

# RSL WODEN VALLEY SUB-BRANCH ENEWS



## Special edition weekly Lockdown eNews 27 August 21

Dear members,

Two weeks down and one more to go; at least that's what is forecast.

I start by acknowledging those readers who have commented on the first edition of this weekly newsletter. We have all appreciated your comments and thank you for taking the time the time to send them.

During the past week, we have developed some contingency plans, just in case the lockdown is extended. I also have some other news to share with you.

Critically, the ACT Government has identified some of our work as being *essential* in acknowledgement of the role we play in supporting our members and others in the Veteran Community in the ACT and region. We now have permission for key staff and volunteers to visit the office sparingly to continue to the claims and appeals processes; and for a small group from the Welfare Team to conduct home visits to help our most vulnerable members and clients. While these are excellent options, I stress they must and will be used sparingly. Therefore, if you or anyone you know is struggling, please contact the Welfare Team through our office number (6285 1931) or by email ([welfare@rslwoden.org.au](mailto:welfare@rslwoden.org.au)) and they will act accordingly.

In general news, the National President continues to represent veterans and their families with a variety of key stakeholders, including the Prime Minister. The NP's comments on and support for various matters, including the situation in Afghanistan, the Brereton Report and subsequent proceedings, the Royal Commission into Defence and Veterans Suicide, and the Vietnam Veterans' Day Commemorations, have been well received by many of those who have been and will continue to be most affected.

On the home front, I am finalising a brief from the ACT Branch for the National HQ regarding the Royal Commission. The paper will form part of a consolidated report that will represent the views of the League as a whole to the Royal Commission. Initially, we will be highlighting key points that will be expanded in the next few weeks.

I also note the National Veterans' Affairs Committee (NVAC) held its second meeting under its new TORs last Tuesday. The Committee is addressing several key issues, including the ATDP training system for advocates and the concerns of many veterans regarding the DFRDB pension commutation processes. Please forward any comments you might have on the latter issue to me through the office ([admin@rslwoden.org.au](mailto:admin@rslwoden.org.au)).

In closing, I thank all of the staff who continue to work from home to provide a base from which some key volunteers continue to provide critical administrative and welfare/compensation support that keeps the wheels turning. Well done to all and please up the good work.

Please stay well, stay in touch with family and friends, and do not hesitate to report any concerns you might have or that you find in others.

Kind regards,

Jim Gilchrist

Dear members,

Following the announcement and extension of the ACT COVID lockdown, the Sub-Branch office and VSC were closed on and from Friday 13 August 2021 and will remain closed until and including Thursday 2 September 2021. This could change if the lockdown is further extended.

During the lockdown, Sub-Branch staff and volunteers are working from home to continue to support members and clients during our normal business hours of 0900-1500 hours, Monday to Friday. They can be contacted via their usual telephone numbers and email addresses.

Regards,

Greg



Woden Valley Sub-Branch

**Greg Kennett**

Secretary

Dear members,

Due to the ACT COVID lockdown, the Sub-Branch OGM scheduled for Tuesday 31 August 2021 is cancelled.

The next OGM is scheduled for Tuesday 28 September 2021.

Regards,

Greg



Woden Valley Sub-Branch

**Greg Kennett**

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT: AFGHANISTAN AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT HOUSE,  
ACT*****MEDIA STATEMENT***

