

2023 **ANNUAL** REPORT

For the year ended 30 June 2023



Supporting Organisations who employ Defence Personnel



Bevan Killick
Honorary Captain (Navy)
Chair, DESC

What is our “Why”?

There have been times in the past when the New Zealand Defence Force has attempted to call up Reservists to serve on deployments and this was met with resistance from the Employers of the Reservists. This was most noticeable when New Zealand Defence Force personnel were sent to East Timor (Timor-Leste) some years ago. Many Employers of the Reservists called up, were unaware of their staff being Reservists and even less aware of the legislative obligations relating to this. Additionally, those Employers were often unaware of the training being received by their own staff and the skills and experience which those staff members brought back to those businesses and organisations.

“
For the sake of Aotearoa New Zealand, these Reservists, their supportive Employers and the training and experiences, need to be celebrated.”

Also, those less enthusiastic Employers need to be taken on the journey to learn of the benefits of employing Reservists, rather than seeing those who serve as a burden. Reserve service is good for the individuals concerned, their Employers and Aotearoa New Zealand as a nation. The Territorial Force Employer Support Council was born, and is now known as the Te Arawhiti ki te Hapori / Defence Employer Support Council (“DESC”) and with an expanded scope.

Scope

The Minister of Defence has empowered the DESC to assist with four aspects of the Defence landscape where NZDF meets “civvy street”.

In summary these are:



Employers of Reservists



Employers of Cadet Force Officers



NZDF Youth programmes (such as the Limited Service Volunteers (LSV), Cadets and Blue Light Programmes, etc)



Regular Force personnel transitioning to civilian employment or in some way exiting the NZDF

While not strictly within the scope of our terms of reference, the DESC has also taken an interest in the recruitment and retention of personnel. Those who transition from being Regular Force personnel are usually Reservist personnel as part of their transition. The relationship with their Employer is important.

Overview of the year

All organisations go through various phases. When most of the current DESC members were appointed, the DESC entered what felt like a start-up phase. Core to this was our Terms of Reference from the then Minister of Defence, Hon Ron Mark. The Terms of Reference remain relevant and appropriate. This year, as we have emerged from the COVID-19 period, excellent results have been produced and other aspects have emerged showing prospects of further gains.



Tohu Awards

Our flagship event is the Tohu Awards. This was held at the Wigram Airforce Museum on Wednesday 2 November 2022. Significant work has taken place over several years to shape up these awards to celebrate success and show support for Reservist Employers and Cadet Force Officer Employers, Reservists themselves and the Limited Service Volunteer programme. What was originally the "Minister of Defence, Awards of Excellence", all be it prestigious, did not exactly roll off the tongue. With the blessing of respective Ministers and through consultation with cultural advisors, iwi contacts outside Defence, industry and NZDF leaders, the "Tohu Awards" were born. These were launched at the Wigram event.

When the current Council was reformed, a Dinner in the Parliament Banquet Hall was already in train. This was held jointly with the Defence Industry Advisory Council ("DIAC") to celebrate the Minister of Defence's Awards of Excellence for both Employers for DESC and Industry for DIAC. This was a fulsome agenda for the evening, and it was preferred to decouple these aspects. The DESC has asked each of the three services (Navy, Army, Air Force) to host the Tohu Awards each year in a three-year cycle.





Tohu Awards

The first awards hosted by a service was the Royal New Zealand Navy hosted awards on 25 May 2021 on board HMNZS Aotearoa in Wellington harbour. While it was a privilege and honour to host an awards Dinner at Parliament the previous year, I suspect many Employers also felt very special having the event on board one of their Navy's ships. It is a wonderful way to showcase the capability of our Defence Force. This would have been an excellent story around water coolers or at BBQs for many weeks to follow.

COVID-19 then necessitated the Awards to be hosted on-line from Defence House with participation both live and pre-recorded by the then Minister of Defence Hon Peeni Henare.

