



Submission No 27

Inquiry into Australia's Overseas Representation

Organisation: Ministerial and Parliamentary Reporting
Department of Defence

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE

SUBMISSION TO JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE

INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S OVERSEAS REPRESENTATION

Introduction

1. This submission focuses on those aspects of the Inquiry's terms of reference that are relevant to the Department of Defence. It outlines Defence's overseas representational positions, the geographic location and spread of these positions, staffing levels, activities, use of Locally Engaged Staff, and ICT issues.

Defence's overseas representation

"Australia's capacity to engage in defence diplomacy with key allies and regional partners is underpinned by the skills of our ADF personnel and civilians in Defence, including Defence personnel posted overseas and the resources available to them. Promoting Australia's middle power role puts a premium on highly developed analytical and policymaking skills, and our ability to understand and shape strategic developments. The Government remains committed to enhancing these skills and retaining the resourcing necessary for this essential foundation of our global and regional engagement plans." (Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific century: Force 2030, Chapter 11).

2. Overseas representation makes a substantial contribution to the achievement of key Defence goals of international engagement, combat effectiveness and preparedness, information sharing and the delivery of new capabilities. Defence currently classifies approximately 95 overseas positions as representational. Defence is rigorous in ensuring that these positions represent an effective and efficient use of resources and address current strategic priorities.

3. Australia's history of operational deployments over the last decade demonstrates the value of strong ties with allies and partner countries, including but not limited to the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Canada. Defence's overseas representation enables these ties, and provides Australia with valuable information and insight into the defence and security policies and postures of other countries.

4. Defence also has a number of non-representational overseas positions. These include secondments, embeds, exchanges, training and liaison positions with the armed forces of allies and partner nations; positions supporting Defence procurement, and those positions which deliver capacity building assistance under the Defence Cooperation Program. Whilst the overseas non-representational workforce is important, this submission focuses exclusively on representational positions.

Geographic location and spread

5. The geographic location and spread of Defence's overseas representational positions is shown at Table 1 (below).

Table 1: Defence representational presence by location

Location	Number of positions
Africa	1
Europe	14
Middle East	5
North America	26
North Asia	8
Pacific	10
South Asia	3
South East Asia	28
TOTAL	95

6. The majority of positions are based in South East Asia and North America, with the remainder roughly split between Europe, the Pacific and North Asia. This reflects the Government's strategic intent as published in the 2009 White Paper. Australia's alliance with the United States is defined as Australia's most important defence relationship, with relationships in the wider Asia-Pacific region assisting to build regional confidence and transparency.

7. Most Defence representational positions are filled by ADF personnel, serving in Defence Attaché or Defence Adviser positions. There are also a small number of Defence APS representational staff who work in specialised roles to support defence relationships with host countries, provide policy advice to the Defence Attaché or Adviser, and liaise with civilian counterparts.

Activities undertaken by Defence staff accredited to Australia's diplomatic posts

8. Defence representational staff form part of the Australian Government's broader foreign policy effort, serving under the direction of the Head of Mission in Australia's embassies, high commissions and consulates.

9. The activities undertaken by Defence staff accredited to Australia's diplomatic posts are varied. All Defence representational staff ultimately work under the authority of the Head of Mission to support Australia's defence and security relationships with the host country. In broad terms, Defence representational staff work to promote Australia's defence policies and national security interests, maintain liaison with the armed forces and civilian defence agencies of the host country, and provide advice to the Head of Mission and the wider Australian Government on developments in the host country's defence policies and activities. Defence representational staff also participate in whole of post responses to crises, disasters or other events which affect Australian citizens or interests.

10. In South East Asia and the Pacific, Defence Attachés and Advisors are also responsible for managing the in-country components of the Defence Cooperation Program. In most cases, this involves oversight of infrastructure or other capacity building projects (largely in East Timor and Papua New Guinea), English language training, and working with the host nation to select candidates for training activities, either in Australia, or provided by Defence in the host country. Bilateral exercises in areas such as counter-terrorism, maritime security and peacekeeping also form a major part of the Defence Cooperation Program, with the Defence

Attaché/Adviser expected to coordinate arrangements for these activities with the host country.

Staffing levels

11. The current figure of 95 representational positions is seen as good value for money, and sufficient to meet the Government's strategic objectives as outlined in the 2009 White Paper. Where resident accreditation is not possible, cross-accreditation is increasingly used as a means of maintaining regular contact with other armed forces and ensuring rapid coverage in response to crises or other events. For example, Defence Attaché Southern Europe (based in Madrid, Spain) is cross-accredited to Egypt, Greece, and Italy; Defence Attaché Berlin is cross-accredited to Lebanon, and Defence Attaché Paris is cross-accredited to Algeria and Morocco. These arrangements work reasonably well.

12. Defence, like most Australian Government agencies with an overseas presence, uses Locally Engaged Staff to augment and support Australian-based staff and activities. Locally Engaged Staff are employed under local jurisdiction through an agreement with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, but are managed by Defence staff at the relevant Embassy, High Commission or Consulate. Defence currently employs approximately 213 Locally Engaged Staff, for an annual cost of approximately \$11 million.

13. The number of Locally Engaged Staff employed by Defence has increased in recent years, in line with the establishment of new Posts and reductions in Australian-based Defence staff at others. Locally Engaged Staff employed by Defence largely occupy administrative positions, and provide valuable, and in many cases, longstanding service. However, the ability of Locally Engaged Staff to undertake complex policy work is limited by security considerations, except in cases where expatriate Australian citizens (able to maintain high-level Australian Government security clearances) can be employed. This is sometimes the case for Posts such as London, New York and Washington, where there are large expatriate populations. Defence expects to maintain, if not increase, its reliance on Locally Engaged Staff in future years.

14. Defence works closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to ensure that overseas representation is calibrated appropriately to meet Australia's defence and security interests. Staffing levels are regularly reviewed to ensure that they are relevant to current and future strategic circumstances, and Government priorities. This has been demonstrated in recent years through the establishment or augmentation of Defence representation in Africa, the Middle East (Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) and Pakistan. In late 2010, the Secretary and Chief of Defence Force commissioned an independent review into Defence's overseas positions to ensure that the workforce is positioned to meet Australia's future strategic requirements. The outcomes of this review are currently being considered by the Minister for Defence.

Effect of e-diplomacy and ICT on activities

15. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provides ICT for Defence representational staff at Posts under a Memorandum of Understanding with Defence, although there are two Posts (London and Washington) with fixed connectivity to both the Defence Restricted and Secret networks. Defence representational staff at all other Posts are reliant in the first instance on the SATIN Low and High networks maintained by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with remote access to the Defence Restricted Network.

16. The importance of secure and reliable ICT cannot be understated, particularly given the sensitivities of international relationships and the role that Defence representational staff have in coordinating an ADF response to any crisis or major event in a host country. This has been demonstrated more recently through Operation PADANG ASSIST, following the earthquake in Padang, Indonesia (2009); Operation PAKISTAN ASSIST II, in response to the floods in Pakistan (2010), and most recently Operation PACIFIC ASSIST, following the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Defence assesses that the existing SATIN networks provide good connectivity for our representational staff, and we will continue to provide input to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to ensure the continual enhancement of these networks. As Defence's own remote ICT capabilities develop they will also be rolled out to support Defence representational staff.

Conclusion

17. Substantial strategic benefits are derived from Defence's overseas representational workforce. Defence works hard to ensure that these positions directly support Australian Government priorities, as outlined in the 2009 Defence White Paper. All positions are closely scrutinised to ensure that they represent an effective and efficient use of Defence resources and address current needs and priorities.

Department of Defence
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