

**Military Historical Society of Australia  
Victorian Branch Inc.**

# Despatches



**Quarterly Newsletter**

**Volume 33, Number 4**

**April - June 2011**

## **Victorian Branch Inc. Committee 2010-11**

### **Office Holders**

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### **Despatches:**

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### **Meetings**

Branch Meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of each month (except December) at the Oakleigh RSL, Drummond Street, Oakleigh starting at 8.00 pm. Visitors most welcome.

## Our Branch – Now and in the Future

by VicSec

As my year as Secretary and third year on Committee comes towards a close I thought I would take the liberty of producing *Despatches* to have a few words on the state of the Branch. The Branch is progressing well, aligned to our 2010-12 Strategic Plan. It has interesting activities, events and projects, a steady flow of new members, and some good guest and member speakers. April's Veterans Night was a good case in point. With nearly 40 in attendance, we heard terrific presentations from Vietnam vets Ron Gates, ex-US Army and our own Alan Rantall, ex-RAE. Good networking, lots of socialising, some new faces and a decent raffle made even better with an organic pumpkin thrown in (don't ask, you had to be there, but it made for a good laugh all round). I think there is a sense developing that it's a pretty good night out to come to an MHSA meeting for both new and veteran members of the Branch.

As you can imagine, it's not easy to produce an annual programme which manages to hit the right places for most members most of the time. Leisure time is under pressure everywhere and especially for those with a full time job and other family and social and professional commitments. So it means extra effort to get to Branch meetings or work on a Branch project. But the fellowship of the men and women alike in the Branch makes it worthwhile. I for one, being interested in just about everything in general, always learn something new at every meeting I attend. As well, we've been able to maintain a good website. And there's a steady flow of information going out to members on email at least, especially for that group of loyal members who are unable to make meetings for whatever reason.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> June we hold our 2<sup>nd</sup> Cobby Oration. We learn from each event and activity and so it promises to be bigger and better than the inaugural Oration at which 92 people attended. I certainly hope that we will see maximum numbers on the 23<sup>rd</sup> accordingly. This sort of event relies on a number of members, not just the Committee, pitching in and making it

all come together on the night. If the event is supported by as many as possible, it shows all comers that we are serious about meeting our Branch objectives. To me this is important, just as important as holding successful and interesting branch meetings. It probably won't hurt to remind ourselves of what those objectives are, as given in the current MHSA Constitution:

"The objects of the Society are the encouragement and pursuit of study and research in military history, customs, traditions, dress, arms, equipment and kindred matters; the promotion of public interest and knowledge in these subjects, and the preservation of historical military objects, with particular reference to the Armed Forces of Australia."

To 'encourage and pursue' these objects we probably need to reach more than just our own membership. We try and do this through our Oration and a Branch project every year or so, which hopefully also helps us to gain new members. We also need to raise funds, for without funds we are very limited in how we can pursue towards meeting these objectives. Branch fees and raffles alone barely meet basic operating costs. So you'll see some additional fund-raising activities. These should be *fun* as well; I hope you'll join in.

BUT our Branch cannot grow and prosper on the efforts of a few people only, and with the opening of all positions on the Committee at this year's AGM, I appeal to each of you to consider whether you might be able to devote some time to Branch work over the coming year. We cannot keep relying on the same people year after year over. Any organisation needs new blood, new energy, new ideas to refresh and renew its working committee, sense and purpose.

From observation of military history and heritage groups in Vic., our Branch is one of the few actually growing. Many have declining membership and a loss of purpose – as we were ourselves a few years ago. Momentum and positive change cannot be maintained without regeneration. So please consider nominating for Committee this year. We need new faces on Committee, new volunteers with commitment and something to contribute. Regardless of how long you have been in the Branch you will be very welcome - and you will make a difference.

## Branch activities to the AGM...and beyond

**26<sup>th</sup> May – Bombing of Darwin and Japanese Plans for Australia.** Guest Speaker Dr Pam Oliver from Monash University, author of several books on Australian-Japanese relations before WWII, including 'Raids on Australia' will address the question - did the Japanese actually plan to invade Australia?

