



The Drum

South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria

(An Unofficial publication for Military Advocates)

December 2024

“Effective teamwork begins and ends with communication.”

Mike Krzyzewski

Why The Drum ?

Many readers will recall The Drum was first published in October 2021 in an effort to keep Military Advocates in SA, Tas and Vic in touch with what was happening Nationally with advocacy training. It was also to provide an opportunity for exchange of news and ideas to improve the support we are able to provide to veterans and their families following cessation of regular publication of the ATDP Update after the Department taking over management of the ATDP, including editorial responsibility for all advocacy related publications.

Regular publication of the ATDP Update resumed in 2023 and publication continued bi-monthly until the Department declined to publish the November issue advising Regional Managers *“I am delaying the mailout of the ATDP Update, as the current version may undermine the program within the community.”* It seems that articles by two of the Regional Managers, relating to their inability to provide effective management and communication within their Regions, met with the disapproval of the Update editor, acting as censor (*a person who supervises conduct and morals*).

The Drum is again resurrected in order to provide an update on various matters of interest to advocates which were last reported on five months ago. This issue also includes two articles related to communication with advocates which it is believed are the ones that were likely to “undermine the program within the community.” The Regional Managers have fought for over three years to have access to advocate contact and training information and continue to receive the same response . . . *such access is not able to be made available for ‘Privacy Reasons’.*

Regional Managers' Contributions to the Unpublished ATDP Update

The Cornerstone of Successful Endeavours

Perhaps surprisingly for many, the above quote is the work of a basketball coach.

Few would disagree with his observation which it seems to me applies to any endeavour that we undertake. In respect of any retail business, for example, there are many aspects of the business for which communication is vital. Communication with consumers has at least two aspects – advertising and handling customer feedback. Then there is communication with suppliers and others in the logistic chain on which the business depends. The critical aspect though is communication with staff; for it is those who are delivering the product to 'customers' at the coalface, on which the success or failure of the business ultimately depends.

In the case of the ATDP the management structure there are two main components; the DVA Management Team including the administrative Support Staff and the three Regional Managers and their Regional Support Groups. The DVA Policy document , ATDP – Context, Structure and Roles, specifies the role of Regional Managers as:

- “Management of the RIG (sic) on behalf of the ATDP
- Coordination of Regional Mentors
- Monitor the delivery of training and CPD through ATDP in their region and provide advice to ATDP on regional or national training issues.

It is acknowledged that Regional Managers also support the coordination of advocacy across their regions through networking and while this is not a function of the ATDP this role is useful to ESOs for such an activity.” (Ed. Emphasis added)

In addition the role of the Regional Support Groups includes:

- **“Monitor the implementation of the ATDP in their region, provide advice to ESOs as required, and report issues, trends, or feedback to ATDP through the Regional Manager as appropriate.**

It is acknowledged that RIG (sic) members also support the coordination of advocacy across their regions through Communities of Practice and other networking. While this is not a function of the ATDP, the RIGs (sic) are useful to ESOs for such activities.” (Ed. Emphasis added)

It is evident from these roles that Regional Managers and RSGs are expected to maintain close liaison with advocates and ESOs in their Region in order to support advocacy training and provide a feedback loop to the ATDP Management Team on Regional training issues. The complete policy document, written in October 2021 following the Department assuming responsibility for the Program, is available for download [here](#).

Of course, as in all enterprises or pursuits, communication between ATDP Management and their 'clients', the Wellbeing and Compensation advocates, depends on an information chain. The first link is between the ATDP Management Team and the Regional Managers and this is achieved through three-monthly meetings and of course email or on-line meetings when out-of-session matters arise which require timely consideration. Regional Manager's are then able to brief members of their Support Group to ensure the passage of important information from the Management Team.

However, it is at this point that the information flow to individual advocates and ESOs becomes problematic. RSG representatives are generally in close contact with only a small proportion of ESOs or individual advocates in their Region so the passage of information is necessarily very limited.

