

18th February 2020

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Pacific Defence Relationships

Introduction

Australia has strong interests in the stability and prosperity of the Pacific region. I am proud of the leadership role that Australia has played in the Pacific region, including peacekeeping efforts in East Timor and the Solomon Islands among other initiatives. There are many challenges that will require greater planning and cooperation with our Pacific island neighbours, including the impact of climate change. This inquiry has an important role in examining the nature of our relationships with Pacific island nations (including our defence relationship), and how they can be improved and developed to better meet regional challenges.

Importance of Pacific Engagement

Australian engagement with our Pacific is a critical part of our foreign affairs and defence policy. As a prosperous and stable country, Australia has an important leadership role to play in the Pacific, including supporting regional security and sustainable development.¹ Our engagement with the region must begin with an understanding of “the kind of Indo-Pacific region we want.” This includes a region with “lasting peace,” respect for the “rights of all states” and “open markets facilitat[ing] the free flow of trade, capital and ideas.”² Having a strong and sustained engagement with the Pacific clearly aligns with our national interest. Australian security and prosperity will be more easily maintained in a “secure, open and prosperous India-Pacific” with a “rules-based international order” rather than rule by force.³ Being surrounded by oceans and with a significant “maritime exclusive economic zone,” Australia has a keen interest in upholding the

¹ Australian Government, *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 87; Australian Government, *Defence White Paper* 2009, 24.

² *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 4.

³ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, iii, v; *Defence White Paper* 2009, 43.

“legal regimes and norms that govern the oceans.”⁴ Adhering to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is particularly important for peaceful maritime activities.⁵

Disturbingly, the “international rules designed to help maintain peace” are being “contested” and “challenged” by aggressive militarisation and disregard for international law.⁶ Maintaining a rules-based order requires “determined diplomacy and strong partnerships,” demonstrated through the Defence Cooperation and Pacific Step-up programs.⁷ A secure Pacific cannot be done unilaterally, but requires “active engagement by regional states in building a rules-based order.”⁸ Thankfully, Australia and our Pacific island neighbours have a common values foundation in supporting a “rules-based international order” and “resolving ... disputes by peaceful means.”⁹ Moreover, Pacific islanders have demonstrated their commitment to upholding regional security, including contribution to stabilisation and humanitarian relief missions.¹⁰

There must be “clear objectives” underpinning defence policy.¹¹ Regional engagement is essential to maintaining Australian security. While there is only a “remote prospect” of a foreign attack on domestic soil, Australia has strategic and economic interests in the region and broader world.¹² Achieving “secure northern approaches” to defend mainland Australia relies upon achieving a “secure nearer region” in the Pacific.¹³ The security situation of neighbouring states such as Papua New Guinea and East Timor is critical for our own security, as history shows “the problems of [our] neighbours can quickly become Australia’s.”¹⁴ The Australian Government recognised the need for “more ambitious engagement by Australia” with a “new approach” to

⁴ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 94.

⁵ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 47.

⁶ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 24.

⁷ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, v; Australian Government, *Defence White Paper* 2016, 76.

⁸ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 14.

⁹ Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, *Boe Declaration on Regional Security* 2018, 6.

¹⁰ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 55, 74-75.

¹¹ *Defence White Paper* 2009, 41.

¹² *Defence White Paper* 2016, 15.

¹³ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 33.

¹⁴ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 7-8; Cambridge University Press, *Garnaut Review* 2008, 146; *Boe Declaration* 2018, 8.

“integrate Pacific countries into ... [our] economies and our security institutions.”¹⁵ Australia has committed to helping build up regional security including with “defence cooperation, aid, policing and building regional organisations” as well as “humanitarian and security assistance where required.”¹⁶ Increased defence engagement will help build effective regional cooperation on “shared security challenges.”¹⁷ Australia is also developing greater maritime capabilities to “rapidly and effectively” respond to Pacific needs.¹⁸ Such engagement with our regional neighbours will help build long-term stability and economic prosperity, with clear benefits for Australia. With targeted support, states that are vulnerable to conflict or instability can become capable partners in upholding regional security.