**Membership and Branch subs for 2011-12.** This year, to help close our books by the end of June we will be asking for 2010-11 renewal fees a little earlier than we normally do. Please remember that 2011-12 sees a fee increase to **\$45** (of which \$35 for MHSA fees goes to the Federal Council for the production of *Sabretache* and \$10 is retained by the Branch).

**Please pay promptly by cheque or direct debit by 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2011**, and absolutely no later than 30<sup>th</sup> June please. Husband and wife combos only one subscription please – for one *Sabretache* in return. **Renewal forms are included in this edition of *Despatches*.**

**23<sup>rd</sup> June - 2<sup>nd</sup> Cobby Oration.** This year we commemorate 100 years of RAN history through the service of the highly respected RAN WWII veteran of the Battle of Coral Sea, the landing at Normandy, and Korean and Vietnam wars, Commodore Dacre Smyth. By now you have your invitations in hand. The Oration will be given by the Senior Naval Officer in Victoria Captain Mark Hill in the Mechanics Institute Hall across the road from the Oakleigh RSL. **This is our signature event of the year so please make this a must on your calendar and support your Branch's biggest event.**

**28<sup>th</sup> July – AGM.**

- Election of office holders and committee members.
- After the AGM member Don Davis will make a presentation of the Air Observer Corps of WWII.

ALL office-holder and committee member roles are up for election this year so if you would like to contribute please nominate for a position.

The positions are:

- President
- Vice-President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- and four ordinary Committee members...

*Nomination forms will go out by post in late June.*

Nominations will then be advised by post in mid-July along with voting forms and proxy forms. Voting can be effected before or at the AGM. I hope that there will be some background information with each nomination so you know you are voting for, as we have had a large number of new members into the branch over the past 12 months!

**August-December 2011.** A preview of the remainder of the year (to be confirmed by the incoming committee) is:

- **25<sup>th</sup> August: Guest Speaker – WWI** possibly on Pozieres – a joint night with the Australian Great War Forum
- **Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> September: Field Trip** to the Museum of HMAS Cerberus – BBQ and guided tour
- **22<sup>nd</sup> September: Annual Collectors Trading Night and Quiz** (based on *Despatches*)
- **27<sup>th</sup> October: Restorations** – guest speakers will present on the challenges and tribulations of restoring aircraft and vehicles
- **24<sup>th</sup> November: Military Cemetery Tour Oakleigh Pioneer Park and Fund-raiser...**from Crimea to the Indian Mutiny to the Prussian Army to the Boer War to WWI, complete with ghosts!
- **15<sup>th</sup> December: Xmas Dinner.**

**Web help needed.** With Peter Beckett away July- November 2011 we are still looking for someone who can be a standby person for the website – Peter will show you what to do and will be able to support, albeit at long distance for those months...**any volunteers please for July-November 2011?**

**New members.** More new members into the Branch:

- **Jeff Cossum**, one of Australia's leading experts on badges and insignia of the Australian Defence forces from colonial times to the present
- **Ross Wilkinson**, historian of the 2/14<sup>th</sup> Battalion Association
- **Murray Justin** interested in Engineer Corps in WWI Western Front and WWII
- **Paul Roos** who joins us in 2011-12, interested in South Africans in the Flying Corps WWI, the Boer War and some medal interests.

The branch membership is now close to 70 and our active meeting numbers are usually more than half of that. But our thanks too, to those members who because of distance or other challenges can't get to meetings. Members like Bill Rudd, into his nineties and still researching and contributing to military history – see [www.wv2roll.gov.au](http://www.wv2roll.gov.au)

**Carnegie Room.** Thanks to some quick footwork, VicSec managed to acquire two excellent display cases for the Carnegie Room for free from the RHSV. Next steps are to start to place displays in the cases and re-organise the wall displays as well. More on this to come.

**'fallen leaves'** – our project book remains on sale and money goes into our funds so *please support your branch and buy a copy for just \$25* – contact any Committee member.

**Branch Website.** Keep engaged with and make contributions to our Branch website [www.mhsavictoria.com](http://www.mhsavictoria.com) - it's the best place to see the latest information on what's going on in the Branch.