After being rescheduled twice due to COVID-19, on Wednesday 2 November 2022 the Royal New Zealand Air Force stepped up and hosted the launch of the Tohu Awards at the Airforce Museum in Wigram. This is New Zealand's National Airforce Museum and where Sir Henry Wigram founded what is now the Royal New Zealand Air Force. We delighted in being able to offer an opportunity for remembrance through a Karanga to begin our event together with the Vietnam Veterans who were also having their reunion at the Airforce Museum. The attendees included Minister of Defence Hon Peeni Henare, Minister for Veterans Hon Meka Whitiri, the Chief of Defence Air Marshal Kevin Short, Chief of Army Major General John Boswell DSD, Australian Army Reservist Major General Douglas Laidlaw and his entourage, local Members of Parliament, the Right Reverend Pihopa (Anglican Bishop for Te Waipounamu) Richard Wallace QSM, and many others that NZDF relies on building bridges with to efficiently deliver its outputs. We would like to acknowledge the Airforce Museum Director Wing Commander Brett Marshall ADC and his team, the world renowned NZ Army Band, NZDF Cultural Advisor WO Kathleen Nikau, the Right Reverend Pihopa Richard Wallace QSM and his wife the Venerable Mere Wallace for their mahi and guidance in making the evening such a great success.



As a result of the success of the Wigram based, Air Force hosted Tohu Awards, we have enjoyed an increase in applications for the 2023 Awards - by several magnitude. While there was an additional workload to judge these applications, we are delighted to see this increase.

This year, it is the Army's turn to host the Tohu Awards. While tempting to host an event, even in late spring, in Waiouru or Linton, the reality of tempting senior business, community and iwi leaders to, what are sometimes desolate places, has a degree of risk. It is usually a significantly increased time requirement which is difficult for senior leaders. Plans are therefore set for the Army to host the 2023 Tohu Awards in central Wellington. This has the advantage of being very accessible for everyone involved.

We intend to have the Royal New Zealand Navy host the Tohu Awards in late 2024 in Devonport.

This will establish a three year cycle of events, covering all three services and the three major centres. In a three year cycle we intend to have the Royal New Zealand Navy host at Devonport (Auckland), the Army to host in Wellington and the Royal New Zealand Air Force to host at the Airforce Museum in Christchurch.



Design and Communications



One of the best ways to engage with Employers and the business community is via the LinkedIn social media platform and to a lesser degree Facebook. When the DESC re-established in mid-2019 there were fewer than 20 LinkedIn followers. An informal target of 1000 LinkedIn followers was set which was achieved during the year. This has been a focus for the DESC and at 30 June 2023 there were approaching 1200 LinkedIn followers.



We now have an informal target of 2500 LinkedIn followers. Significant investment of time and resource has gone into this growing this audience with posts regularly receiving around 4000 views. Pleasingly, the LinkedIn posts with the highest views were those celebrating the Tohu Awards.



Despite asking for the advertisement calling for applications for Tohu Awards to be published in the three service magazines the advertisement only featured once in Navy Today. This will be followed up with Defence Public Affairs as there needs to be a step change in their responsiveness to our needs for print media and website changes.



Work continues on our public facing website, which now includes biographical details of the Council members. Significantly more resources need to be available for Reservists and their Employers.

International connections and a search for best practice



- We were delighted to be able to host our Australian counterparts led by Major General Douglas Laidlaw at both the Tohu Awards and our Council meeting the following day in November 2022. Excellent discussions and comparisons of approaches resulted. We will be extending an invitation to Major General Laidlaw for him or his representative's attendance at the 2023 Tohu Awards. The Australian counterparts have indicated that an invitation will be extended for the DESC Chair and perhaps others to attend the Australian Awards later in November 2023.
- In recent years COVID-19 had hampered our international engagement. Lieutenant Colonel Vanessa Houghton attended the NATO organised National Reserve Force Committee Staff Officer Meeting. The Staff Officers' meeting is a more operational version of the NATO National Reserve Force Committee ("NRFCC") International Conference on Employer Support for the Reserves ("ICESR") held every two years. ICESR's primary aim is to share information and experiences on methods of support by (and for) civilian employers of Defence Reservists and to explore future directions for the development and use of Reserves. In 2022 the ICESR was held in Copenhagen and attended virtually by the DESC Chair and AC DRYS, Captain Quentin Randall RNZN. There was a suggestion that New Zealand could host the 2024 ICESR Conference, however we have declined as we felt the distance for others to travel would have been prohibitive. The venue for the 2024 ICESR has not been advised at the time of writing.
- While internationally Reserves have significant differences between nations, many of the challenges are consistent. We will continue with these useful engagements.