This problem was brought sharply home to me when I wanted to encourage ESOs to support their trainee advocates attending the face-to-face Facilitated Learning Program planned for Melbourne in early October. While I have good contact details for my six RSG members in SA, Tas and Victoria and the half dozen or so ESO sub-Branched in my area that is where communication stops. Regional Managers (and their RIG members) do not have access to contact details for individual advocates or their ESO Authorised Person. So communication with the end-user of the ATDP service is possible with only a very small proportion of those we need to be able to contact to provide effective liaison with the ATDP Management Team and more importantly to be able to assist ESOs and veterans and their families to make effective and efficient use of the advocacy services available in the Region – noting that assisting with the provision of advocacy services is not an ATDP function supported by the Department.

Regional Managers have been imploring the Department to restore their access to ESO and Advocate contact details since our access to the databases was removed in July 2021. These requests have continually met with the response that this is not possible because of Privacy Legislation requirements.

It is puzzling that Joe Blow from Bronzewing Labour Hire Pty Ltd can be security cleared and have access to contact details and very personal veteran medical information in a matter of weeks; yet access for Regional Managers to ESO and advocate contact information to enable direct support to advocates and indirectly

to veterans and their families seeking assistance ? No way – privacy.

The inability of Regional Managers to communicate with ESOs and advocates in their Region quickly and efficiently has been holding back the development of ATDP and assistance with the provision of advocacy support to veterans and their families for three years and the need to resolve the issue is now urgent. Three years of ‘looking into it’ has produced no improvement.

And this from a second Regional Manager:

Connection with Veterans and their Families and Ex-Service Organisations

Connections and communications within any business are vital to the success of the business and for the customers to benefit. The Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP) and its Advocate and Ex-Service Organisations (ESO) customers are no different.

Connections with Veterans, their Families and Ex-Service Organisations (ESO) are vital for Regional Managers (RM) to assist in the improvement of the ATDP, Advocates and ESOs. The knowledge gained from connections between RMs and their customers identifies improvements in ATDP content, delivery and quality to better assist Veterans. RMs have not been able to connect with Advocates and ESO Authorised Persons since July 2021 due to DVA Privacy Legislation requirements which restricts RMs’ access to contact details, continuous improvement development and training progress. Without this knowledge the RMs cannot successfully connect and therefore can only provide very limited assistance to the ATDP, Advocates and ESO. This greatly limits the ability for the ATDP to continuously improve and grow.

Your RMs are hamstrung in providing Advocates and ESOs with support and assistance in the navigation of the ATDP and its processes and the provision of important information on DVA decisions that affect Advocates and ESOs and hence Veterans and Families.

RMs have the greatest potential to contact ALL Advocates irrespective of which ESO they are a member of. The ESO Round Table (ESORT) represents only a small and selective slice of the ATDP Advocate cohort who supports Veterans and their Families and ESORT Members only report to a minimal segment of the overall Advocate cohort. Therefore, input into ESORT initiated studies and decisions only reaches a minority of Advocates.

At this time when the Royal Commission into Veteran Suicide and Death has delivered its final Report and recommendations, and Veteran legislation harmonisation is imminent many Advocates and ESOs have questions about the future.

Ed: If there is an insurmountable provision within the Privacy Legislation that prevents ATDP Regional Managers from knowing the contact details of advocates and ESO Authorised Persons in their Region then why/how would ATDP Update readers knowing this “*undermine the Program within the community*” ?

Movement on the Advocacy Front

Combined Level 1 Wellbeing and Compensation training is now well and truly underway and in August/September I had the pleasure of taking part in the two FLP sessions conducted in Perth. The programs (Module 1 and 2 – the common training and Wellbeing modules, on 13-15 August and Module 3, Compensation, on 11-13 September) were conducted at the SAS Regiment, Swanbourne, in the Gratwick Club. The support provided by the Regiment and advocates from The House, an SAS Association facility just outside the base security perimeter, was excellent.

