written history of the period and the issue.

The final report of the Royal Commission was to be a major disappointment for the fledgling VVAA as the Chair, Justice Phillip Evatt, announced that Agent Orange was 'not guilty' of the claim that is was the cause of the various ailments being ascribed to it by the Vietnam veteran community. He spoke of the Agent Orange "phenomenon" and that it had been glamorised by "politicised scientists practicing pseudo-science" (Legge 1985: 1). Evatt however was to be criticized for the populist language in his report and public pronouncements which veiled findings in the body of the report which in turn indicated that there appeared to be links between the "toxic chemical and some cancers" (Edwards 2014: 281-282). Further his unambiguous statement that "by any standard of proof and without any doubt" veterans and their families would not have been harmed by exposure to toxic chemicals in Vietnam was to draw surprise and dismay from scientists around the world (Crowe 1999: 115-116). A closer reading of the report was to deepen the conflict between the activism of the veterans and the repatriation authorities and to further distance the VVAA from the RSL.

The high levels of passion and energy expended over this one major issue caused severe and often interpersonal ruptures and internal ructions within the VVAA and sadly, the suicide of several of the major players. In the mid-1990s the NSW Branch of the VVAA believed its interests and objectives were being ignored by the national executive of the VVAA and after several attempts at mediation it elected to disassociate itself from the national body and the *Vietnam Veterans Federation of Australia* (VVFA) was established (VVFA 2014: 4). This ESO took with it over half the national membership of the VVAA and South Australia, the ACT and Queensland along with NSW became the founding member States. There was the broad perception among Vietnam veterans that their now broad issues were not being represented in the relevant forums (Crow, 1999: 173).

Such a split is not uncommon in membership organizations let alone in the Australian ESO community however the reasons for it are not clearly identified and each organisation is coy as to exactly why it occurred. The VVAA refers to the "fundamental" differences of approach between the Federation and the Association though fails to identify just what they are while the VVFA pointedly maintains that it "is an organisation strong enough to confront government when it fails in its is duty to veterans and to challenge the bureaucracy when it

lets down those its purpose is to help" (VVFA 2014: 4). It is interesting to note that it is the VVFA that continues to pursue the fight to have the official history, as written by Professor F.B. Smith, corrected and not merely reflect the various studies and reports that have been published since the original publication (Walker 2014). It was Professor Smith who "omitted the findings of the Agent Orange Royal Commission that vindicated the veterans' case" (Walker 2014a: no page number).

This on-going issue highlights the level of passion and commitment that now exists with the contemporary ESOs as opposed to the acceptance of situations by the traditional ESOs. This passion and commitment lead to the *main body* of the contemporary era of advocacy and lobbying by the ADC (Table 1). Following the formation of the VVFA other ESOs either established or ones that had previously been localized or specific in their roles were emboldened to take on a more national focus. ESOs such as the *Royal Australian Regiment Association* (RAR) which represents the members and former members of the regular or professional infantry element of the Army become aggressive in its approach to the issues of its membership. Also the *Defence Force Welfare Association* (DFWA), having dropped the 'regular' tag, now sought to represent the broad issues of both the permanent and reserve members and former members of the ADF. New ESOs such as the *Partners of Veterans (PVA)* and the *Australian Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Association of Australia (APPVAA)* formed to represent specific constituencies. The traditional ESOs were increasingly seen as unable to present effective and appealing persona in the rapidly evolving atmosphere of the late 20th and early 21st century.

Unlike the ESOs active in the traditional era many of the ESOs active in the contemporary era identify with a particular campaign such as the *National Malaya Borneo Veterans Association Australia* (NMBVA) and the VVFA. While a number of these ESOs are facing an uncertain future because of the finite number of individuals who served at a particular time or in a particular conflict others however have the opportunity to survive and thrive as their potential membership is based on existing and formed elements within the ADF. These include the RAR and the *Naval Association of Australia* (NAA). Such ESOs will need to continually evolve and where possible reinvent their membership base or risk irrelevancy with the rise of and apparent flourishing of virtual ESOs (see below) (Fielding 2006).

The establishment of the *Alliance of Defence Service Organisations (ADSO)* is seen as a crucial development in the contemporary era confirming the place of its member ESOs within the ADC.   More commonly called 'The Alliance' the ADSO comprises some of Australia's major military ESOs as members: the *Defence Force Welfare Association* (DFWA); the *Naval Association of Australia* (NAA); the *Royal Australian Regiment Associations/ Corporation* (RARC); the *Australian Special Air Services Association* (ASASA); and the *RAAF Association* (RAAFA); and partners the *Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia* (VVAA) and the *Australian Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Veterans Association (APPVA)*. They provide member support services to past and current serving men and women and their families.

In military parlance the ADSO can be said to taking on the task of 'mopping up' the objective and bringing order to a situation of chaos. The ADSO has exposed its collective voice and intellectual rigor to decision-makers at a time of increasing change in the national political and bureaucratic environment. ADSO has created a 'network of authority' (Lindbloom 1977) that has united a number of silo ESOs into a common purpose. It is increasingly seen as a foil to the voice of the traditional ESOs, particularly the RSL whose national leadership continues to seek independence of voice despite its declining membership and the failure to capture the empathy of the more recent veterans and ex-service personnel.

