

Note: *Apart from the small section at the end so indicated, this and its attachment were originally sent to the CEO, Jon Black, for his information prior to it now being offered as a private member's submission on the RSL NSW 'Strategic Plan'. If it weren't for the pitifully small number of other submissions appearing on the website, I'd likely not have proceeded to this step. Perhaps my doing this will encourage others to dare question what 'head office' has offered? After all, Aussi diggers have rarely shown themselves reluctant to criticise, or even step-around, their higher ranking officers' beliefs. And this has been an approach which has almost inevitably led to better outcomes.*

Following our brief exchange of comments during City of Newcastle RSL Sub-branch AGM on 10 Feb 2020, I wish to expand and add to the discussion.

It's obvious that considerable effort has gone into developing the current draft plan and it covers far more than I'm capable of objectively assessing. Thus I'll restrict what follows to addressing what I believe to be the crux of the entire issue; viz, what's stated in the first paragraph of the 'Case for Change', and what follows from that in 'Goal 3: Grow and maintain the engagement/membership of veterans and their families with RSL NSW'.

I believe that unless Goal 3 is achieved, then the other Goals cannot be. The other Goals are important, but none is as critical as Goal 3. Therefore Goal 3 has to be the primary focus – and all other Goals should be treated as enabling objectives (to the achievement of Goal 3) or as supporting objectives to the overall Plan. Likely some of the other Goals may then be combined, so that fewer than seven 'Strategic Goals' are listed – thus simplifying the overall Plan and especially the concentration of effort required to achieve the stated purpose; viz:

To support veterans and their families through access to services that improve their health and wellbeing; assist in transition to civilian life and connection to community and foster camaraderie and commemorative service.

Without a healthy and vibrant RSL NSW, none of this is more than a pipe-dream. I believe all will wither as will an RSL NSW which fails to increase its 'real' members; ie, those with full voting rights (generally 'Service Members'). I do not suggest that other classes of members don't perform an essential role within the entity – but none has the power to bring about real change and maintain the essence of what is 'The RSL'. So, to Goal 3.

Firstly, as a general issue, I believe the expected 'success dates' need to be defined more clearly; eg, instead of using 'By 20XX', use 'By the end of 20XX' (or by a specific date/month). As currently appears, it's too easy for some to assume that what may be intended as 1 January, is actually 31 December. An excuse for the lazy and indifferent. Possibly some of these 'success dates' are too optimistic – and thus unrealistic?

As a general rule, I believe such a Plan needs to incorporate base and goal data – not just that such-and-such an incremental improvement will occur; eg, 'From a 1 Jan 20XX base of XYZ, an improvement of AB% will occur (by the end of 20YY), or alternatively (each year for the next CD years). This particularly applies to 3b., but has implications throughout the entire Plan.

3b. refers to Gen Z, Y & X; ie, generally those born from around 1965 (or possibly as early as 1960), thus after the baby-boomers. So, the target population includes those now aged up to around 55 (or 60). This seems to be counter-productive. Surely, if somebody's already 55, he's had more than enough time to join the RSL? Not only that, but the needs/desires of somebody aged 55 are vastly different to those of somebody aged 45 (or younger). So, why is not the primary target Generations Y & Z; ie, those born from no earlier than 1975, now aged no more than 45? It's at about this age that family demands tend to lessen; that financial pressures have often reduced; and that increased time allows for more social/community effort. None of this is to suggest that any qualifying person aged over 45 should not be welcomed – just that the effort could be more closely targeted.

So far as still serving members of the ADF are concerned, similar arguments apply – especially having had enough time to join for any aged over 45 (of whom there are few). I'd

suggest the optimum time to recruit these is at enlistment. Indeed, as part of the enlistment process. The next most likely/ideal time is during the separation process, however, closer links with all elements of the ADF – down to unit and sub-unit level – right throughout service also need to be established and maintained. These data also suggest that the average time in service throughout the ADF is around 15-16 years¹, thus this time must not be wasted (or ignored).

Current data suggest that the annual enlistment and separation numbers are each around 5,000-5,500 nationally and 1,600-1,750 in NSW². If one were to optimistically assume that 15% of all enlisting and separating ADF members (NSW figures) were to join RSL NSW, then around an additional 500 potential new service members could be recruited annually. Unfortunately, this increase would go nowhere near replacing the death rate of the existing RSL NSW service membership.

I don't have the figures (which RSL NSW should have a better estimate of), but based on actuarial tables and the current average age of members (76 years), RSL NSW will lose an average of around 1,130³ service members each year over the next 11 years (by which time the average age of those remaining will likely be around 86-89 years). To just replace its natural losses, RSL NSW will need to recruit over 30% of all enlisting and separating ADF personnel (in NSW) every year over the next 11 years – and that's assuming none is already a member. This is surely a pipe-dream?