What was most noticeable was the constant input and discussion of various aspects of advocacy from the 19 representatives of the ESOs involved which included RSL WA State Branch, RSL Mandurah and RSL Port Kennedy, the Australian Special Air Service Association, Live Play Work Incorporated and Legacy WA. The opportunity to mix with advocates from a wide variety of backgrounds and of varying experience levels is something that is not able to be achieved in the on-line programs.

Subsequently, I was very disappointed to learn that the Melbourne and Sydney face-to-face programs scheduled for October were changed to on-line due to a lack of support. As advocates we need to encourage our ESOs to support face-to-face programs because of the additional benefit they offer to advocates through sharing of personal experiences with other advocates. Getting the message to ESOs and advocates about the value added by face-to-face programs is not made any easier by all communication being controlled by people with little or no military advocacy training or experience in provision of advocacy support to veterans and their families.

Victorian Regional Veteran Centre Project (VRVCP)

In the hustle and bustle of the days that we live in the contribution of those who have gone before us is quickly forgotten. So it is with the VRVCP. In the early days of this Century (2000's) a couple of Office bearers of the Victorian Vietnam Veterans' Association (John Printz OAM and John Methven OAM) saw the need to establish Regional focal points that were easily recognisable by veterans as places they could obtain wellbeing and compensation claim support. The first such centre was established in Sale.

With a lot of hard work and the cooperation of the Victorian Branch of the RSL and the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the Victorian Regional Veteran Centre Project was born. Centres were established in major Regional centres including Wodonga, Ballarat, Bendigo (Central Victorian Veteran Support Centre (CVVSC)), Seymour, Drouin, Geelong and many others. Many of the Centres continue to operate today but are slowly being subsumed into the Government's Veterans' and Families' Hubs Project with little or no apparent thought for existing Centres which have been in operation for over twenty years.

As with most veteran initiated projects that proved successful, the origin of Veteran Support Centres has been quickly forgotten now 'Hubs' have become a Government initiative with tens of millions of dollars thrown at them.

In December, the Veteran Support Centre in Drouin (VIC) will close its doors for the last time after serving the needs of West Gippsland Veterans for over 20 years. So far, all the Veterans' and Families' Hubs established or planned for Victoria are to the West of Melbourne so the Drouin centre will be sorely missed. Thanks to all involved for your dedicated service.

Consolidation and Assessment Programs – Finalisation

The last two issues of the Update mentioned that the number of candidates attending a Consolidation and Assessment program but then failing to submit the written exercises required to complete their accreditation is disappointing. From all reports I receive the situation is worsening rather than getting better. The Drum's view, based on RM feedback is that the completion rate of face-to-face programs was much higher than we are seeing now and this is probably attributable, at least in part, to the ready access to trainer and assessor support and peer support on the F2F programs. But what would RMs know as RMs do not have any access to

that information.

For many years Regional Managers and Regional Mentors were able to make personal contact and issue ‘hurry up’ notices to candidates and their mentors which significantly reduced the problem. These days, however, RMs and Regional Mentors have no access to contact details for candidates let alone access to program attendance records or candidate workbook or program exercise submissions necessary to ensure ongoing monitoring of candidate progress. Yet another important thread in the fabric of the ATDP which has caused the program to lose momentum over the last three years.

If you have attended a C&A Program this year and not yet submitted your Workbook and exercises, please make this a priority – there are veterans and families out there that need your qualification and experience.

Assessment Status Report

Since the last ‘Update’ the following progress has been achieved by Region 3 candidates:

16 Aug - 18 Oct 24		Compensation Level 1	Compensation Level 2	Compensation Level 3	Compensation Level 4	Wellbeing Level 1	Wellbeing Level 2
SOA Issued	16	4	1			11	
Program Attendance	37	13	1			23	
New Enrolments - Training	40	19	5			16	
New Enrolments - RPL	2						2
Mentor Notifications (C&A Ready)	2	1	1				
Mentor Workshop Attendance	0						

Congratulations

Congratulations to Ralph (RAAFA Tas), Jackie, Heather, Daniel and Lisa (RSL Tas), Rob (Legacy Tas), Colleen (CVVSC) and Craig, Sharon and Bronwyn (RSL Vic) - Wellbeing Level 1; Michael (Military Advocates SA) – Compensation Level 1; together with Mick (RSL Vic) who completed Compensation Level 2, on achieving accreditation during the period.

