

DRAFT

Naval Reserve Association of Canada Transition Committee Discussion: Policy on Advocacy

January 2024

Executive Summary

Officially created at the annual general meeting of the former University Naval Training Division Association, the Naval Reserve Association of Canada (NRAC) has continued to focus its mandate on the two primary themes inherited from the UNTDA – those of the fostering of social connections, built typically through shared reserve experience, and also of enabling the remembrance of the significant contributions made by Naval Reservists to Canada, through archiving and other projects. In late 2023, the new Transition Committee to the NRAC Board of Directors was asked to summarise a general position of the NRAC on the potential role of advocacy, which historically was not pursued by the UNTDA.

General Interpretation of Advocacy

The typical understanding of ‘advocacy’ is that of *public support for or recommendations of a particular cause or policy* (Oxford online). At a different level, advocacy could also be taken to mean support for individuals or groups, as opposed to more abstract policy questions.

The Naval Association of Canada is a well-known example of an association with a formal advocacy mandate. A dedicated line of effort, their ‘Naval Affairs’ program *“...through research, national and local programs, provides a voice to educate Canadians and their leaders on the importance of Canada’s Navy to our nation’s well-being, economic prosperity, sovereignty and defence.”*

They are a hub for research papers, conferences, recurring lecture series, and responses to media articles and government positions, including Parliamentary Budget Officer reports. Helpfully, they provide a series of ‘Briefing Notes’ which serve as accessible ‘aide memoires’ to a public audience on such topics as ‘Canada as a maritime State’, ‘Why Does Canada Need a navy’, ‘National Shipbuilding Strategy’, ‘The Law of the Sea and Canadian Maritime Security’, ‘RCN Capabilities’

and the like. Similarly, the 'Bibliography' section provides excellent summaries of source material on a rich array of maritime and naval topics.

The Navy League of Canada has a stated mission of supporting and promoting maritime affairs by *"...encouraging dependable marine transportation and port facilities, and maritime safety and protection."* They also work to *"...ensure that Canada's Navy remains relevant, sustainable, ready and able."*

Finally, the Royal Canadian Air Force Association of Canada has an Advocacy Committee, reporting to the National Executive Council and the larger Association itself with the stated mandate to advocate

...on behalf of the broader RCAFA membership on issues related to key organizational objectives: commemoration of the achievements of those who have served as members of Canada's air forces since their inception; advocacy for a proficient and well-equipped air force; advocacy and support for air force personnel, both serving and retired; and support for the Royal Canadian Air Cadet program.

It crafts position papers destined for a variety of fora, including the Conference of Defence Associations and magazine publications. Notably, consensus from the core membership and approval by the Committee Chair and subsequent RCAFA chain of command are required prior to release.

The RCAFA also manages a webpage with an array of activities, products and resources in the 'Advocacy' section, combining historical tidbits, memorialisation efforts with various position papers.

Of note, neither the NAC nor the Navy League appear to focus upon reserve issues as a distinct or discrete aspect of naval or maritime power.

UNTDA 2025 Study and Historical Perspective

In 2021 a series of interviews with the then-Board of Directors to answer the questions of 'what the UNTDA could be by 2025' resulted in a report which, among other lines of inquiry, asked whether or not a renewed or evolved organisation should consider adding advocacy for reserve issues to its mandate.

While most respondents were reluctant to establish advocacy as an official and persistent line of effort (as with the RCAFA, Navy League or NAC), some were keen on advocacy on an ad-hoc, issues basis, assuming a response to an issue could be developed. One argued that soft advocacy was an ongoing fact of UNTDA / NRAC. It was acknowledged that it could be a challenge to be able to speak with a single voice on any given issue.

One interviewee reminded that the now-defunct Maritime Defence Association of Canada (MDAC), largely comprised of Naval Reserve officers, had in the past a similar role in lobbying government for support to the RCN. The difficulty that arose was the conflict of serving officers lobbying government thus inhibiting serving reserve officers from membership in any external organisation that officially advocates for reserve issues.