*23 Aug 2021  
Prime Minister  
E&OE*

Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, for almost 20 years, tens of thousands of Australians have served in Afghanistan under the authority and direction of successive governments. It is right that here in our national Parliament we give an account of recent events, as well as begin a more considered reflection on almost 20 years in Afghanistan. Liberal democracies do not shy away from history. Debate, accountability and responsibility are fundamental to who we are. Mr Speaker, the situation on the ground in Kabul and across Afghanistan is dangerous and changing rapidly. The National Security Committee of Cabinet has been meeting daily on Afghanistan, and Australia is working closely with our allies and partners. Our priority is the safe and orderly departure of Australian citizens, permanent residents and visa holders, including formerly locally engaged Afghan employees. I can report that with the assistance of partners in the United Kingdom and the United States, we've been able to evacuate more than a thousand people in 12 flights from Kabul since last Wednesday. The first people evacuated from Afghanistan landed in Perth via Al Minhad Base early on Friday morning, and another flight landed earlier today in Melbourne. The evacuation flights will continue for as long as we can continue to operate and get people out. Mr Speaker, this as an urgent and dangerous mission. The Member for Herbert said it best when addressing the soldiers departing on the first rescue mission last week from 3 Brigade. "You are going into the belly of the beast," he said. "A place where the rule of law does not exist on an operation that is dangerous, serious, and it's in our national interests for you to succeed." As we speak, more than 700 Australians are playing their part in this mission, from the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Home Affairs, the Australian Border Force and the Australian Defence Force. Many of these people have been deployed directly into Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul. We currently have two C-17A Globemasters, two C-130J Hercules and one KC-30A Multi-Role Tanker Transport aircraft deployed to the Middle East, conducting and supporting evacuation operations.

These evacuations are both dangerous and complex. Landing slots in Kabul are limited and the on ground time is also limited. Access to the airport for those seeking to be evacuated is a major limiting factor, and the approaches are very dangerous. I thank our key international partners, the United States and the United Kingdom, who are helping to secure Hamid Karzai International Airport, and our close friends in the United Arab Emirates who have been generous hosts for Australia's evacuation efforts. We deeply appreciate their support, and I was pleased to pass on our thanks directly to His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince Zeid, for his support. And, I thank our state and territory leaders also for the reception arrangements they have so quickly and instinctively put in place, without having to be asked, to support the returning evacuees.

Mr Speaker, since April this year, we've been able to bring out more than 430 Afghan locally engaged employees and their families who have been resettled in Australia. This is not a simple process. It has taken many, many months, both in preparation for the uplift at that time and since, and this number continues to grow as each evacuation flight makes its way from Kabul back to AMAB.

As mentioned, more than a thousand people have already been evacuated on those flights since last Wednesday, as many as four going in each and every evening, including locally engaged Afghans and their families. They will add to the more than 8,500 Afghan nationals that have been resettled in Australia since 2013, including more than 1,900 Afghan locally engaged employees and their families. We're committed to doing the right thing by those who have stood with us, and that's what we've been doing for some period of time. And, we're doing absolutely everything we can do right now to help them.

I also want to address our humanitarian intake. Australia will welcome an initial additional humanitarian intake of some 3,000 Afghan nationals by next July, as part of our annual program. I expect that this increase, this will increase, I should say, in the years ahead, and I commit our Government to continue to increase our intake of Afghan nationals at elevated levels into the years ahead. At this stage, the 3,000 will come from our existing 13,750 person annual humanitarian program. But, I want to stress that that 3,000 is a floor, it's not a ceiling. If we need to increase the size of the overall program to accommodate additional persons, then we will.

We will be resettling people who have legitimate claims through our official humanitarian program. We will not be providing a pathway to anyone who seeks to come here by any other means or change the status of others who have come by other means.

Mr Speaker, next month it will be 20 years since the September 11 attacks. Al-Qaeda, using the safe haven provided by the Taliban, attacked our way of life. Those attacks on freedom were subsequently mimicked by other extremist groups, such as Jemaah Islamiyah, in the years that followed. In 2001, when the Taliban refused to hand over Al-Qaeda terrorists, Australia supported a US led operation to root out and eliminate the capacity to stage more attacks against the West from Afghanistan.

That we have hampered, interrupted and curtailed on so many occasions mass casualty attacks since then should be in no doubt, and is a testament to all those who have served. That determination to keep the world safe from terror attacks has not changed and will not change.

Mr Speaker, together with our allies and partners, we also laboured long and hard to help the Afghan people secure a better future. To restore a broken state. We invested in schools and health care, in power generation and more. We educated, well, saw to the education of women and girls. Heartbreakingly, the fruits from those seeds of hope are now very uncertain. We must recognise with realism and humility the limits of our power and resources to secure the outcome so many Afghans, not least millions of women and children, yearn for. But, let no one say this noble endeavour was anything other than a sign of what marks Australian sacrifice for the good of others. The cause was and always will be a just one.