### **Affiliations.**

*The Australian Great War Association*, which now also uses the Oakleigh-Carnegie RSL as its base, has agreed to become a 'Special Interest Group' of the Branch. That is, AGWA will be the WWI specialists for the Branch, helping to arrange WWI speakers both within the Branch and in their own group, allowing our members to attend their sessions if interested. You'll see a piece from AGWA later in *Despatches* and every quarter from now on we will have an AGWA input.

AGWA's Next Drill Night - Date: Thursday 9th June 2011

Time: 19:30 - 22:00 - Location: Oakleigh RSL, Drummond St Oakleigh

All are welcome, come and experience WWI Living History!

Recruiting now! Tel: 0405 007 700 email: [david@kokodahistorical.com.au](mailto:david@kokodahistorical.com.au)

*The Naval Historical Society of Australia (NHSa) Victorian Chapter* has also agreed to affiliate with MHSA – again, in this case we will promote each other's meetings to our respective membership and hold a joint meeting of substance once a year – in this case it will be the Cobby Oration on 23<sup>rd</sup> June to commemorate 100 years of the RAN and the service of Commodore Dacre Smyth. As well, we exchange newsletters – the NHSa's newsletter is called the *Three-Headed Dog* (now there's a good question for September's quiz). If you would like to see it just ask VicSec. Check out the NHSa's website at <http://www.navyhistory.org.au/>

*Military History and Heritage Victoria Inc. (MHHV).* This is a new group in Victoria, launched on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2011. Unlike the other associations it is in the form of an umbrella group which promotes all military history and heritage groups in the State – regardless of type and whether air, sea or land, from colonial periods right through to the present. Our Branch Committee has agreed to become a foundation 'affiliate organisational member' of MHHV to promote our Branch activities and our president has accepted a role on the MHHV Council. A number of MHSA members have already joined MHHV and contributed articles to the MHHV website. Our own member Dr. Jim Wood is a Vice-Patron of MHHV Inc. See the MHHV website at [www.mhhv.org.au](http://www.mhhv.org.au)

### **Projects.**

**Camp Pell Project.** This project, to conduct an historical re-enactment of the April 1942 naming of US Camp Pell in Royal Park is moving forward quite well. Research is well underway for both the souvenir booklet and the commemorative plaque (to be designed by Roy Bastiaan) and the event details are lining up. The event will be held on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2012. More detail to come in the months ahead.

**Remembrance magazine.** A complimentary copy of The Shrine's new magazine with this issue of *Despatches*, thanks to David Howell.

**Biographical** - Biographies of interesting men and women with military interests; some permanent military, some militia, some Volunteers – who helped shape our military history. This time, a Naval officer in commemoration of 100 years of RAN history.

DALTON, LIONEL SYDNEY (1902-1941), naval officer, was born on 26 October 1902 in South Melbourne, second son of Edward Lisle Dalton, a clerk from Adelaide, and his Victorian-born wife Annie Myra, née Oliver. Educated at Middle Park State School, in 1916 Syd entered the Royal Australian Naval College, Jervis Bay, Federal Capital Territory. He did reasonably well academically, won colours for cricket and Rugby Union football, and gained a reputation as a good 'all rounder' who was prepared to 'have a go'. In January 1920 he was promoted midshipman and sent to sea in H.M.A.S. *Australia*.

Based in England for further training from 1921, Dalton served in several Royal Navy ships. He was promoted lieutenant in December 1924, graduated from the R.N. Engineering College at Keyham, Devonport, in 1925, and returned to Australia that year. After postings to H.M.A.S. *Anzac* and *Adelaide*, he went back to England in 1927 to commission the new vessel, *Australia*. On 24 March 1928 he married Margaret Mary Anderson at St Andrew's parish church, Plymouth. Home again, in 1931 he was posted to the seaplane-carrier, *Albatross*. While an instructor (1932-34) at the engineering school, H.M.A.S. *Cerberus*, Westernport, Victoria, he was promoted engineer lieutenant commander. In 1934 he found himself once more in England, standing by the six-inch-gun cruiser, *Sydney*, then under construction at Wallsend, Northumberland. He sailed in her to Australia and in 1937 transferred to H.M.A.S. *Adelaide*.

