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## MEDIA RELEASE

### RSL TASMANIA APPEARS BEFORE ROYAL COMMISSION

RSL Tasmania Executives and Branch Representatives have appeared today before *The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide* sitting in Hobart as part of their Australia-wide hearing program.

After giving evidence before Commissioner Kaldas and his colleagues, RSL Tasmania CEO John Hardy was very pleased with the hearing. “We are extremely grateful to the Royal Commission for giving us the opportunity to explain in detail what services are in place for Tasmanian Veterans and their families and our plans for improving them.”

In response to questioning from Counsel Assisting Erin Longbottom, Mr. Hardy was able to outline succinctly the way forward to combat this scourge of Veteran suicide. “We know the current system of Veteran service delivery in Australia is in urgent need of repair; it does not work as it should, and we know that the incidence of Veteran suicide is on the rise. The recent snapshot of specific health and wellbeing data provided by the 2021 Census reveals that the percentage of Tasmanian Veterans with mental illness or other long term health issues are also higher than the national average.”

Hardy added, “Tasmanian Veterans want improved access to health services within their own communities. Issues our Defence Family have encountered include distance to services, hours of service, knowledge of services available, financial and cultural barriers, and a need for ‘Veteran friendly’ services.”

In response to the crisis, RSL Tasmania created a *Welfare, Wellbeing and Advocacy Committee*, specifically tasked to identify and consolidate the services that were actually being provided. They found most the common challenge for Veterans wanting help to transition back into the community was accessing services that provide them with care for their physical health, pain management and mental health.

RSL Tasmania advised the Commission that they believe the establishment of the **VeteranHub** model hopes to address the needs identified. RSL Tasmania’s **VeteranHub** model is a ‘Hub and Spoke’ model of service delivery that plans to co-locate a range of Veteran services to reach as many Veterans and their families as possible across Tasmania. Hardy also highlighted that. “All ESOs (Ex-Service Organisations) must work together, this must never be about the RSL or our ESOs, it must be about the wellbeing of our Veterans. **We owe it to them to work together.**”

Although RSL Tasmania has identified a lack of general and specialist medical treatment available to Veterans in Tasmania, quantitative data on whether these lack of services may have contributed to Defence and Veteran death by suicide, attempted suicide or suicidality is difficult to determine.

After the hearing, RSL Tasmania President Barry Quinn reiterated the message he gave to the Royal Commission, “We truly believe that providing timely and appropriate medical treatment, therapeutic intervention and lifestyle support programs to Veterans, would improve the health and wellbeing of Veterans and their families and give them quality of life.”

**Contact:** John Hardy, RSL Tasmania CEO

**About us:** *RSL Tasmania is the peak body for Ex Service Organisations in Tasmania. We provide support and assistance to serving and ex-service personnel and their families. This is our Defence Family, and we support their combined return to health, work, and civilian life.*

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