Mr Speaker, it's been said that memory is a place where our vanished days gather, and for all our veterans, police officers, diplomats, aid workers and others who have served in our name and in our cause, there is already a gathering of days. Today, we recall the cost of this, our longest war. As the Member for Canning might say, looking sacrifice right in the eyes. And, as former Prime Minister John Howard is remind us, there is no hierarchy of sacrifice. And, I would add to that, amongst those who fall in our name, in our uniform, under our flag, standing up for our values, we honour the sacrifice of the 41 Australians who have died in Afghanistan in the service of our country, and we acknowledge the terrible loss suffered by their families, who I know so many in this Chamber, as do I know personally, and would have spoken to in these last days especially.

We must acknowledge that for every name inscribed along the Hall of Memory at the Australian War Memorial, there are thousands more who also paid a terrible price for their service. Painful memories that cannot be shaken. I know many of you are asking a simple question, was it worth it? Yes, it was. We did the right thing. You did the right thing. As with any war, of course, there are errors and miscalculations, and history won't shy away from that, and neither will we, as a free people. Yet because of your skill, you who have served, your fearlessness and your courage, Australia is safer today because of your efforts and your sacrifice. Australia is better because of you. None of us can give a full answer to the questions you're asking yourselves and of each other, and none of us can predict what will lie ahead. But, be assured of this - you are not alone. Be assured of this - Australia is proud of your service. I am proud of your service. Your families and all those who so dearly love you are so proud of you. And we are proud of your families, who have also carried the burden of your service, as only you can know, and we are deeply thankful to them.

We are proud too of our defence personnel and officials, working day and night right now to evacuate Australians in Kabul and the many Afghans who have worked with us. And, in keeping with the good and decent country you sought to serve,

Australia will resettle thousands upon thousands, as we have already done, of Afghans who courageously stood with us.

So, to the living, I say this. We will remember and honour your service. And to our fallen, we say, lest we forget.

PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA  
The Hon Scott Morrison MP





## The Hon Andrew Gee MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs  
Minister for Defence Personnel  
Federal Member for Calare

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

**25 August 2021**

### **AUSSIE VETERAN VYING FOR MORE PARALYMPIC GOLD**

Australians are celebrating our veterans competing at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel Andrew Gee spoke with former Australian Army Sapper and Paralympian Curtis McGrath OAM, to wish him and the entire Australian Paralympic Team good luck in Tokyo.

Curtis was three months into a tour of Afghanistan as an Australian Army Combat Engineer when he stepped on an improvised explosive device. Tragically, he lost both his legs, shattered bones in his wrist, sustained burns to his left arm, had perforated ear drums and a large wound at the back of his thigh.

Just nine years after his life-threatening injuries he is looking to win back-to-back Paralympic Gold Medals in the Paracanoeing.

Minister Gee said it was an honour to speak with Curtis as he prepares to defend his Paralympic title.

"Curtis is an extraordinarily bright and talented young Australian who has worked extremely hard following his life threatening injuries while on active service, to reach the summit of Paralympic achievement in such a short time," Minister Gee said.

"His resilience, hard work and determination are qualities shared by so many of our Defence personnel and veterans, and his story shows how sport can change your life against all odds.

"Curtis has served our country in peacetime and war, he's a Paralympic gold medallist and an athlete we're all very proud of, including the veteran community.

"He's achieved so much at such a young age which is a testament to his determination and drive."



Curtis McGrath said it was a pleasure to share his story with Minister Gee.

“I’m humbled to be able to represent my country alongside so many inspirational Australians at the Paralympic Games,” Mr McGrath said.

“My Army mates saved my life back in 2012 and I hope my story can inspire other defence personnel and veterans who face adversity to persevere and find a passion to help them through, for me it was sport.”

“All of our Aussie athletes personify the Paralympic values of courage, determination, inspiration and equality, and their families and friends should be extremely proud,” Minister Gee said.

“I wish all Australians, including Curtis and our competing veterans all the very best of luck in Tokyo. We’re all behind you.

“Although fans won’t be there in person to wave the Aussie flag in the stands, we’ll all certainly be there watching the telly and cheering them on from home.

“We saw how much the Olympics lifted our spirits in a difficult time, so now let’s bring on the Paralympic Games – Aussie, Aussie, Aussie!”

Read more about Curtis’ story on the [Australian War Memorial website](#).