Promoted engineer commander on 31 December 1937, Dalton rejoined *Sydney* in June 1939 as engineer officer. In May 1940 the ship was deployed for service in the Mediterranean. On 19 July, while patrolling off Cape Spada, Crete, a flotilla of British destroyers sighted two Italian cruisers, the *Bande Nere* and *Bartolomeo Colleoni*. Some forty nautical miles (74 km) to the north, *Sydney* changed course to lend assistance: she pursued the Italian vessels at high speed down the west coast of Crete,

destroyed the *Bartolomeo Colleoni* and damaged the *Bande Nere*. Dalton's steadfastness and professionalism ensured that *Sydney's* machinery performed faultlessly throughout the engagement. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order.

*Sydney's* action against a superior force was widely regarded as Australia's most significant naval victory. Dalton recorded the ship's arrival in Alexandria harbour, Egypt, next day: '[We] . . . steamed down the line of battleships and cruisers, receiving a welcome that was wonderful. All ships cleared lower deck and gave us three cheers as we proceeded, and anyone would have imagined that we had won the war'. In 1940 the demands made on Dalton and his staff were enormous, with the ship steaming a total of 66,000 nautical miles (122,232 km). *Sydney* returned to Australian waters in February 1941.

On 19 November 1941, about 150 nautical miles (278 km) south-west of Carnarvon, Western Australia, *Sydney* challenged a disguised merchant vessel, later known to have been the German raider, *Kormoran*, which lured the cruiser closer then opened fire. Both ships were lost in the action, *Sydney* with her entire complement of 645 men. Dalton was survived by his wife and son David who became an engineer officer in the R.A.N. and rose to captain.

Alan Hinge, 'Dalton, Lionel Sydney (1902 - 1941)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 13, Melbourne University Press, 1993, pp 566-567.





## WHEN THEY LEARNED TO FLY BY HIT OR MISS Air Instruction Early in the Last War [WWI] Was Primitive, But Had Its Humorous Side - By MAX DUNN

AIRMEN today should be very satisfied with their conditions of training. Efficient cooks minister to their palates; expert instructors coach their every movement; first-class aeroplanes withstand their tyro blunders; well-cut uniforms build up their self-respect; the technical training given them prepares them for peacetime occupations; and the honour already won by the Air Force gives them an ideal to strive after. All this makes it easier for them to achieve the status of seasoned pilots. Conditions were entirely different when the last war broke out. Fortunately the British Government had established the Central Flying School 2 years previously, but when hostilities began there were so few airmen available that pilots who had their Royal Aero Club certificate were immediately given commissions, and some were in France within a week. Others were put in charge of reserve squadrons for giving preliminary training. Pupils when they qualified in the reserve squadrons were sent to either the Central Flying School or service squadrons where they completed their training.



A Maurice Farman training plane of 1914. It was fitted with a radial Gnome engine and "pusher" airscrew

Instruction was given in such planes as the Maurice Farman 'Longhorn', then considered a most advanced type of machine. This biplane was a "pusher" (i.e., having the propeller at the rear)

and was a framework of wood swaddled in cloth and tied together with yards upon yards of piano wire between the wings. Instructor and pupil sat behind each other in a flimsy bathtub nacelle, which jutted out in front. A few minutes' flight served to rob the pupil of any confidence he might have had, for the nacelle was so uncomfortable and draughty that soon he had nothing but the "wind up." There was no dual control. The elevators were controlled by a central column, the ailerons were operated by a pair of "spectacles" on the column, and the rudder pedals could be worked only from the front seat.

On reporting for instruction the budding pilot was hardly reassured by being supplied with a padded crash helmet and being tied into the seat. There were no intercommunication telephones. Though the 2 men sat only 2ft. apart, neither could hear the other, for the roar of the 80-hp Renault engine and the rush of the wind swamped all conversation. Most of the instructor's frenzied gesticulations were hard to interpret, and the "instruction" was usually supplemented with a complementary "dressing down" after they landed. All the pupil learned from these monologues were some valuable expressions for future use. He thus taught himself to fly by trial and error; but other things he learned by precept and example.