Responding to Terms of Reference:

1. Current Defence Cooperation and Pacific Step-up Activities^[SEP]

The Pacific Step-Up program is a significant expansion in our engagement with Pacific Island nations, including with defence cooperation. One of our primary “Strategic Defence Interest[s]” is having a “secure nearer region,” including the South Pacific.¹⁹ Australian defence policy includes helping Pacific Island nations “build and strengthen their security” and support “regional operations to address shared security challenges.”²⁰ This includes training programs such police and defence officials, such as the Australian Pacific Security College.²¹ The Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre to “deliver more effective approaches to transnational organised crime.”²² These programs build up the skills of Pacific officials and enable deeper and more effective cooperation on crime and security issues.

Regional security is also assisted by Australia gifting patrol boats to Pacific island nations. Between 1987 and 1997, twelve Pacific Island countries and East Timor were gifted

¹⁵ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 8.

¹⁶ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 48.

¹⁷ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 33; *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 8.

¹⁸ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 27.

¹⁹ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 17.

²⁰ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 17.

²¹ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 103.

²² *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 103.

twenty-four Pacific Patrol Boats (PPBs). This was part of the Pacific Patrol Boat Program.²³ The second round of the program, named the Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP), has started recently with two Guardian Class Patrol Boats gifted to Tuvalu and Tonga in 2019.²⁴ The full program will deliver 21 replacement Patrol Boats for thirteen nations.²⁵ Participating nations include “Palau, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa and Cook Islands.”²⁶ The program aims to “enhance practical cooperation across the South Pacific” including on “maritime security, fisheries protection and transnational crime.”²⁷ The program also has additional support including “regional coordination centres” and “integrated aerial surveillance” to increase the effectiveness of the program.²⁸ The provision of these patrol boats gives Pacific island states greater capability to meet their own defence needs and cooperate with Australia on common security issues. It also builds trust and good will, underpinning a stronger cooperative relationship.

2. Meeting Pacific Islander needs, request and feedback ^[1]_{SEP}

Effective collaboration between Australia and the Pacific island nations will require responding to their priority needs and concerns. This involves listening to them and respecting their “traditional and cultural norms.”²⁹ The needs and vision of the Pacific island nations have been clearly articulated in regional forums and agreements (including Australian participation). This includes the *Boe Declaration on Regional Security* and the latest Pacific Island Forum Communique issued in Tuvalu in 2019. Security issues identified in the *Boe Declaration* include climate change, cybersecurity, transnational crime, humanitarian relief and environmental/resource security.³⁰ The 50th Pacific Island Forum communique discussed climate

²³ Auditor-General, *Major Projects Report 2020*, 321-322.

²⁴ *Major Projects Report 2020*, 70.

²⁵ *Major Projects Report 2020*, 322; *Defence White Paper 2016*, 74, 126-127; *Foreign Policy White Paper 2017*, 103.

²⁶ *Major Projects Report 2020*, 322.

²⁷ *Major Projects Report 2020*, 322; *Defence White Paper 2016*, 74, 126-127; *Foreign Policy White Paper 2017*, 103.

²⁸ *Major Projects Report 2020*, 322.

²⁹ Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, *Pacific Island Forum Communiqué 2019*, 5.

³⁰ *Boe Declaration 2018*.

change, fisheries management, conflict in West Papua.³¹ Pacific Islanders have articulated a regional vision including “peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity” for “all Pacific people.”³² The Pacific Island Forums provides a great avenue for dialogue and cooperation between Australia and Pacific Island nations.³³ The Pacific Island Forum also includes civil society and regional organisations, enabling Australian officials to encounter a variety of stakeholders.³⁴ This has helped Australia’s Defence Cooperation and Pacific Step-up activities be carefully targeted to Pacific needs. Australia should continuously welcome requests and feedback from Pacific Islanders about our policy initiatives. Australia should carefully consider the upcoming *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*.³⁵ Security challenges in the Pacific will continue to evolve and may require increased Australian involvement.

