

Marrickville Peace Group

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SUBMISSION

to the

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee Department of the Senate

on the

“Defence Legislation Amendment (Enhancement of Defence Force Response to Emergencies) Bill 2020”.

1. The Bill is a massive, missed opportunity. In so far as it would enhance and increase reliance on armed forces during emergencies, this would be at the expense of any other approach.

The formation of a Civil Defence Force (CDF) is proposed as an alternative.

2. Recent experiences have clearly demonstrated the need for extra assistance during emergencies. There is no denying that the assistance of ADF was (and is) invaluable. However, that the ADF was available during the emergencies was a matter of coincidence and convenience. Indeed, as things stand, the ADF is the only available source of assistance in emergency situations.

3. There is a tradition of making use of the ADF in emergency that goes back at least as far as the 1974 Cyclone Tracy disaster. However, this tradition should not limit consideration of the best ways to deal with every emergency. Because it worked once does not mean that it will always be the best option.

4. We should remind ourselves that the ADF’s primary function, for which it is principally trained, is the fighting of wars. To engage in warfare is to experience the most extreme form of human-inflicted violence. This is distinctly different to, and must be sharply contrasted with, the provision of relief in a disaster situation.

5. Use of military forces also presents significant dangers in any domestic situation.

“Use of the military other than for external defence, is a critical and controversial issue in the political life of a country and the civil liberties of its citizens. ‘An armed disciplined body is in its essence dangerous to Liberty: undisciplined, it is ruinous to Society. Given that there must be a permanent Defence Force, it is critical that it be employed only for proper purposes and that it be subject to proper controls.’” (Parliamentary Library Bills Digest no. 15, October 6, 2020.)

6. The times are changing. The entire globe is entering a climate crisis, the full ramifications of which will not be known until they arrive. We can certainly anticipate more natural disasters and more, consequent, social upheavals. Circumstances may constrain us to deal with these disasters without outside assistance (with reference to Section 123AA of the Bill).

7. The formation of a fully functioning CDF is advocated as a viable alternative to use of the ADF or external military/police forces.

8. In the proposed CDF there would be absolutely no necessity for training in the use of weapons. There would be no necessity to prepare troops for the trauma and psychological damage of experiencing violence and/or inflicting it on others.

9. Many aspects of a defence force would be directly relevant to the CDF. For example, an organised command structure and the need to follow firm discipline would be necessary. Many of the skills within the ADF would be transferable to the CDF. The significant exception being the ability and willingness to bear arms and withstand and/or inflict violence.

10. A professional body of personnel, on constant stand-by (like, but distinct from, the ADF), is envisaged. This body would need to be trained in all the skills necessary for response to emergency situations. Existing SES and Volunteer Fire Brigade systems could provide an existing basis from which the proposed CDF might be built.

11. Faced, as we are, with an uncertain future, it is time to re-imagine the possible resolution to the problem. Expanding the use of the ADF is but one of many possible ways of responding to anticipated disasters – a limited one, at that. A more imaginative resolution would be the creation and mobilisation of a CDF. This would, in fact, represent a more optimal deployment of personnel resources.

Signed

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On behalf of Marrickville Peace Group