After 6 "lessons," totalling in all about 2 hours, the pupil was asked whether he felt enough of a seasoned flier to take the plane up alone. If he managed to survive about 10 hours of solo flying he got the coveted "wings." Some youngsters from the best families, however, got commissions and had only 2 hours' solo before they went to France. (Today the pupil must have at least 40 hours' dual and 60 hours' solo before he gets pilot's badge. In addition he does another 50 hours' advanced training before going into action.) Most of the German and British planes were 2-seaters, carrying a pilot and an observer ("passenger," as he was first

called), who was supposed to be able to make accurate reports for army officials. A great many of these observers had never been in a plane before, and very few had had any training in observation. If the truth were really told, most of them were airsick for the first dozen trips, so it was no wonder that some of their reports looked a bit sick to their commanding officers.

Ground staff arrangements were not any better. Men with little or no mechanical training were signed on. There were so few skilled aeroplane mechanics that any man who had had anything to do with motorcars was welcomed with stripes. There was no organised system of technical training as there is today, so these "ack emmas" improvised as they went along, just like the pilots and the observers. Fortunately many of the best fliers knew a great deal about aeroplane engines and rigging, and were not entirely dependent on the ground staff.

There was some improvement, in the training of observers and mechanics during 1915-16, but little in the training of pilots. Incidentally one of the best teachers of flying during 1915 was Miss Marjorie Stinson, the first and only woman to train pilots for the Royal Flying Corps. In those days it was easier to get into the RFC if the applicant had had some previous experience. Miss Stinson, who was an American and a graduate of the Wright school at Dayton, Ohio, let it be known in Canada that she was ready to take pupils. Many Canadians crossed over into the States, and so successful was she as a teacher that before long she was turning hundreds away.

British flight instruction did not show any great advance until the middle of 1917. One man, Col. R. R. Smith-Barry, was responsible. He worked a revolutionary change by introducing those methods of teaching which are even nowadays the foundation of instruction in British air forces. Smith-Barry was one of the graduates of

the first flying course at the Central Flying School in 1912. He had been commanding officer of the famous fighting -unit, No. 60 Squadron, and he had earned such a reputation for organising ability and for turning the poorest pilots' into first-class airmen that the authorities sent him back to England in 1916.

He realised that British flying instruction was in an appalling mess. The standard of pilotage was low and the number of casualties high. The whole problem of teaching had not been tackled in a scientific manner. Instructors and pupils alike were privately scared of the planes they were using. In the air the machines did things that instructors and pupils could neither explain nor control. It was even contended that one pilot's favourite stunts had been originated, not by himself, but by the plane he was flying! The instructors' motto was "Safety First," with the result that all the pupil learned was to take off somehow, to make a circuit somehow, and to land somehow.

Smith-Barry changed all that. Soon after his appointment as commandant of the special flying school at Gosport he set about putting his ideas into practice. He had to go very cautiously, for the Air Ministry was reluctant to accept his scientific approach to the problem. His contention was that practically all the casualties were due to the pilot's lack of knowledge about the mechanics of controlled flight. It was not long before Smith-Barry's pupils proved in open competition with other squadrons that his system was the best. Pilots from his hands began to fly with a skilful ease previously considered the gift of the lucky. Manoeuvres once looked upon as dangerous were woven into the very technique of flying itself.

More is known now than then about the effects of such things as aileron drag, but so sound were Smith-Barry's ideas that his little yellow handbook "Flight Instruction, 1918," contains most of the

essentials of correct modern flight training. The ordinary intercommunication telephones, the most used item of equipment in teaching today, were introduced by Smith-Barry, and are still called "Gosport phones" in USA. In fact, the whole technique of dual instruction was the product of his organising genius.

Another theory of Smith-Barry's that has left its mark on the RAF was that men to give their best must be well cared for, housed, and fed. In the hungry days of the last war the mess at Gosport was unique in the variety and quality of its catering. Though sugar was then one of the rarest commodities in Britain, Smith Barry's men never suffered a shortage. I still have memories of the oyster bar he installed. If Smith-Barry were alive today he would feel a glow of pride in having had such a hand in the shaping of the RAF and, incidentally, the RAAF. *The Argus*, 8 November 1941, p.2

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### **RETRENCHMENT CHURCHES APPROVE REDUCTION**

The Council of the Churches at yesterday's meeting passed a resolution noting with approval the decision of the Commonwealth Government to reduce the defence vote by approximately 10 per cent. It congratulated the Government on its recognition of the fact that "security is achieved by means including the strengthening of the machinery for international arbitration, conciliation, and judicial procedure." The resolution further invited members of Christian churches and all others wishing to prevent war to support the Government at the present critical juncture of international affairs in all efforts to ensure a general reduction of world armaments, with a view to the ultimate substitution of an international police force for the present national defence system, and suggested that the first charge upon the money saved by this general reduction should be to indemnify genuine sufferers thereby.