2A. Climate change

The preeminent security challenge identified by Pacific Islanders is climate change, on which “the science is non-negotiable.”³⁶ Climate change is described as the “single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific.”³⁷ Extreme weather events such as “cyclones, intense storms and storm surges” threaten “death and destruction” and “political, economic and social” destabilisation.³⁸ Rising sea levels and severe weather conditions also pose an existential threat many to low lying Pacific island nations.³⁹ Such issues will not be confined to them, rather every country including Australia will experience the “ripple effects of climate induced political disturbances and even violent conflict in the region.”⁴⁰ Responding to the impacts of climate change will require “cooperative regional solutions and Australian participation.”⁴¹ With the “resources and skilled personnel,” Australia will have the responsibility to “shoulder a substantial part of any increase in emergency and humanitarian

³¹ *Pacific Island Forum Communique* 2019.

³² *Boe Declaration* 2018.

³³ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 104.

³⁴ *Pacific Island Forum Communique* 2019, 2.

³⁵ *Pacific Island Forum Communique* 2019, 3.

³⁶ *Pacific Island Forum Communique* 2019, 12.

³⁷ *Boe Declaration* 2018, 1.

³⁸ *Garnaut Review* 2008, 147-148; *Defence White Paper* 2009, 40.

³⁹ *Garnaut Review* 2008, 149, 225; *Pacific Island Forum Communique* 2019, 5, 12-13.

⁴⁰ *Garnaut Review* 2008, 150.

⁴¹ *Garnaut Review* 2008, 146.

operations in its immediate neighbourhood.”⁴² Australia may need to support “unstable states” that become “overwhelmed” by climate change.⁴³ The investment in greater “maritime ... and amphibious capability” will also help the ADF be more “responsive and flexible” to the needs of our Pacific neighbours.⁴⁴ The gifting of landing craft to Tonga will help cooperation on regional disaster relief.⁴⁵ Regional operations and upgrading defence capability to meet these future demands will have an immense cost on the budget, which will require financial planning.⁴⁶

Pacific islanders have made clear that regional security cooperation includes acting on climate change adaptation and mitigation to ensure their security and economic viability.⁴⁷ Pacific Islanders also desire stronger mitigation to reduce the impact on the Pacific region. As the *Kainaki II Declaration for Urgent Climate Action* now states, the “shared prosperity and security” of the Pacific requires “urgent action by the international community” on emissions reduction, including to “reach net zero [emissions] around 2050.”⁴⁸ Australia will be expected to contribute to taking “bold, decisive and transformative action,” including domestic action, regional support and global advocacy.⁴⁹ While Australia has made a commitment to reduce emissions I believe we should support more ambitious action (aiming for temperature increases below 1.5 or even 1.3 degrees above pre-industrial levels).⁵⁰ Our Pacific island neighbours are sensitive to even the slightest changes in climate, hence the lower level temperatures would have broad benefits for regional security (and the opposite effect under higher temperatures). Australia also has a strong interest in mitigation considering the many “economic, environmental and security risks” we face under severe climate change.⁵¹

⁴² *Garnaut Review* 2008, 148, 226; *Defence White Paper* 2016, 16.

⁴³ *Garnaut Review* 148-150.

⁴⁴ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 74-5.

⁴⁵ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 74-5.

⁴⁶ *Garnaut Review* 2008, 148, 256-260.

⁴⁷ *Boe Declaraion* 2018, 1; *Pacific Island Forum Communiqué* 2019, 12.

⁴⁸ *Pacific Island Forum Communiqué* 2019, 12.

