



Submission No 28

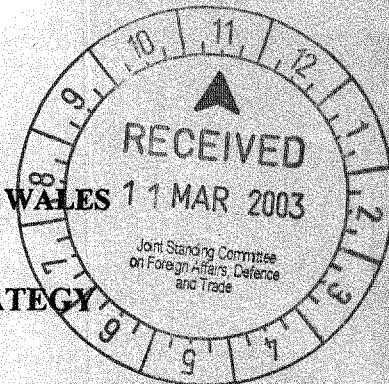
Inquiry into Australia's Maritime Strategy

Organisation: Royal United Service Institution of New South
Wales Supplementary Submission

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THE ROYAL UNITED SERVICE INSTITUTION OF NEW SOUTH WALES
Incorporated



AUSTRALIA'S MERCHANT NAVY AND MARITIME STRATEGY

The capacity of Australia's merchant navy to contribute to Australia's maritime strategy, particularly its capacity transport a large volume of defence personnel and materiel, is virtually non-existent.

A list, prepared by the Australian Shipowners Association in April 2001 (the latest available), showed that there were 49 vessels on its books. Of these, all but a few were purpose-built for a specific trade to and from specific terminals. Some were very large, single cargo vessels, designed for commodities such as liquid natural gas, petrol, oil, cement and bauxite, and would not be convertible to convey defence personnel and materiel. Some are over 120 000 tonnes.

There were, however, nine roll on – roll off vessels that potentially would be convertible, but of them: two (*Spirit 1* and *Spirit 2*) are Bass Strait overseas-owned chartered vessels; five are exclusively Tasmanian trade and their removal would isolate Tasmania; and one operates from Darwin; leaving only one coastal vessel that is not dedicated to a particular usage. Since the list was prepared nearly two years ago, some further re-flagging is understood to have occurred.

Furthermore, merchant ships in previous wars were flexible to the extent that they could all self-load and self-discharge, either at a wharf or into barges off-shore. This is into stark contrast to the modern specialised ships built for specific cargos and terminals.

As matters now stand, Australia would have to look overseas in an emergency. Independent ships, however, are in very short supply world-wide, although passenger ships possibly could be leased.

As a consequence, we see no future for the current Australian Merchant Navy as part of Australia's defence. We consider that the Government should institute a search for further vessels of the *Kanimbla* and *Manoora* style and seek to acquire them, provided that they require little rebuilding. Purpose built vessels should be acquired if existing vessels are not available (usually more cost-effective than rebuilding an existing vessel). These vessels should form part of the Royal Australian Navy and should be crewed by what were once called Royal Australian Naval Reserve and Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve ("wavy navy") personnel.

DOUGLAS McDONALD
Councillor
10 February 2003

KEITH PRYOR
Member

Douglas McDonald