

First of all I must thank you for the opportunity to meet with you again at Coffs Harbour. I was quite disappointed at the way it almost got hijacked by those from the Veterans Centre. I wondered what we were there for when the first question was about where the piece of paper for a course I have done? Any way now to the concerns of Grafton.

CEO Response. The facts about the Veteran's Centre are interesting. It's a reason why the Strategic Plan is so important – why was the Centre set up separate from the RSL Sub-Branch in the first place? That's the question I asked myself when I incorrectly assumed it was part of the RSL in Coffs Harbour.

The Centre does the claims and advocacy work for the RSL though and is a good example of why the strategic plan suggests a move towards paid advocates because of the expectations put on volunteer advocates in today's new ATDP world.

The volunteer advocates at this Centre are exhausted and have too much work for the volunteers they have.

We are working, as per the Strategic Plan to bring the Centre back under the wing of the RSL, and I thank the members there and the President of the Club Ltd for helping to achieve this outcome. Ideally, it shouldn't have been set up as separate organisation in the first place – but we need to look to the future, learning from the past.

1. P2. There is evidence that RSL NSW has not been able to replicate this because of a lack of collaboration, a lack of need for the wealthier sub-branches to participate, insufficient trust in strategic leadership, and arguably too much self interest in various quarters.

Q. Is RSL NSW blaming Sub Branches for the lack of trust and lack of revenue streams. Please elaborate on the strategic leadership and how this has been effective in the past, and who is RSL NSW saying has had too much self-interest?

CEO Response. No, not all. There is no *blame* in the Strategic Plan. It's an observation that came through the member's feedback SVA survey - many members don't have a high level of trust in their State Branch or Board of Directors because of what occurred through Bergin and the ACNC investigation. It should be noted now that we are past that. We have a new Board that is totally transparent – see 'Board Communique's after each meeting, and all the key financials (money in/money out) on the website for members to see.

Because of this, many Sub-Branches don't 'donate' or 'contribute' to the State Branch, or the state-wide RSL DefenceCare or VSA through RSL WBI so yes revenues have declined.

Without funds working towards strategic goals, the RSL will lose its impact and break apart. This is why RSL Qld conversely can do so much, they have large centralized funds (see the options on the operating model.) which could put NSW sub-branches under RSL QLD State Branch as their vision is to be 'RSL Australia' HQ..

I can't elaborate on effectiveness of 'strategic leadership in the past' but the assessment does say that a key reason why hundreds of other veteran organisations (so called 'ESOs' like Soldier On and Bravery Trust, Young Veterans and so on) have commenced over the last 20 years is that the RSL has not adapted or modernised to provide what more recent veterans are looking for.

The Strategic Plan proposes changes so the RSL can reassert itself as the leading veteran's organisation, not just fade away because it's not relevant to younger generations – new members are needed, and things must be done differently. The observation about self-interest is manifested from the trust issue.

Some leadership at Sub-Branch level want the universe to be limited to the Sub-Branch sphere of influence, rather than a collective effort to make RSL a strong organisation everywhere. Again, the Strategic Plan suggests greater collaboration can address this, and quickly.

This is one reason why transparency of funds is so important, –such as the disaster fund or Support and Assistance fund, – it's all on the website now so members can see money in and where it is spent.

Despite this, I am still surprised that many Sub-Branches continue to 'donate' directly to other Sub-Branches of their choosing, not working as one, to support veterans in need. This is fundamental because as I said at the consultation session, the proposed plan is underpinned by two assumptions validated at last year's Congress: the RSL will remain member-based and remain a charity.

As a charity, in Australian law, a member cannot obtain a benefit from the charity. That's okay, because members are members of the RSL because they wish to help veterans and their families – our charitable purpose as espoused in the Constitution, not obtain a financial or other benefit themselves.

But, again as I said at Congress and at the consultation session, as service members and therefore also a veteran, there may be a time that a member may need assistance from the charity too. This benefit would need to be declared as such so it can pass ACNC scrutiny. This can be done, and camaraderie can be an acceptable charitable expense, and should be recorded as such, not as 'welfare.' I am often observing transfers of funds between Sub-Branches rather than through the RSL NSW Support and Assistance Fund. Unless appropriately recorded, this type of donation is likely to attract the attention of the ACNC because there is often lack of clarity on the intended purpose of the 'donation.' The main purpose of all the funds and resources of the RSL is to help veterans. The Strategic Plan outlines what this help can be, including commemoration. Also, don't forget the proposed Strategic Plan puts the Sub-Branch and veteran at the centre.

2. P3. Our Veteran sponsors and other are trained and supported by a professional full time cadre staff, positioned at Veteran Centre's around the State. These staff are funded generously through the RSL NSW network and its many partners.

Q. How is this to be funded? How many of these centres are being proposed? How is the support going to be effectively provided over such a large area (outside of Sydney)

CEO Response. The proposed funding model is attached to the draft Strategic Plan. By pooling investments, (that is, instead of individual Sub-Branches making individual investment decisions – and paying individually for advice and services) they invest in the investment choices of RSL. They keep the investment on their own balance sheets, which is an important fact, and as investors they decide the risk profile they wish to accept amongst the suite of investment choices available in the pooled fund arrangement.

By big savings in funds management fees alone many roles in centres, about 20 from last year's numbers, can be funded, and then as the model suggests, strategic investment decisions are made by the investors or their representatives, **before** any disbursements back to individual Sub-Branch investors.