Many countries including the United Kingdom under PM Boris Johnson are advocating for this in the upcoming 2020 Glasgow Conference.

⁴⁹ *Pacific Island Forum Communiqué* 2019, 15.

⁵⁰ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 84.

⁵¹ *Garnaut Review* 2008, 173, 588-9; *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 84.

3. Defence and other Departments ^[L SEP]

The multifaceted challenges in the Pacific region will require Defence and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to collaborate with other departments. Departments should develop policies relating to how they can contribute to regional maritime security.⁵²

Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

Our defence policy is intricately integrated with foreign policy. Defence cooperation requires building strong, trusting relationships through diplomacy. This is easier with countries that share our common values on the rules-based order (fortunately much of the Pacific region). Though effective diplomacy should pursue areas of common interest where we have defence cooperation (such as fighting transnational crime or disaster relief). Security tensions such as keeping freedom of navigation in the South China Sea should be managed diplomatically wherever possible, but with precautions given to defence preparation. The ADF can also assist where defence capability is needed, such as evacuation of citizens following natural disasters.

Australian involvement in Pacific island forum and other diplomatic channels contributes to a more effective and targeted defence policy.

Environment and Agriculture

The Department of the Environment should analyse the likely impact of climate change on the Pacific region and the effects on the security landscape. Climate change will need to be included in “long-term planning and investment,” including the likely ramifications for “national and regional security.”⁵³ Sea level rises and extreme weather phenomena will have impacts on defence infrastructure, for example, including Navy bases and other facilities.⁵⁴ Such information can be shared with Pacific island nations to underpin regional preparation and cooperation. Environmental analysis could include the severity of climate change according to various mitigation levels. This could have implications for sea level rises, for example, and resulting regional displacement.⁵⁵ The Environment Department could also coordinate policy on regional mitigation and adaptation efforts (including, say, renewable energy projects). Australia has

⁵² *Defence White Paper* 2009, 54, 98-99

⁵³ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 84.

⁵⁴ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 102.

⁵⁵ *Garnaut Review* 2008, 128.

committed to help “strengthen the capacity of the Pacific, particularly low lying atoll states, to respond to climate change.”⁵⁶ The Department of Agriculture could help with regional food security. Ensuring reliable food sources is essential with the threat of reduced agricultural productivity from changing “growing seasons” and “migratory ... fish stocks” under climate change. The Pacific Step-up includes several good programs, including sustainable fisheries management and protection of food sources from illegal fishing (under the PMSP). Ensuring food security and broader resilience could help reduce the threat of migration and resource based conflict, which would have serious implications for regional security.⁵⁷

Immigration

Defence can also collaborate with the Department of Immigration and Border Security. Climate change could cause migration pressures with the emergence of “climate refugees.”⁵⁸ Australia and New Zealand will be expected to become the primary “countries of resettlement” for displaced Pacific Islanders, which may require “special classes of entry.”⁵⁹ Severe weather events and resource based conflicts could also push many others in the Asia-Pacific region to migrate elsewhere. There will need to be an orderly and effective immigration process to effectively manage the flows of people in the Pacific region (including resettlement into Australia). Defence may have a role in managing people smuggling and other migration security threats, though a good immigration process should free up these resources.

4. Collaborating with other countries involved in the Pacific region L SEP

Countries from outside the Pacific region will have important roles to play in regional security and development. Australia should welcome such investment, namely from nations that share our commitment to democracy, human rights and adherence to international norms (such as freedom of navigation on the seas). Australia has important relationships with various states that will likely have an influence in the South Pacific region, including our core allies “United States and New Zealand,” along with “Japan, Indonesia, India, Singapore, the Republic of Korea, China”

⁵⁶ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 104.

⁵⁷ *Garnaut Review* 2008, 145-146; *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 94; *Defence White Paper* 2009, 31, 39-40.

⁵⁸ *Garnaut Review* 2008, 225.