Thanks for your hard work and ongoing support of our veterans and their families.

For those of you who wonder why there are 16 new SoAs issued in the above table and only 12 advocates mentioned above, 4 of those who qualified during the period were congratulated in the August ATDP Update as there is a two to three week lag between receiving the updated figures for the Update and its publication 😊

So, the foregoing is the majority of the content submitted to the Department for the unpublished November ’24 ATDP Update. The Drum does not understand how advocates knowing the reason for poor management and communication from their Regional Managers will “*undermine the program within the community*”.

The Institute of Veterans' Advocates

Following the September meeting of the ESORT Advocacy Governance Working Group the Department issued a paper outlining the proposal with some 'big picture' information about composition and operation of the Institute for stakeholder comment. The paper generally covered the initial thoughts of the Working Group as seen by the Department but there was not time for it to be commented on by Working Group Members before it was published.

The Department had intended to consolidate the input from stakeholders and report to the ESORT without the Working Group having seen the stakeholder submissions. However, after representation from the Working Group it was decided that permission should be requested (for privacy reasons) from stakeholders for their papers to be made available to Working Group members for their better understanding of the Department's position. The Drum has difficulty understanding why ESOs/individuals/groups etc. would not expect that comments on a Working Group paper would be seen by members of the Working Group that originated it.

ATDP Regional Managers made a submission which basically supported the proposal in principal but withheld unconditional support on the basis that the keys to success or failure of the proposal were financial support, the Department's role, active involvement of qualified and experienced volunteers in training and management and access to critical information that is presently restricted to DVA employees such as advocate contact details, training information and trainees' progress data. The status of fee-for-service providers would also need to be clearly understood.

The Drum understands that around 75 percent of the (about) 110 contributors consented to their submissions being seen by the Working Group and/or published on the DVA web-site and The Drum would encourage all advocates to seize the opportunity to read the submissions to better understand stakeholder views on the proposal. The Drum also understands that the Working Group's frustration at the lack of progress is shared by the Department who must navigate the 'unintended consequences' of existing legislation including the inability of the Department to directly financially support what is essentially a private business.

ATDP Management Changes

Earlier in the month Regional Managers were advised that Michelle Higgins, who had been acting in the position of Assistant Director ATDP Delivery since early 2023, was leaving the Program management team. Michell came to ATDP from her position as

DVA's Townsville VAN manager and her understanding of and empathy with, veterans was quickly evident. Her return to her substantive position as VAN Manager is a great loss to the ATDP Program and we thank her for her support and positive contribution to the veteran community in general but particularly to the ATDP and the Townsville veteran community.

And Finally

A very Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year to you and your loved ones.

From the Team at The Drum



CONTACT DETAILS

Contact information for key National ATDP Team Members is included in the back pages of the ATDP Update and key Region 3 team contact details are below

Regional Manager (RM3)	Roger Greene	rm3@atdp.org.au
Regional Mentor (Compensation) SA	Ray Kemp OAM	rr.kemp@icloud.com
Regional Mentor (Wellbeing) SA	Tich Tyson OAM	tich@plymptonvc.org.au
Regional Mentor (Compensation) Tas	Garry Beven	garry_beven@live.com.au
Regional Mentor (Wellbeing) Tas	David Waddle OAM	davnol@bigpond.com
Regional Mentor (Compensation) Vic	John Horan	johnhoran6@bigpond.com
Region 3 Program Support Officer (PSO) SA time, 8.30-4.00, Mon-Fri	Phil Boys	pso3@atdp.org.au 08 8290 0273 or 0484 594 791