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THE MILITARY VETERANS DATABASE MANAGEMENT BY THE DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY VETERANS AND THE STATE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AGENCY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The management of the Military Veterans Database by the Department of Military Veterans (DMV) has been highlighted as a key concern by both the Department and the Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans (PCDMV). Crucially, it is considered a key stumbling block to the effective distribution of benefits to deserving military veterans. As such, the PCDMV has placed increased focus on the oversight of this aspect of the DMV management in recent times. At a meeting on 24 October 2016, it was noted that the State Information Technology Agency (SITA) may able to assist the DMV in establishing an effective system for the management of the Database. Based on the challenges experienced by the DMV and the potential assistance by SITA, the PCDMV has requested a joint briefing by the Department and Agency on possible cooperation related to the Database. This paper provides a brief overview of recent engagements on the Database and poses several questions which Members may wish to utilise during their engage the DMV and SITA.

2. THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE MILITARY VETERANS DATABASE

The most recent information made available by the DMV regarding the status of the database includes the following:

One of the strategic priorities brought forward in the DMV's 2016/17 Annual Report was the *Maintenance of a credible and secure national military veterans database*. This relates to the process of finalising the electronic system, which will be used to administer the registration of military veterans in the National Veterans Military database in a secured and reliable manner. The Annual Report noted that as at 31 March 2016, 98 per cent of the 71 811 military veterans registered on the database are *bona fide* Veterans with force numbers that are verifiable through the Department of Defence (DOD).[1]

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[1] Department of Military Veterans 2016. Annual Report 2015/16. p. 37

On 18 October 2016, the PCDMV met with the DMV during which they indicated the following:

- The DMV is assisting veterans who submitted incomplete forms to get their updated details on the database so that Skills Development has an updated database.
- The Turnaround Strategic Initiative (TSI) had a special work group in order to give attention to the database.
- Delays have resulted in the slow verification of members by former non-statutory force bodies.

On 11 November 2016, the DMV made a presentation to the Joint Standing Committee on Defence (JSCD) on its turnaround strategy. The strategy also highlighted a verified database as essential to effectiveness. The Turnaround Task Team made the following recommendation regarding the database:

- Develop a database verification process (key enabler).
- The process of verification, categorisation and benefits allocations should be integrated.
- The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Director should interact with the Chief Director (Database) to establish a priority Ministerial Verification Project, with clear timelines on developing application which will enable the credibility of verification of each beneficiary and every veteran.

As such, the Turnaround Task Team provided a proposed High Level Database and Benefits Process, which includes a verified database (See Figure below). The process will first require the verification of applications according to the definition of a Veteran. It should be noted however, that verification cannot take place without the existence of a credible Military Veterans Database.

Figure: High Level Database and Benefits Process
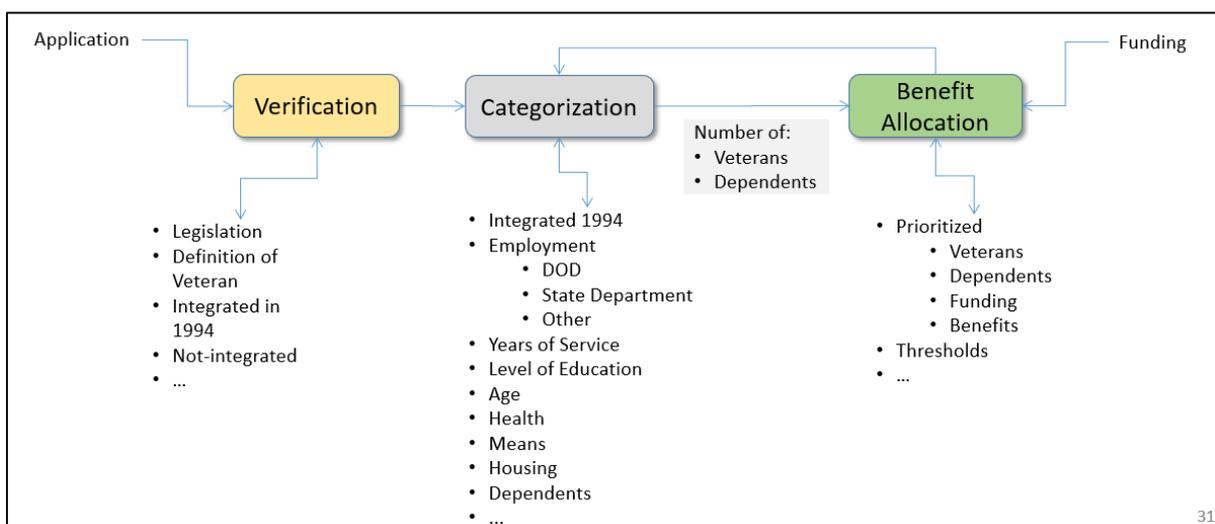
3. THE ROLE OF SITA IN THE MILITARY VETERANS DATABASE MANAGEMENT

While SITA has presented to the PCDMV in the past, these presentations related largely to the modernising of the defence information systems in the Department of Defence. However, during the 24 August 2016 engagement and in the presentation submitted for the 22 February 2017 meeting, the following were noted in terms of the assistance offered by SITA to the DMV:

- There is an existing Business Agreement between the DMV and SITA that was formed in August 2014.
- The SITA contracts with the DOD has commenced and SITA is now delivering some services to the DOD. However, services to the DMV will only be prioritised over time.
- DMV received Ministerial instruction in February 2016 to establish an in-house Contact Centre at the DMV Head Quarters.

Aside from the in-house Contact Centre, very limited information is available as to the actual role of SITA in assisting the DMV in the establishment of a credible Military Veterans' Database. It is, however, clear that SITA has the capability to provide the DMV with an appropriate IT platform to ensure the optimal functioning of the Database. Nonetheless, verification of the list will still solely depend on the work of the DMV.

Members may pose the following questions related to the Database:
- What is the current status of the DMV Database?
- What percentage of the DMV Database has been verified?
- What engagement has taken place with the former non-statutory forces bodies to ensure that backlogs with the Database are being addressed?
- Has the 'means test' been applied to those on the Military Veterans' Database to ensure that benefits are not unduly awarded?
- Has the Ministerial Verification Project been established to investigate the drivers that lead to delays regarding the Database? If so, what are the timelines set for this Project?

- How many engagements have been recorded between SITA and the DMV since the Business Agreement in August 2014? And what have been the outcomes of these engagements?
- What services can SITA offer to the DMV?
- Will cooperation between SITA and the DMV be formalised through, for instance, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and/or Service Level Agreement (SLA)?
- Will SITA's involvement add to the speedy finalisaiton of the Database?