Veterans' Affairs



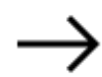
The DESC was represented at Veterans' Expos held in Auckland, Palmerston North and Christchurch, the launch of Te Arataki mō te Hauora Ngākau mō ngā Mōrehu a Tū me ō rātou Whānau / The Veteran, Family and Whānau Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework and the subsequent Symposium.



As service personnel leave the Regular Force they typically become Reservists in some capacity. We are also using our established social media channels to be a catalyst for Veterans' Affairs to connect with more contemporary Veterans who don't necessarily identify with the traditional perception of being a Veteran. These events also provide useful anecdotes for us of personnel transferring to civilian life and reserve force service.

The DESC promotes the value of Defence service for both those who are Reservists and those who have transitioned to civvy street. These individuals have excellent value to continue to apply to their Employers and society more broadly. Reservists and Veterans have excellent skills, attributes, work ethic and experiences to contribute. They should not be seen, as they are by some, as in some way damaged or requiring extra support. While we require better data, this may be the case in the minority. In the majority of cases, quite the opposite is the case. It is blatantly obvious that some organisations are actively targeting Veterans and current service personnel. This demonstrates that some progressive organisations recognise the competitive advantage that current or ex-service personnel bring to an organisation. Our international engagement with kindred organisations supports this hypothesis. We are seeing a number of multi-national corporations exploring how their programmes abroad can be adapted to an Aotearoa New Zealand context. Naturally this embeds a cultural foundation. Those organisations that neglect the value of Defence service, either from veterans or Reservists, will not benefit from the advantage they bring. Every year the individual stories displayed in the Tohu Awards further proves this.

Legislative changes



We continue to monitor and receive briefings from NZDF personnel regarding their work on the Volunteer Employment Protection Act (“VEPA”) and any potential amendments. The Act is administered by the Ministry for Business Innovation and Employment.



Other initiatives

The DESC contributes to NZDF by providing connections to Industry and Employers. This is particularly helpful for thought leadership and strategic advice on areas such as cyber, digital, Information Technology, future workforce architecture, health, e-sports and equity and inclusion.



We have also pushed for Reserve Units to better document their significant Employers. This was found to be absent when senior NZDF leaders suggested they meet with Reserve Employers. There is also a role for Regional Engagement Officers (“REOs”) to add value in this space, but in essence the intelligence for this will be held at the unit level.



Material and resources for Employers continues to be developed and this will all become more visible with a future refresh of the website.



Survey work continues as we gather evidence to support our initiatives and to be able to measure our effectiveness. Our international counterparts also appear to be data poor in their endeavours.

Team arrivals and departures

All DESC Council and Secretariat Members are engaged and enthusiastic about the work of the DESC. At time of writing we are seeking Ministerial and Cabinet approval for an appointment to fill the vacancy left by Tui Te Hau.

The DESC farewelled Captain Quentin Randall RNZN as Assistant Chief Defence Reserves Youth and Sport ("AC DRYS"). Captain Randall was a strategic thinker who built on the work of his excellent predecessors. Captain Randall was replaced by Colonel Jason Dyhrberg DSD and soon to be replaced by Colonel Roger Margetts ONZM. We record our thanks to both Captain Randall and Colonel Dyhrberg for their work with us and the progress they both made on a number of issues. The DESC would benefit from longer tenure from those appointed to the position of AC DRYS.