The rate of return will also be much higher in the pooled fund, which could offer greater diversity. Also, with respect to 'partners' – working as 'one' we can attract strategic and corporate partners. For instance, the TV advertisements you will see shortly to support what the RSL is doing to promote ANZAC Day during the COVID19 crisis are funded by a corporate partner.

This cannot occur unless we work together as the 'RSL.' The plan also suggests we need a new income source such as Qld des with the Art Union – again, this can only happen if we work together.

I think the number of centres will be determined by Districts and what we can afford. You will be surprised by how many we already have and I urge you to look at how we are setting the one up in Nowra.

3. P4. RSL NSW can strategically fund services where required and invest collectively to ensure a strong and sustainable future.

Q. What is RSL NSW meaning behind invest collectively?

See response above

4. pg10. Commemoration activities are relevant to contemporary Australian society.

Q. What exactly does this mean? Are we going to change our activities such as Anzac and Remembrance Day?

CEO Response. No, it means these commemorations are critically important to today's society and the RSL should remain the leader – it's in our DNA. I'm already seeing in places other organisations 'takeover' presence at ANZAC Day because a Sub-Branch is not getting out in the community as it used to do because of having no members, or in some cases too much income and therefore doesn't need to fundraise in the community, flying the 'RSL flag.' The Strategic Plan says – don't let this happen – keep the RSL as the custodian and leader in commemoration.

5. p11. Centres of excellence are Veterans Centres where Veterans can receive face to face support and an access point for services.

Q. How will this be funded? Is this not taking over the services that Sub-Branche already provide through advocates? How will this strengthen our Sub-Branche when we are actively encouraging Veteran's to go to other centres for assistance? Are we not effectively admitting that we, as Sub-Branche are not able to provide assistance?

CEO Response. See above about Centres and my commentary on advocates. The Strategic Plan positions the RSL as the leader and through 'veteran sponsors' (who are trained RSL members – not accredited training like ATDP) we guide veterans in need to the service they need – including services provided by our own charities such as RSL DefenceCare or RSL LifeCare.

Expanding in the future under the Plan, RSL DefenceCare are doing the claims and advocacy work as fully qualified paid FT advocates and are located at centres around the State and connected to all Sub-Branche and veteran sponsors with technology.

I can see the paid advocates being complemented by volunteers, but the new DVA regime makes it very hard for volunteers to reach and maintain qualifying standards. It can be done, but we are

asking a lot from volunteers and we are losing many good ones now as they 'retire' when their current qualification expires. TIP was easier to train in than ATDP.

6. p14 7.8. Establish a cadre of full time staff to support and train volunteers to build capability of RSL NSW>

Q. How will this be funded? **As above** –How will training be delivered as if this staff is Sydney based will training not be expensive to deliver to regional areas?

CEO Response. I see the training cadre being positioned at Centres so they can access Sub-Branches easily.

Are Sub-Branches going to be asked to pay for its volunteers to attend any training? As most of the training will over a two day period the next thing is who is going to foot the bill for accommodation as well?

CEO Response. I envisage the trainers coming to the Sub-Branch

7. p14 7.10. Consolidating unsustainable Sub-Branches.

How will the terms of reference be decided and who will have input on these terms?

CEO Response. This would be a matter for the DPC, consulting with Sub-Branch – working with guidance from the Board.

Will Sub-Branches be forced to consolidate, close or become Chapters? We are still waiting for the SOP on Chapters?

CEO Response. The SOP on forming Chapters (as of 5/4/20) is with the DPC, it hasn't come to ANZAC House yet. I can't see 'forced' amalgamations or closures unless there is a non-compliance – with the Constitution, ACNC or another regulator like DFT. Chapters keep an all-important presence in a location without the burden of administration.

The general feeling of those who have commented on the Strategic Plan appears to be that they fail to see how diluting the role of Sub-Branches, forcing smaller Sub-Branches to consolidate with larger Sub Branches, to become Chapters of other Sub-Branches (for which we have no rules, Grafton has been asking about this in excess of 6 months), increasing spending on Veteran Centre's and extra staff and doing this all without explanation of where the extra money is going to be sourced from, is going to build any real TRUST in RSL NSW?

CEO Response. This is interesting as the Sub-Branch and the veteran in need is at the centre of the Strategic Plan – this is very useful feedback if that is not clear enough. I have explained funding model above, I hope this helps. I have asked the DPC to form a working group of interested and expert members to help further develop the funding model concept. I think COVID 19 is not helping us progress this or completing the work on the SOPs for chapters.

I also note that it was the intention of RSL NSW to present the draft Sub Branch Model Constitutions for consideration of the DCP, but which could not happen because of the current medical crisis. Considering that you acknowledge that the proposed constitutions will be presented for comment on/endorsed until June and the proposed could be forwarded back and forth and then not allow Sub-Branches any time for them to hold meetings etc. to work out which way they opt to go prior to Congress, is there any thought being given to allowing Sub Branches to be forwarded a draft copy for comment to their District President? Or will this be another command decision? I would like to also

ascertain who amongst the DP have the knowledge to make the financial decisions without showing favor to their own situation?

CEO Response. I'm not sure I understand the question here. As soon as the drafts go to the DPC, they will be made available to the membership/Sub-Branches. Perhaps call me to help me clarify the question.