Related findings to the Report which offered tangential linkages to advocacy efforts included collaboration with museums in projects that would increase awareness of the importance of a Naval Reserve, providing a platform to relay third party information relevant to membership, such as VAC benefits and the like, soliciting members who would be willing to contribute to awareness campaigns on an ad hoc basis and finally, developing a strategy for symposia hosted at local (NRD) levels to promote community linkages with its NRD.

Since then, it has also been agreed that NRAC could directly engage with VAC in the furtherance of VAC understanding of the needs of Naval Reserve veterans.

Proposed Position

In the new NRAC context, the fact remains that given that there are a number of former UNTDs and post-UNTD officers (an increasingly, non-commissioned members) with some public profile or background which offers the potential for the NRAC to speak with authority on certain issues.

Indeed there is a noticeable and regrettable gap in the general understanding of the potential, capability, challenges and issues unique to reserve service, and particularly Naval Reserve service, with no single (non-government) voice to address or fill this gap.

There is no interest at this time in the NRAC in developing a formal role similar to that described above - developing aid memoirs, seeking position papers and promoting various issues - however there are some less demanding opportunities

to convey information more aligned with the broader NRAC mandate which seem to present a more appropriate level of effort.

Assuming the general acceptance of such a soft 'reactive' advocacy role, NRAC therefore requires a stated policy on advocacy, which would be aligned with its vision, mandate, good governance goals and accountabilities, as stated in its Policy Manual as a not-for profit corporation in Canada.

Recommendation:

1. The NRAC Role statement (as expressed on the webpage, among other sources), should be updated to acknowledge that, while it is not a politically active organisation, it is interested in increasing awareness of the positive nation-building legacy of the Naval Reserve in Canada, which may result in opportunities to exercise 'soft' advocacy.

The NRAC recognises that, through its membership, it has a vast – and valuable - repository of insight into the history and challenges of the Naval Reserve life which rightly may be called upon from time to time.

Any proactive or reactive responses to these ad hoc issues would strive to be consistent with the Association's governance principles by being based in the Board principle of seeking consensus while respecting differences of opinion, and adhering to the Board responsibilities of leadership and management excellence, effectiveness, and respectful maintenance of good relationships with the Naval Reserve, the Royal Canadian Navy, and sister associations such as the NAC etc.

Proposed re-worked language could resemble:

~~"The Association is not politically active and plays no advocacy role and while it does not include organised advocacy in its mandate, it is recognised that the vast expertise and experience of the membership may be called upon from time to time in support of the broader interest on increasing awareness of the legacy, challenges and opportunities of Naval Reserve service in Canada. In these cases, any positions expressed will seek to be consistent with the Association and Board best principles of excellence, effectiveness and the maintenance of good relationships with the Naval Reserve, Royal Canadian Navy and sister associations (NAC and the like)..."~~

2. Although taking a reactive approach to the idea of 'advocacy', the Board may solicit a list of names of members who may be willing to respond to or address specific issues through drafting letters, editorials and the like, or speaking in public. This may be either in reaction to public policy events, or to further an NRAC project or initiative. This should exclude any members who remain active in the Reserve or Regular forces.

3. The above does not preclude either proactive or reactive engagement with service providers such as VAC, in the more general pursuit of dialogue which enhances mutual understanding and possibly even improved support to veterans. This would be carefully executed, understanding the sensitivities of treading into official lanes, and would ensure appropriate awareness among stakeholders, including Naval Reserve HQ.

4. The Board, may in future, also consider the value of NRAC sponsoring or co-sponsoring the hosting of lectures or symposia/colloquia with local universities, NACs, Navy League or the like which could be either or history- or more current-affairs-based. The national footprint could enable coordinated regional or national discussion, or equally enable local themes based on local expertise/ member availability. The NRAC membership is rich in those who could speak expertly and could draw interest at the community level; hosted out of NRDs, the benefit would be increased visibility and awareness of local Naval Reserve presence as well.