CAPT Corina Bruce RNZNR,
Deputy Chair



Captain David Morgan



Bevan Killick
Honorary Captain (Navy),
Chair



MAJGEN John Boswell, DSD
Chief of Army and CDF Rep



Brenda Steele



Felicity Evans



Warner Cowin



Jules Fulton



CAPT Quentin Randall RNZN
AC DRYS Farewelled



Kirk Hope



COL Jason Dyhrberg, DSD
AC DRYS Welcomed

DESC Council Members

Our Council members are engaged and enthusiastic about the work of the DESC.

The individual DESC Members all have exceptional careers in their respective fields. The DESC Members have all gone above and beyond during the year in their contribution to DESC matters. Due to Members and staff having various conflicting commitments and ill health at times, the DESC only met on three occasions. This has resulted in a cost saving and a reduction in our carbon footprint. We also utilise on-line meeting methods where appropriate and possible. The DESC Members and their meeting attendance is as follows:

Council Member	Meeting attendance		
	24 August 2022	3 November 2022	22 February 2022
Hon CAPT (Navy) Bevan Killick, Chair	Present	Present	Present
CAPT Corina Bruce, RNZNR, Deputy Chair	Present	Present	Present
MAJGEN John Boswell, DSD (CDF Rep)	Apology	Present	Apology
Felicity Evans	Present	Present	Present
Jules Fulton	Apology	Present	Apology
Kirk Hope	Via MS Teams	Apology	Apology
Captain David Morgan	Apology	Apology	Apology
Brenda Steele	Present	Present	Apology
Warner Cowin	Present	Present	Present

DESC Financial Report 2023

ALL VALUES '000	FY 22/23	FY 21/22	FY20/21
Tohu Awards	72.1	34.3	17.2
Communications & Media	58.4	10.5	12.1
Council Members' fees	28.4	20.6	21.7
Council Members' travel	13.1	19.5	17.5
	172.0	84.9	68.5

The table illustrates an increase in spending in the Tohu Awards, Communications & Media and the Council Members' fees categories.

The expenditure increase of the Tohu Awards reflects the end of COVID-19 restraints. Attendance of 130 persons, catering and entertainment accounted for much of the increase in expenditure.

The increase in spending on Communications & Media, reflects an increase in activity around the design and creation of resources to support the Tohu Awards and the development of the DESC website, while also maintaining DESC Social Media Platforms. LinkedIn and Facebook followers, visitors to the DESC website and social media clicks, continue to steadily increase.

The end of the pandemic has enabled a return to normal DESC activity, accounting for the decrease in Council fees.

This year has seen a decline in travel expenditure, in part due to the ill health of some Council and Secretariat members, necessitating the cancellation of the June 2023 meeting. The location of the three meetings meant the DESC was able to keep travel cost to a minimum, with the August 2022 and February 2023 meetings being held in Wellington and the November 2023 meeting being held in Christchurch, the morning after the 2022 Tohu Awards.

Thanks

We have been superbly supported by the DESC Secretariat team, including Marika Trotter, John Harvey and Shiloh Dobie. The DESC Members record their gratitude for the team's hard work, dedication and outstanding achievements during the year.

We also need to acknowledge the work of the Secretariat team and the Council Members in delivering on our outputs. It is appropriate to acknowledge that this has been achieved during a period when both Secretariat staff and Council Members have had more than their fair share of family bereavements, ill health, surgeries and other distractions. With this backdrop the team has covered for each other and delivered ground breaking excellence.



Conclusion

It is evident from our international counterparts that the work of the DESC is increasingly important, particularly if the NZDF is likely to need to flex its capabilities. This is increasingly more likely as a result of global geopolitics.

The well-defined strategy work, rebranding of our Awards, increased social media presence, general profile of DESC and the Tohu Awards, have been significantly enhanced over the past few years. This year we have seen some of the results of this work and it has been very pleasing.

NZDF recruitment, retention, increased workload, importance of youth programmes have all contributed to our work becoming vital for the effective operation of NZDF and better societal outcomes for Aotearoa New Zealand.



desc.govt.nz