



**RSL NSW – Draft Strategic Plan 2020-2025**  
**Harbord RSL sub-Branch review and comments**

***Preamble:***

Harbord's sub-Branch membership is supportive of this DRAFT Strategic plan; however, we do have some concerns that it may not achieve realistic outcomes if its implementation is not fully funded with strong committed leadership.

For the league to move forward, we feel it needs to address the following major issues confronting the RSL movement.

It is important that the league identify the main issues causing the **falling membership of contemporary “service” members, over the last twenty (20) years or so.**

The ADF has been on an operational footing, continuously for those 20 years.

The past lack of leadership at the senior management levels at RSL NSW has allowed the emergence of other ESO & VSO to fill a void in delivering support and key services to the current veterans. Many of these ESO & VSO's popped up overnight, many were not fit for purpose and were (are) run for profit.

Today's, contemporary veterans are professionals, highly trained and skilled. Their perception of **RSL Club life is beer, pokies and bistro meals.** This model is not for them. Some also perceive that the RSL NSW brand has been damaged.

The objectives of the founders of the RSL movement are much the same then as now:

- Salute and Honour The “Fallen”.
- Ensure the Welfare of Our “Fallen” Families.
- Support Veterans Transition and ongoing Wellbeing.

Our members feel that the RSL has nationally neglected the third point which has contributed to a higher rate of current veterans' scepticism of the league.

*End of opening comments.*



### ***The Draft plan:***

The “**Purpose and Vision**” are fine, measurable and maybe achievable but the **motto** may need a rework?

**Motto:** A suggestion: Instead of “*One RSL acting together, delivering locally*” to read: “***Acting together... Delivering Locally – RSL NSW***”.

### **➤ The Seven (7) Strategic Goals:**

We believe they are worthy; a few are verbose. We agree with the Bill Hardman OAM comments/alterations to these goals.

#### **Comments on several goals:**

Sub-Branches in their District Council (DC) areas, have strengths and weaknesses, some are wealthy and hold properties, others just exist for camaraderie and ceremonial purposes.

Most District Councils (*with a sub-Branches collaborative approach*) are well placed to deliver several of the goals proposed locally. Other goals will need state and national focus for value of implementation.

The core services required by current vets; we believe are:

1. **Transition** services including re-training or up-skilling and job placement services
2. **Advocate** on their behalf for compensation
3. **Wellbeing** offerings ongoing... Gym and Pool membership and allied health services.

**Points 1 and 2** above should be an ADF led “transition package” delivered by approved RSL Veterans Centres, established in targeted RSL District Council areas.

**Point 3** should be offered seamlessly by the RSL District Councils via their sub-Branches that are able to offer wellbeing services. These services should be on offer to all RSL “service” members within that DC area. This needs further negotiations with service providers.

### ***Goal 5.5 Centres of Excellence – “Veterans Centres”***

We strongly support RSL NSW establishing more Centres of Excellence – “Veterans Centre” in RSL districts with high number of contemporary veterans. These should be fully funded with an independent board of management, including strict audit process in place. They should be a “one-stop-shop”, staffed with skilled paid employees. For rural areas mobile units is a worthy idea.

**A good example would be Dee Why RSL’s** funding (with other corporate sponsors) of the Veteran Centre Sydney Northern Beaches. This Vet centre now offers a myriad of services for transition (also linked with the NSW Govt., successful career placement program) and advocate for veterans’ compensation, if required.



### ***Goal 3.4 re: Communication and Connectivity.***

We agree that a quality “Services and Product Catalogue” be developed and placed on the RSL website, including hard copies. **One of our current serving ADF members cautions** the RSL when it starts to develop this catalogue, that it should observe recent offerings such as the Australian Partners of Defence (APOD) program and services already provided by the **ADF transition centres.**

We also suggest that RSL NSW develop a quality easy to use “**App**” **for our mobile device.**

Including on the website and “**App**” should be an **easy on-line membership application process, with proof of service linked to the new “Veterans Card”** now being issued.

#### ***➤ Veteran’s Wellbeing - during and after a vet’s transition:***

##### ***Suggest:***

Veterans becomes a member of the **local sub-Branch** (free membership for 3 to 5 years) by residential address or by choice, at an appropriate time.

Encouragement of service veterans to join a **DVA approved gym subsidised by DVA** for 3 to 5 years. Some NSW government departments subsidise gym membership for their staff.

A good example is the new **Wellbeing Precinct** at Harbord Diggers Club which is now offering a world class gym and pool complex with allied health services all on-site. The Harbord Diggers sub-Branch has secured a generous gym and pool discount for our members. Our membership has grown by 40% since the “Wellbeing Precinct” open. We also notice that our veterans have now re-connected with other local veterans, enjoying a coffee and chat after a gym workout.

We are aware it would be difficult to offer the above in regional and rural areas.

We also suggest that for regional and rural areas where RSL clubs don’t have gyms, RSL NSW and National, **should partner with a national gym company provider.**

##### ***Case for change:***

Page 2 for the “*case for change*” mentions the strong revenue stream to RSL Queensland from its lotteries operating nationally (and NZ), with countless dollars moving out of NSW to the benefit of Queensland. Most of the punters from NSW sincerely believe the profits go to NSW veterans. This needs urgent action.

One of our members (a former merchant banker) had a quick look at **RSL Qld’s “Art Union” costs and profits:**

- It has over \$180m in net assets, with an operating surplus of over \$24m after spending \$11.5m on employee costs and \$13.4m on donations and welfare.***



We believe some talks have taken place which have not resulted in any benefit to NSW veterans.

If so, maybe **lobbying** is required at the highest levels. Is **legislation** the answer and is it feasible?

The draft also states that RSL NSW is regarded as a respected organisation... but the brand has been damaged by allegations of corruption at the highest level. But on the other hand, lately the nightly TV news reports from the firegrounds consistently state, “*the local RSL has opened its doors as evacuation stations*”, etc.

Maybe some sort of re-branding could be considered with a short marketing video with Gen Z, Y and X veterans talking about the new offerings and how it is helping them. Perhaps even considering a redesign of the badge, (with the new motto) which hasn’t change for decades.

***Lastly:***

**A few questions our members asked:**

- 1. How does this draft plan align with strategies of RSL national and other state branches?*
- 2. Will common objectives and strategies be adopted nationally?*
- 3. Who will champion this plan and how is it funded? No specific funding strategies have been proposed by RSL NSW bar the saving in management fees – Annexure A part 2 and in several of the goals.*
- 4. Why is RSL Queensland operating their very successful “Art Union” in NSW (and other jurisdictions, including NZ) with NO profits coming back to NSW veterans? Is this covered by Goal 5? RSL Queensland marketing could be challenged as misleading?*
- 5. Are the funds saved in the management fees to be distributed to sub-Branches to fund the strategic plan’s initiatives?*
- 6. Have any current serving members, or more importantly, recently transitioned veterans, been consulted on this draft?*
- 7. Do we know the numbers of veterans leaving the ADF in NSW per year? We been told its about 3k to 4k veterans per year?*
- 8. Re 1.4 “Free Membership” how long would this last... should RSL/ADF/DVA subsidise it for the first 3 to 5 years?*
- 9. The “Buddy System” ... it is a concern to us that to “buddy up” a 70+-year-old sub-Branch member to advise/support a 30-year-old veteran may not work. Quality training for the right “young at heart” older veterans would be needed. How would the “buddy system” be funded?*

The end.