⁵⁹ *Garnaut Review* 149, 225.

among others.⁶⁰ Our relationship with many of these countries is outlined in the latest Defence and Foreign Policy White Papers. There is already cooperation on disaster relief and other regional challenges. For example, France, New Zealand and Australia coordinate humanitarian efforts under the "FRANZ Arrangement," demonstrated in Vanuatu following Cyclone Pam in 2015.⁶¹

The United States is credited with a stabilising influence and upholding the rules-based order.⁶² The United States also has an important role to play in environmental security issues, such as their "nuclear testing legacy."⁶³ The nature of the United States-China relationship will have implications for the South Pacific region, including Australian involvement.⁶⁴ Australia welcomes cooperation between the United States and China on security areas such as "search and rescue, counter-piracy, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief."⁶⁵ Australia is rightfully wary of Chinese influence in the Pacific given their militarisation of the South China Sea and other aggressive behaviours.⁶⁶ Though China could have a beneficial influence if they develop a policy to "enhances stability, reinforces international law and respects the interests of smaller countries."⁶⁷

We should not overlook the significant contributions to regional (and international) security by the Pacific islanders themselves. Notwithstanding their own security and development challenges, Pacific Islanders nations have collaborated with Australia on regional operations. Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Fiji have volunteered defence and police personnel to stabilisation missions in the Solomon Islands, Bougainville and even Afghanistan.⁶⁸ South Pacific, Papua New Guinean and Indonesian defence personnel have also contributed to disaster relief operations, including Australia during the recent 2019/2020 bushfire crisis. Australia

⁶⁰ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 22

⁶¹ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 138.

⁶² *Defence White Paper* 2009, 32; *Defence White Paper* 2016, 41; *Foreign Policy White Paper*, 26.

⁶³ *Pacific Island Forum Communiqué* 2019, 6.

⁶⁴ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 15, 30.

⁶⁵ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 41.

⁶⁶ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 43.

⁶⁷ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 39.

⁶⁸ *Defence White Paper* 2009, 40; *Defence White Paper* 2016, 55, 127.

rightfully advocates for the perspectives and “interests of Pacific island countries” to be given greater consideration by global multilateral institutions.⁶⁹

5. Any Related Matters ^[SEP]

While greater defence engagement in the Pacific is welcome and beneficial, this should not come at the expense of other regions. Our strategic interest in the “secure nearer region” includes “maritime South East Asia” along with the “South Pacific.”⁷⁰ We also have a strategic interest in the having a broader “stable Indo-Pacific region.”⁷¹ Regional security can also be supported by Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). ODA can help build resilience against various security threats, “extremism ... infectious diseases ... natural disasters and economic shocks.”⁷² Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), for example, is a relatively small part of the budget but pays dividends in terms of economic prosperity, security and good will amongst our neighbours. I believe ODA is one of the most cost-effective programs funded by the Australian Government, but has unfortunately declined in recent years. Australia should pledge to restore foreign aid funding to the international standard of 0.7% of GNI. This would mirror the commitment to defence spending at 2% of GDP.⁷³ Around 90% of ODA is currently dedicated to the Indo-Pacific region, which reflects our primary strategic priorities.⁷⁴ However, more generous funding for ODA would enable Australia to promote security and sustainable development programs more broadly, such as South-East Asia, the Middle East and South America. As a prosperous and developed country, Australia could sustain engagement in multiple regions. This would underpin our support for a stable, “rules-based global order.”⁷⁵ This would enable broader cooperation on transnational security issues, such as terrorism, migration and climate change. Building up defence capability and cooperation more broadly would bear dividends for Australian and South Pacific security.

Thank you for considering my submission.

⁶⁹ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 81.

⁷⁰ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 17.

⁷¹ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 33.

⁷² *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 18.

⁷³ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 19.

⁷⁴ *Foreign Policy White Paper* 2017, 18.

⁷⁵ *Defence White Paper* 2016, 17.

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Kind Regards,

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