The Paralympic Games began on 24 August with the Paracanoeing events from 2-4 September.

**Minister Gee’s office: 0459 966 944**







## **The Hon Andrew Gee MP**

Minister for Veterans' Affairs  
Minister for Defence Personnel  
Federal Member for Calare

### **MEDIA STATEMENT**

23 August 2021

#### **YOUNG VETERANS SHOW SUPPORT FOR OUR TROOPS**

*“Every single one of us that went, knows the difference we made on the ground when we were over there.”*

These are the words of one contemporary veteran who I met with following the unfolding events in Afghanistan.

It's been a difficult time for many in our veteran community however it is important to hear the voices of those who were there, on the ground, sharing their stories of the positive change they brought to Afghanistan.

Last week I held a roundtable with our younger veterans, including many who served in Afghanistan, to hear and receive updates on the impact the events there are having on the mental health of our veteran community.

The consensus was clear – that our ADF members made a real difference in Afghanistan and they know that their time there was successful.

All participants in the meeting agreed that our Defence personnel who served in Afghanistan, their families and children need to hear the message that their service was critical to the people of Afghanistan.

Children of our veterans should be very proud of their mothers or fathers and know that their service made a real difference.

It is crucial the Australian community acknowledges the many achievements of our veterans and also that their service provided hope and security for Afghanistan for two decades.

The men and women of the ADF helped build schools, medical centres and ran clinics.

They played a key role in ensuring the people of Afghanistan were able to access electricity, young girls were given an education, women a chance to work and also that there was a reduction in maternal mortality rates.

They defended freedom and made Afghanistan a better country. In so doing they performed in the finest traditions of the Australian armed services.

I was honoured to meet with members of the Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association, Australian Veterans Alliance, Defence Families of Australia, RSL DefenceCare, Soldier On, Naval Association of Australia, Royal Australian Regiment Association, Mates4Mates, 42 for 42, Military Wife Life, Defence Kidz Project, Swiss8, Ironside Recruitment, RAR Association, Disaster Relief Australia, Veteran Support Force and Bravery Trust, to hear their views and ideas on supporting the veteran community at this difficult time.

We can all be proud, as they are, of the positive contribution our ADF men and women made over the past two decades of service in Afghanistan.

Our Afghanistan veterans are united in their pride of service, and as a nation we must unite behind them and let them know how highly valued their efforts are and how grateful our country is to them.

Our nation will never forget the 39,000 Australians who served in Afghanistan including the 41 who made the ultimate sacrifice.

At my direction, the Department of Veterans' Affairs has been contacting the families of ADF members who lost their lives in Afghanistan, as well as any veterans the Department is aware of who could suffer adversely as a result of what is currently happening there.

So far the Department of Veterans' Affairs has contacted over 300,000 veterans and their families to let them know that support is there if they need it.

This is a distressing and difficult time for many and I encourage anyone who served in Afghanistan to reach out to support services available to them, and their families if they need it.

For those who are not currently registered with DVA, please know that help and support is there for you.

**Support services available 24/7:**

**Open Arms** – Veterans & Families Counselling service on [1800 011 046](tel:1800011046)

**Safe Zone Support** on [1800 142 072](tel:1800142072) is a free and anonymous counselling line for current serving ADF personnel, veterans and their families

**Defence Family Helpline** available for ADF members and their families on 1800 624 608

MEDIA CONTACTS

Minister Gee's office: 0459 966 944

DVA Media: 02 6289 6466



## The Hon Andrew Gee MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs  
Minister for Defence Personnel  
Federal Member for Calare

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

**24 August 2021**

### **MR STUART SMITH APPOINTED DEFENCE ENGAGEMENT COMMISSIONER**

Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel Andrew Gee today announced the appointment of Mr Stuart Smith AO DSC as Defence Engagement Commissioner.

"Following a distinguished military career spanning 37 years rising to the rank of Major General, and post service employment as the State Disaster Recovery Coordinator in Queensland, I'm pleased to announce Mr Stuart Smith has been appointed as Defence Engagement Commissioner, to lead the Repatriation Commission's engagement with the Australian Defence Force (ADF)," Minister Gee said.

