



Australian Government
Department of Defence

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee

Inquiry into funding for public research into foreign policy issues

Department of Defence Submission

[04/2021]

Overview

The Department of Defence welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into Funding for public research into foreign policy issues. Defence is proud to support independent research, events and activities to deepen the public Australian strategic debate and enhance Defence's strategic policy.

Defence has multiple mechanisms for supporting public research, including the Strategic Policy Grants Program (SPGP), the Army Research Scheme, contributions to whole of Government funding arrangements and other arrangements such as memberships, 1.5 track dialogues and research agreements. While these programs are focused on defence, capability and national security issues, there is overlap with foreign policy issues. In FY 2019/20 Defence invested approximately \$13 million into these programs.

Defence also engages with universities and think tanks through programs that are not included in this submission, as they address topics that are not related to foreign policy issues and are therefore outside the scope of the inquiry.

Strategic Policy Grants Program

The Strategic Policy Grants Program is highly competitive. The 2021 round had 100 applications seeking a total of \$26.2 million in funding over multiple years. In FY 2019/20 Defence committed approximately \$5 million under the program.

Applications are required to demonstrate how their proposals address one or more of a set of Australian defence and security priority policy topics, and the guidelines specifically ask applicants to outline how their proposal will enhance the public strategic debate.

Defence reviews the list of priority policy topics each year to ensure that proposals have a direct relevance to Australia's future defence and security needs. Most of these topics have foreign policy implications. The topics for the 2021 round were:

- Strategic competition (e.g. US-China)
- Coercive statecraft / grey-zone activities
- Challenges to global rules, norms and institutions
- Accelerating regional military modernisation (and asymmetric advantages)
- Emerging and disruptive technologies
- Expanding cyber capabilities
- Prospect of high-intensity military conflict
- Geostrategic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Threats to national resilience (e.g. disrupted global supply chains)
- Threats to human security
- State fragility in our immediate region

Think Tanks

The Australian Government established the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) in 2001 to provide analysis and advice on defence, strategic policy and national security to government and the public. ASPI is a Commonwealth corporation, independent from

Defence. ASPI's Charter requires it to provide independent analysis and advice, and it is governed by a non-partisan Council.

Defence provides grant funding to ASPI to foster and deepen strategic policy discourse, debate and research of value to the Australian Government, Department of Defence and wider Australian public. Defence provides ASPI \$4 million annually under a five-year grant (FY2018-19 to FY2022-23, \$20 million total). This funding supports independent policy relevant research, Defence specific projects and professional development courses. In FY2019-20 the Defence grant accounted for 34 per cent of ASPI's total funding, down from 84 per cent in FY2010-11.

In addition to the programs outlined above, in FY 2019/20 Defence provided approximately \$4 million to other academic institutions and think tanks, including the National Security College, the American Australian Association and the Lowy Institute.

Army Research Scheme

The Army Research Scheme funds approximately \$200,000 per year in research projects. While the research projects are largely addressing military issues such as capability, war and operating environment, there is some overlap with foreign policy subject matter such as Australia's strategic interests and relationships. Research projects funded through this scheme are currently being undertaken by Charles Sturt University, Polrisk, Brady Perspectives, Murdoch University, Australian National University, University of Western Australia, Griffith University and Oxford University.