I don't believe the current Plan provides for the future of RSL NSW. The numbers don't stack up. There are not sufficient numbers in (or enlisting in or leaving) the ADF to sustain existing service member numbers – let alone ensure the future growth required – and that's assuming interest in joining RSL NSW can be vastly increased. Where are these new service members to come from?

It will be controversial, and many no-change mentalities will fight against it, but I believe the attached data table implies a possible answer. One where the essential elements of 'camaraderie', 'common organisational cultures and backgrounds', and 'service to the community' may be retained and strengthened – if such a change were introduced before it's too late. But that will be subject to separate arguments; and no doubt many documents.

What else is missing is evidence in Goal 3 of SMEAC⁴ having been executed. While the 'M' part may be there, I believe the 'S' and 'E' have not been adequately considered – and the 'A' and 'C' cannot exist until both 'S' and 'E' have been defined. Indeed, I believe the same may be said for the overall Plan more generally. Perhaps it's time to go back and re-look at the matter as one would during a military TEWT or Operation. Maybe as Harry Chauvel, John Monash or Leslie Morshead may have? But not as a Douglas Haig-type exercise.

Peter Cousins

Attached:

1. Data Table re Paper on RSL NSW 'Service Member' Numbers

ps. Whilst every effort has been taken to find and use accurate and current data in the attached, I cannot guarantee accuracy. Checking of data used is recommended.

¹ Time in service – see data table

² ADF turnover – see data table

³ RSL NSW annual membership losses – see data table

⁴ 'SMEAC' – This mnemonic for those who may have forgotten (or not been involved) that for many years, section commanders to division commanders have successfully used this tool to plan ADF operations and exercises. **S**ituation, **M**ission, **E**xecution, **A**dmin & Logistics, **C**ommand & Signals. **Note:** This footnote not in original to CEO

Additional part (not in original to CEO) follows:

Before what precedes and now follows is seriously considered, I ask it be remembered that in just a few decades, RSL NSW (indeed the entire RSL movement) has accepted that its *raison d'être* has changed dramatically from 'Returned Serviceman' to the much diluted, bureaucrat inspired, definition of 'Veteran'; viz, any person with more than one days' service in the ADF, notwithstanding that the time criteria for RSL NSW service membership is six months in-service. I believe the time for a similar quantum leap is upon us.

The implications within the penultimate paragraph in my original thoughts above are several – and will indeed be controversial. Indeed, to some they will be anathema. My response is; What is your Plan? (if something like what I'm suggesting is simply ignored).

Yes. As we've spectacularly failed over the last 50 years or so to convince enough ADF and ex-ADF members to join (and remain in) RSL NSW as 'service members', why would non-ADF members consider joining as 'service members' – unless they're offered something? And if they are, what is it to be (that will be mutually beneficial and non-discriminatory)?

Thinking outside the box might produce a concept whereby we may continue to support both our ceremonial and ADF family support goals – and concurrently encourage a potentially entity-saving non-ADF family of memberships.

Perhaps; just perhaps (if we dare look past our prejudices); a 'new RSL NSW' can provide support to, for instance, serving and ex-Border Force (and Police, Emergency Services, etc) members and their families on the same bases as are now provided to existing ex and serving ADF members and their families? If this were to be so, then a relatively simple formula based, in part, on a combination of time and membership numbers could be used to assist determine what (of the 'new RSL NSW') funds and other resources were to be allocated to 'old RSL NSW' and 'new RSL NSW' membership support?

Think about it, "Returned and Services ...". Not too hard to accept that "Services" could include "Security and Emergency Services", is it? These are the same people who risk their lives and wellbeing on a daily basis to serve not only our nation and states, but also our members and their families. Many of whom paid the ultimate price in our recent bushfires; while many others will die or suffer PTSD and other wounds directly as a result of their service. Apart from the colour of the uniforms, where are the real fundamental differences?

Too hard? Well, I say to all prepared to read this, where's your Plan B? I'm not so conceited or naïve to believe that my proposal is the only one worth considering. So, if you have any ideas, put them forward now rather than sit and snipe – or be afraid to do anything. Ten years from now it'll be way too late – and the mentality of 'old RSL NSW' will, I believe, effectively be with the troglodytes. And as to how we of the Vietnam era, in particular, may expect any support in our fading years, please give me your solution. And please don't tell me DVA and/or (any) government will do this for us.

As a closing comment on the current draft Strategic Plan, I believe it embodies the greatest failure elements in all military operations; viz, it lacks focus on a single, primary objective; forgets the principles of combat power and concentration of force; and lacks a reserve. In simple non-military terms, it's too wide-reaching; ignores the lack of numbers available to mount and sustain the effort; and has no back-up plan. I would love to be proven wrong – but unless this happens within a far shorter time than ten years – it likely won't be I who's shown to have erred.

