

It's great to finally be at the National Council Workshop, after what has felt like a very long road getting here.

We want you to know from the outset that we are here to listen. The whole purpose of this workshop is get your ideas to help build the RNZRSA of the future.

For all of us to get the most out of today, I want you to forget everything you've heard before you walked in the door today. There's a lot of misinformation circulating out there both in the media and in our own ranks, and some of you may have come here today with some preconceived notions of what's being proposed.

We know members of our own organisation are actively trying to undermine this process by sharing misinformation and trying to build a campaign of resistance to any form of change.

I want you to park all that. Forget it. The conversation starts now.

We are all here today because we care about the RSA and we want to see it survive and thrive long into the future.

Today is about looking to that future, and working out how we can modernise and remain a relevant force for veterans in New Zealand.

But when we talk about modernizing, and a modernization programme – what are we really talking about?

First and most importantly, the programme of change we are proposing to go through relates to the RNZRSA not individual Associations. The RNZRSA has been here for over 108 years, and any organisation that has existed that long is dealing with a legacy of decisions made over time.

For us, those decisions have left us with a governance structure that promotes conflict and doesn't make any real sense – we've got a Board that controls funding and the overall direction of the organisation but no means of implementing their decisions. And we've got a Presidents' Forum that represents the membership but has no financial or legal responsibilities.

To be a modern organisation we need connected leadership – but what does that look like? Let's talk about it and find out.

Our current structure also means that Associations are relatively isolated, disconnected from support and the lines of communication just aren't working.

To be a modern organisation we need greater connection, we need to be able to talk to each other, support each other and be unified by a common purpose. What does that look like? Let's talk about it and find out.

I know there are those of you that will still be asking why? Why do we need to change at all?

The RNZRSA started back when a single man sat on a hill in Gallipoli looking at the carnage that surrounded him. He saw that those around him would be returning to New Zealand damaged by their experience, both physically and mentally, and that there was no support ready for them when they got home.

108 years later, we have creaking government services that are unable to deliver support to our veterans – wait times of up to two years for the most basic of services. We have a country that

doesn't recognise the special nature of military service and the sacrifices it requires, that believe it is just like any other job.

But we have a country that is still creating veterans every day – over 62000 veterans of military service since 1990. Over 12000 veterans of operational deployments. Right now over 250 New Zealand Defence Force personnel are deployed around the world.

We owe it to them and the sacrifices they make to ensure support is there when they need it.

And to be a member of the RNZRSA, to display that badge on your building, or wear the badge on your jacket, means that regardless of the business you operate, or how you connect with your community, the reason we are all here, our why, is to support New Zealand's veterans of military service and their whānau.

As your National President I'm asking you all to come together today. Forget your preconceived ideas and get stuck in. We will all have different ideas of what a modernised RNZRSA might look like, and that's exactly why we're here, to hear each other out and work together.

Let's make the most of this opportunity, and let's make sure we respect each other. Today, everybody's voice has equal weight – you aren't a President, or a secretary, treasurer, affiliate or member of the Board or Forum. Today we are all equal so I encourage you to speak freely and openly, but I also ask you to allow others to speak. Let's not jump all over each other or hold court, we need to nail a way forward today and the only way we can do that is together.

Let's roll up our sleeves and get on with it. The future starts today and every single one of you is part of it.