Virtual era

In recent years there has been a growth in the number and range of what are loosely termed virtual or web-based ESOs. The genesis for the establishment of these ESOs is the ready availability of technology and its use by the present tech-savvy generation of service and ex-service personnel.   A more suitable descriptor for this new generation of organisation is 'virtual ESOs' though the label is not considered appropriate by some of the founders of such sites as they do not consider themselves as ESOs in the traditional sense even though they are performing the work of ESOs if one is to apply the DVA definition to them.

The range of virtual ESOs is extensive and is the subject of continuing research. Some identified examples include: *Australian Defence Force Alumni* (ADFA); *The Australian Army Association* (AAA); *Defence in Business* (DIB); *Defence Network Australia*; *Defence Professionals of Australia*; *Heroes on the Water Australia Inc.*; *Iraq, Afghanistan and Middle Eastern Veterans Association of Australia*; *The Veterans Corps Inc.* (TVCI); *Women's Veterans Association of Australia* (WVAA); and *Wounded Heroes.*

As these organisations are web-based or make extensive use of social media, identifying their reach and influence is a developing science. The reach and influence of social media is a new science and has seen the establishment of two companies - *Klout* in 2009 and *Kred* in 2011 (Clay 2013) - that brands and individuals use to measure their reach and influence across social channels. This research identified that few of the virtual ESOs have attempted to identify their reach as yet. A significant point in establishing the reach of the virtual ESOs can be sum up in the words of *Klout* (cite in Clay 2013: no page number) who advises that "posting a thousand times and getting zero responses is not as influential as posting once and getting a thousand responses. It isn't about how much someone talks, but about how many people listen and respond".

Many of the identified ESOs of the virtual era recognize needs and provide conduits for support in the same areas as do the traditional and contemporary era ESOs. Such areas are advice on pensions, advocacy to DVA if needed, and links to welfare agencies along with the opportunity to debate the wide ranging topics that used to be the fare of those who attended regular meetings of the traditional ESOs. The difference is that such conversations are conducted over the internet and in a manner acceptable to the present day members and former members of the ADF.

The challenge that these virtual ESOs are facing - and it is one which will become more pronounced as the failing relevance and influence of the ESOs of the traditional and contemporary eras gathers traction - is their ability to advocate systemically and lobby, to influence government policy and to project their issues. Presently their issues, such as they are, are piggy-backed onto those of the more vocal ESOs (more associated with the contemporary era) which are reflective of that particular ESO agenda and not specifically

directed at the younger generation of veterans and ex-service personnel. A review of the various virtual ESO web sites shows that they focus on issues and topics ranging from social activities, the preparation of CVs, to the exchange of papers and articles of a certain genre designed to elicit discussion. Issues such as compensation and medical needs other than PTSD, which is both topical and relevant, receive scant attention.

Discussion and Conclusion

The empirical findings from Phase 1 are currently being woven together to form a rich description of the three eras: the *traditional*, the *contemporary* and the *virtual.* This paper has presented the first take on this evolving analysis of the three eras.

In this process any analysis of Australian ESOs cannot be addressed without constant reference to that of the RSL which for nearly a century has been the accepted face of the nation's veteran community. The RSL grew out of the Returned Soldiers' clubrooms formed in 1915 through the enthusiasm of the general public in the early days of WW1. It's *Statement of Aims and Ideals* cemented into its genetic make-up at that time remains the bedrock of the RSL's reason for ongoing existence and the rationale for its dealings with government and the bureaucracy. As the other ESOs developed in the traditional era they replicated the constitutional framework of the RSL along with its bureaucratic organizational structure. The ESOs active in the reconnaissance and main body elements of the contemporary era followed the same pattern and to a point suffer the same organizational challenges of the 'father' organization. Each of these to greater or lesser degrees is captive of the time and the generation for which they formed and breaking out of that organizational and attitudinal mindset is a challenge only they can meet. Questions of organizational relevancy are seeing a lessening of influence of many of these ESOs.

Prevarication and an inability by the then leadership of the RSL to understand the determination of the veterans of the Vietnam War to not be sidelined by dated attitudes and government obduracy encouraged the birth of the VVAA and the many new and revitalised ESOs that presently proliferate in the ADC. These ESO have had varying levels of success in representing the issues of their members with many now seeing an uncertain

future before them. This future is now seemingly being filled by both an active ADSO (a network of advocacy organisations or advocacy network) and the various virtual ESOs, which are in many ways replicating the exploration activities of the post-Vietnam ESOs in seeking a place in the future. These virtual ESOs are being activated by this current generation - the 'millennials' - who have an affinity for the connected world and appear to have little empathy or tolerance of the bureaucratic and organizational practices of earlier generations (Fritzon, Howell, & Zakheim 2014). These ESOs of the virtual era are headed by adaptive and astute individuals interested only in the provision of service or support to their developing membership. They however are yet to address the issue of how do they effectively and constructively lobby the decision makers on behalf of their generation.

Emerging indications from the ongoing cross-era analysis, facilitated by the semi-structured interviews from Phase 2 of the study, reflect a desire for change, for the adaption of technology and social media in addressing the issues of the present and future generation of service men and women. Early themes are *leadership* and *organisational agility* which can best be summed up by *effective representation* by committed members prepared to vigorously take-up the many issues that churn around this unique section of the Australian community. Representation of the issues and concerns of the members of the ADC by the traditional ESOs followed the conventions of the 20th century. It was conservative and predictable in a time when the influence of these traditional ESOs was pervasive due to the effect of the two World Wars on the nation's psyche. This situation has now changed and along with the changing population demographic, cultural changes and the lessening influence of this unique constituency a new ADC paradigm is demanded if its issues are to be addressed and its relevance enhanced.

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