Peter Cousins
City of Newcastle RSL Sub-branch
Service Member No. 220384
20 Mar 2020

Data Table re Paper on RSL NSW 'Service Member' Numbers

| Item | Current Value ¹ (or Approx) | |
|---|--|-------------------------------|
| Total Members in NSW (RSL NSW website) | 35,000 | |
| 'Service' Members (Written advice ex RSL NSW 13 Feb 20) | 26,186 | |
| Average Age of Members (as per Jon Black's advice 10 Feb 20) | 76 years | |
| Male Life Expectancies (Time Remaining & Resultant Age) from 2015-17 Aust Life Tables ex Aust Govt Actuary, from current ages of: | | |
| Current Age | Remaining Life Time | Age at Life Expectancy |
| 55 years (<10% m'ship) | 28 yrs : 4 mths | 83 yrs : 4 mths |
| 60 years | 24 : 0 | 84 : 0 |
| 70 years | 15 : 10 | 85 : 10 |
| 76 years (Avg m'ship age currently) | 11 : 6 | 87 : 6 |
| 80 years (current avg + 4 yrs) | 9 : 10 | 89 : 0 |
| 86 years (current avg + 10 yrs) | 5 : 11 | 91 : 11 |
| 87 years (current avg + 11 yrs) | 5 : 6 | 92 : 6 |
| 90 years (current avg + 14 yrs) | 4 : 6 | 94 : 6 |
| 94 years (current avg + 18 yrs) | 3 : 5 | 97 : 5 |
| | | |
| | | |
| | Aust Total | NSW |
| Australian & NSW Population (ABS Jun 19) | 25,364,300 | 8,089,500 |
| NSW Population as % of Total Australian | | 31.9% |
| Following Data Split on Basis of NSW:Aust Population Proportions | | |
| Strength of ADF (Regular & Reserve) | 82,000 | 26,158 ² |
| Current Enlisting/Departing Members Annually (Therefore Approx Average Time-in-Service) | 5,000 - 5,500 | 1,595 - 1,755 |
| | 14.9 – 16.4 yrs | |
| Number of ADF Deployed (July 2019) | 2,400 | |
| RSL NSW 'Service' Members as % of ADF Strength | 31.9% | 100.1% |
| Assumed 'Service' Members in 11 yrs 6 mths (if no changes) – These will then have average age of 87 yrs 6 mths | | Approx 13,000 ³ |
| Avg annual deaths of 'Service' Members over next 11 yrs 6 mths | | Approx 1,130 |
| Avg annual % of departing ADF mbrs needed to replace deaths | 20.5% to 22.6% | 64.4% to 70.8% |
| Avg annual % of enlisting ADF mbrs needed to replace deaths | 20.5% to 22.6% | 64.4% to 70.8% |
| | | |
| Strength of Australian Border Force (6 Dec 2016, ex Wikipedia) | 5,800 | 1,850 ⁴ |
| Strength of Australian Customs & Border Protection Service (June 2014, ex Wikipedia) | 5,424 | 1,730 |
| Sub-total, Border Force & Customs | 11,224 | 3,580 |
| | | |
| Strength of Australian Federal Police (1 Apr 19 AFP website) (927 in NSW + 3,839 in ACT) | 6,695 | 2,152 ⁵ |
| Strength of NSW Police Force (2017-2018 Annual Report) | 20,725 | 20,725 |
| Sub-total, Federal & NSW Police | 27,420 | 22,877 |

¹ Data Source – Where possible, data have been sourced from current official records.

² ADF Strength (in NSW) based on proportion of NSW:Aust population, not on posted unit location, on the assumption that on discharge, most will return to their previous state/territory of residence.

³ Surviving members based on actuarial tables (basis that around 50% will still survive at end of any stated life expectancy time).

⁴ Aust Border Force & Aust Customs (numbers originally from NSW) also based on proportion of NSW:Aust populations.

⁵ AFP – 2,152 (in NSW) based on actual 927 + 31.9% of ACT based staff.

| | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| | | |
| Strength of NSW Rural Fire Service (14 Feb 20 RFS website) | 72,491 | 72,491 |
| Strength of Fire & Rescue NSW (14 Feb 20 FRNSW website) | 12,067 | 12,067 |
| Strength of NSW Ambulance/Paramedics (14 Feb 20 NSW Ambulance website) | 9,558 | 9,558 |
| Sub-total, NSW Ambulance + Fire & Rescue Services | 94,116 | 94,116 |
| | | |
| Sub-total (all above non-ADF forces/services) | 132,760 | 120,573 |
| Proportion of the above to ADF strength | 161.9% | 460.9% |

Link to Life Expectancy calculator:

www.superguide.com.au/boost-your-superannuation/latest-data-find-out-how-long-you-can-expect-to-live#calculator