

# **AIDN-NT Connecting Defence & Industry**

**AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRY & DEFENCE NETWORK - NT**

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## **DEVELOPING AUSTRALIA'S NORTH**

Thank you for your invitation to the Australian Industry and Defence Network – Northern Territory (AIDN-NT) to provide a submission to the Northern Australia Inquiry. AIDN-NT welcomes this opportunity to advocate for the maturation of Defence in our region and through that the development of defence industry. Our submission will focus on specific actions and decisions that will enhance and support the Defence and Northern Territory relationship into the future.

Darwin is the only capital city in northern Australia and holds the regional centre of gravity for Australia's national interests. It is acknowledged as one of two identified crucial strategic locations in regards to national security and one of seven significant logistical centres. It also holds the regional centre of gravity for Defence, hosting up to 10% of personnel and capability for operational, training and support activities in the region. Consideration regarding the role that Darwin and, by extension, the Northern Territory, will play in the protection and projection of Australia's interests is crucial as regionally, economic and political power shift to the indo-pacific arc.

A significant percentage of national energy resource and wealth productivity is situated to the north. Additionally, security of trading and shipping routes will be focused towards our northern neighbours as Australia becomes increasingly reliant on international trade as the balance of global power both politicly and economically transfers to the Asia Pacific region. Strategically pre-positioning defence assets in northern Australia will determine strike capability at short notice and also act as a deterrent to assertive neighbours. Any requirement for southern mobilisation will reduce the immediacy of the response and impede comprehensive preparations.

Maintaining the current Northern Territory defence posture as the minimum core strategic force required to support deterrence, protection and force projection strategies for national security purposes is essential. Removal of any defence establishments or units will imply a reduced strategic focus for the region that is not aligned with national security interests. Furthermore, withdrawal of ADF presence with the ramp-up of in country international military presence could likely indicate an abandonment of strategic regional relationships leading to possible future instability in the region.

Maritime:

Limited Naval maintenance and berthing infrastructure and industry maintenance infrastructure undermine the capability of the ACPB fleet to successfully undertake its border security role. The constraints in both these areas transfers ACPB maintenance to external jurisdictions in the east and west, and increase the costs and operational downtime resulting from these movements which, in turn, reduces industry capability in maritime maintenance. Industry skills and capability are available in Darwin, however they cannot be fully utilised due to the limitations of current maintenance facilities.

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Supporting a purpose built ship deep maintenance facility should be strongly considered to capture the increasing naval traffic, both national and international, to provide replenishing, maintenance and furlough opportunities for crews. This facility will also ensure the sustainment and growth of strategic ship maintenance capability.

## **Aerospace:**

The increasing modernisation of ADF aerospace capability, including the JSF and UAV fleets, will place significant stress on current southern based RAAF infrastructure. Encroachment and noise concerns are increasing management stresses with current platforms so the location of larger, more powerful, platforms in proximity to civilian infrastructure and residential areas may put these issues into further contention.

Katherine is already host to RAAF Tindal, home to one squadron of jets. The potential is available to locate a second squadron of jets. RAAF Tindal is remote in location to the town centre and residential precincts thereby alleviating encroachment and noise concerns. Basing and maintaining ADF UAV fleets should also be subject to serious consideration in regards to access and location to Australia's strategic interests.

## **Land:**

As the US – Australia alliance continues to develop maturity opportunity exists to leverage current existing ADF contracting arrangements through the current Defence trade agreement to support the USMC in country through local industry. American forces are generally reluctant to allow foreign nationals access to their fleets for maintenance services, however with the construction of new logistics facilities at Robertson Barracks with a supporting industrial precinct being developed at the Defence Support Hub close by opportunities are available for the USMC to access the systems, services and industrial support in close proximity to their operational basing.

## **Infrastructure:**

North Australia is a strategic location that can be leveraged to reduce congestion on defence and industry infrastructure in southern states. Greenfield opportunities to develop fit for purpose infrastructure and opportunities to expand current Defence infrastructure assets are available. Consideration of new, and greatly expanded, naval facilities capable of berthing and/or home basing larger RAN platforms such as the LHD and AWD. Additionally, pressures on RAAF facilities on the east coast could be managed through relocation of fast jet squadrons to the Northern Territory to be based at Katherine with additional defence infrastructure to support UAV fleets.

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## Logistics:

Develop a comprehensive and integrated transport and logistical blueprint with Katherine as the centre of gravity. Rail connections from both the east and west coasts to compliment and enhance the services provided by the north-south transcontinental railway will support northern Australian goals. Developing east-west rail infrastructure will also provide important logistical infrastructure linking all Multi-role Brigades stationed in Darwin, Townsville and Brisbane. Additional rail infrastructure could also be developed to deliver reliable access to the Bradshaw Training Ground allowing improved access and usage opportunities.

## Recommendations:

AIDN-NT recommends the following considerations in relation to Defence in the Northern Territory:

- Maintaining current Defence posture in the NT with the addition of home-berthed LHD and/or AWD, aerial UAV capacity and 2nd fast jet (JSF) squadron in Katherine.
- A new naval base development with heavy industrial maintenance facilities.
- Leverage current Land maintenance contracts and US – Australia defence trade agreement to support local industry maintenance of USMC equipment.
- Develop east-west rail infrastructure including access to NT training grounds such as Bradshaw and Delamere.

Arthur Boyd  
President

AIDN – Northern Territory