



Submission No 30

Inquiry into Australia's Maritime Strategy

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Response to a question asked by Mr Byrne about the numbers of personnel and platforms required in the next 5 to 10 years, taken on notice.

As far as personnel are concerned, the numbers required will in the long run be determined by the equipment they have to operate, the conditions of service (especially sea/shore ratio) and the balance between permanent service, reserves, defence civilians and civilian/industry contractors. Given this, and lacking the basis to make informed assumptions, I am not able to answer Mr Byrne's question with respect to personnel. I would make the point that the RAN in particular, and the ADF generally, is currently operating at the very lower end of the spectrum in terms of a reasonable number of people, given the tasks required of them. Reducing numbers of people alone (i.e. without comprehensive rationalisation of the tasks required) for the ADF in 2003 would be unwise.

Determining numbers of platforms must be done with reference to three specific issues: the strategic appreciation, the relationships within the existing and forecast force structure and the budget available. With these factors in mind (and I will indicate where I would make a specific assumption about them) I would regard the following as being indicative of required numbers.

Maritime Patrol platforms - primarily intended for the control and enforcement of the Australian Exclusive Economic Zone (AEEZ). The short answer is that a number between 10 and 20 could sound about right. This is a very wide margin, however it is dependant on several important questions. Rather than making the assumptions about the answers myself I have listed the questions below.

- What sort of surveillance system will be used to monitor the AEEZ and approaches? Vessels, such as the current patrol boats, are not usually the most efficient platforms for wide area surveillance. They provide the capability to monitor a small area in great detail for an extended period, and most importantly the ability to regulate or enforce activity. To know how many hulls would be required is dependant on the manner in which they will be cued by the surveillance system.
- What is the maintenance cycle of the vessels?
- Will the vessels have a single or dual crew? This, like the maintenance cycle, determines how many days at sea the vessels can operate before requiring maintenance/crew rest.
- What is the endurance of the vessel itself?
- Will the vessels be used for tasks beyond simply patrolling/controlling the AEEZ? (i.e. anti-piracy in South East Asia in cooperation with allies, fishery patrol in the South West Pacific.)

- Cost is an obvious question.

Underlying my assessment is the contention that the requirement to be able to surveil the AEEZ and approaches, and to regulate and enforce activity, is a rapidly growing requirement – for Australia and nations throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

It is also my belief that these platforms should, in general, be designed and constructed in Australia.

These platforms are required within a relatively short period of time; they should be starting to enter service within 5-10 years.

Maritime Warfare platforms

There are a variety of disciplines, if you like, within maritime warfare, the principle ones being general warfighting, amphibious capabilities, support and replenishment, mine warfare and submarines. Air power capabilities are a unique case, in that they are not an end in themselves, but are a fundamental and integral part of the disciplines above.

This answer deals specifically with the requirements for platforms with general warfighting capabilities.

The short answer is a number between 10 and 15, of which 3 to 4 should be higher end platforms with capabilities approximate to the currently touted Air Warfare destroyer. It would not be advisable to have fewer than this number because it represents a minimum critical mass. Warships are at one level discrete units and they require maintenance, training periods and so forth, to build and maintain the capabilities from high end warfighting to constabulary and diplomatic tasks. If a force were to drop beneath the minimum level required for critical mass then it would suffer a proportionately large drop in capability due to spending most of its time simply maintaining itself (capability and physical condition).

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The Chairman also asked about the MOLE Concept (Manoeuvre Operations in the littoral environment) where there is not a hostile environment.

My answer was truncated. I would simply make the point that I do not see the MOLE concept as being part of a strategic appreciation. It is an operational level concept and something which the ADF should have a capability to do, but I do not see it as a fundamental part of an appreciation of Australian military maritime strategy.