*The Sydney Morning Herald* 7<sup>th</sup> August 1929, p.15

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### **Military Books by David Jenner**

#### **A HISTORY OF THE 2/29th. BATTALION 8<sup>th</sup> AUSTRALIAN DIVISION A.I.F.**

Published by the Battalion Association 1983.

A somewhat unusual history , in that almost all the records of the unit were lost : the contributors relied mainly on their memories to formulate it. The 2/29th.is of course famous for its role in the Battle of the Muar Road against the highly trained Imperial Guards Division of the Japanese Army.

Some 43 pages of the History are written by the R.M.O., Captain Victor Brand MC, from a diary he wrote possibly in part during, and certainly after , his harrowing journey back to Singapore. Victor was my excellent anaesthetist at one time, and said he had written the diary "in the white heat of anger."

His account of the Muar Road action is most graphic , but the tale of his escape south is one of the treasures of matter-of-fact description of humanity under extreme duress, surviving and persevering, when all hope seemed to be lost. As an inspiring account of human endeavour, bravery and sheer refusal to be beaten ,it is equal to any in the A.I.F.

To anyone who has not read this account of events , I would recommend Capt. Brand's story as an inspiration to all.



## VOLUNTEERING AT BEALE'S SWAMP

VOLUNTEERING AT BEALE'S SWAMP. — A correspondent, writing from the vicinity of Harry Beale's Swamp, thus refers to the volunteer movement which has been set on foot in that locality :—" I beg to say that regular drill is performed, and gone through efficiently, the men, unfortunately, being prevented from working on account of the very bad weather we have had here lately. Accompanied by a first-rate fifer and two drummers, they readily go through their exercises in a manner that would astonish brigades of older experience, considering that they have only been a fortnight in practice, and if encouraged they would muster well and astonish the crack B.V.R."

*Bell's Life In Victoria* 11<sup>th</sup> July 1863

[VicSec note: Harry Beale's Swamp, now Beale's Reservoir, is near Bungaree, 14 km east of Ballarat. I am sure that the crack Ballarat Volunteer Rifles were indeed astonished. See the chaps below, well you get the idea...]



A WARRIOR OF VICTORIA IN COSTUME OF THE PERIOD. LITTLE FOOT-PAGE ATTENDING.



### **Preservation, Education, Re-enactment, Research**

The Australian Great War Association began its life small, with just a handful of people that had an interest in re-enactment, history and the ANZACs in the First World War. From those humble beginnings, we have now grown to have sections in NSW, ACT, QLD and SA. The simple aim of AGWA is: Through re-enactment we bring 1914-1918 alive and make a living memorial to the ANZACs.

By doing this, AGWA's members help community groups, Veteran organisations, RSLs, schools, museums, and from time to time, the ADF. Most of our members portray the ordinary Digger and this allows us to participate in honour guards for ceremonies such as ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day, Church services or when an Honour guard is appropriate.

These events require our members to have a current firearm licence and a period .303 rifle. However, if this is not for you, you are more than welcome to be a "non-carrying" member. Not all the ANZACs in the Great War carried a rifle. There were plenty of men and women who worked in medical units, the AFC, the RAN and as dispatch riders, not to mention all the civilians of 1914-1918. Note that AGWA does many static displays throughout the year.

Recently AGWA attended History Comes Alive! at Barwon Park, Wichelsea, there the group participated in a re-enactment of the Hindenburg Line. As a special interest group of the MHSA Victorian Branch the group meets regularly at Oakleigh RSL. All MHSA members are more than welcome to visit on any one of our drill nights. Please visit [www.agwa.org.au](http://www.agwa.org.au) for more information.