"Mr Smith has been acting in the position since August 2020. During this time he has worked closely with Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs to strengthen cooperation and outcomes for our veterans.

"In particular, Mr Smith works with many ex-service organisations to discuss support for serving veterans and the delivery of programs that enable veterans and their families to secure meaningful employment once they transition.

"Over the past year, he has also worked closely with the Joint Transition Authority to establish a framework for transition support and services."

Mr Smith has actively engaged with Defence leaders, ex-service organisations, veterans and Defence personnel. He has undertaken roundtables and visits to Defence bases around the country to listen and grasp a fuller understanding of the ADF experience.

In 2012 Major General Smith was appointed Commander Joint Task Force 633, responsible for Operation Slipper and Australian forces operating in the Middle East.

"During my period of command in Afghanistan six Australian soldiers were killed and three were wounded in action," Mr Smith said.

"I have been working hard to ensure the support for those veterans and their families affected by service has been synchronised between Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

"With the rapidly changing situation in Afghanistan and many veterans reflecting on their service, getting that support to where it is needed has never been more important."

Minister Gee said he warmly welcomed Stuart Smith's appointment.

"With a deep professional understanding of the ADF and extensive public and private sector experience, I am positive Mr Smith will continue to contribute highly to the close cooperative relationship between the Repatriation Commission and the ADF to better support Defence personal, veterans and their families," Minister Gee said.

For further information visit the DVA website [Defence Engagement Commissioner Stuart Smith](#).

#### **MEDIA CONTACTS:**

**Minister Gee's office: 0459 966 944**

**DVA Media: 02 6289 6466**

## **ACT Government COVID Update - Emergency food relief**

Dear members,

Please see the following announcement from the ACT Government:

**“The ACT Government has responded quickly to provide emergency food relief for Canberrans most in need during this 7-day lockdown.**

**The ACT Government has partnered with VolunteeringACT and the State Emergency Service to provide emergency food to those in need.**

**Any Canberran who is significantly and adversely impacted by this 7-day lockdown and is unable to feed their family is encouraged to call 1800 43 11 33. Callers will be linked with a VolunteeringACT staff member who will place a shopping order on their behalf and members of the SES will then collect the order and deliver it to them.**

**The SES are unable to enter a person’s home, so the groceries will be left on the doorstep after a knock at the door.**

<https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/community/access-help#Emergency-food-relief>

**Jessica Summerrell**

Executive Branch Manager, Community & Social Inclusion”

Regards,

Greg

**Greg Kennett**

Secretary

Woden Valley Sub-Branch

Australian Capital Territory

P: (02) 6285 1931

## ACT COVID-19 restrictions update



**Dear All,**

With the recent announcement of an extended COVID-19 lockdown across the ACT, we wanted to provide you with an update about our services.

Australia Post is an essential service and as such our operations continue despite COVID-19 restrictions. This means that:

- Post Offices remain open across the state

Processing and delivery of letters and parcels continues

The lockdown is however impacting some of our delivery operations including air freight. Our delivery network has also been affected by increased online shopping activity, resulting in parcel volumes similar to the Christmas period.

Our posties and delivery drivers will continue to deliver as quickly and safely as they can, but please understand delivery delays may be experienced.

We have a range of health and safety measures in place to help protect you, our people and the community. These include perspex screens, hand sanitiser and social distancing in all Post Offices, along with extra cleaning in high touch areas. We've also applied additional measures throughout our processing centres and delivery network.

To help us all stay COVID safe, we're asking you to follow these guidelines when visiting a Post Office or receiving a delivery:

### **When visiting a Post Office**

- Please keep 1.5 metres from staff and other customers.
- Sanitise your hands and wear a mask where required.

Stay home if you're showing symptoms.

### **When receiving a delivery**

- Please keep 1.5 metres from our posties and drivers.
- If you're experiencing symptoms, please let your postie or driver know.
- Wear a mask where required and practice good hygiene.

To ensure we avoid unnecessary contact, there's currently no requirement for you to sign for deliveries. If the sender has requested a signature, we'll confirm delivery by recording the name of the person receiving the item. Visit our website to learn more about [COVID-19 health and safety](#).

We are thinking of you in this difficult time and thank you for your ongoing support and patience.

Stay safe,

**From your Australia Post team**