

Senate, Monday, 24 September 2001

COMMITTEES: Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee: Joint: Report

Senator COONAN (New South Wales) (5.08 p.m.) —On behalf of Senator Ferguson, I present the report of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade entitled *A model for a new army: community comments on the 'From phantom to force' parliamentary report into the Army*, together with the *Hansard* record of the committee's proceedings and submissions received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be printed.

Senator COONAN —I seek leave to move a motion in relation to the report and to incorporate my tabling statement in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Senator COONAN —I move:

That the Senate take note of the report.

The statement read as follows—

In September 2000 this committee tabled a report on Army titled 'From Phantom to Force: Towards a More Efficient and Effective Army.' That report raised great concern that while the performance of our Army over the last decade has been impressive, much of it has been and remains hollow, and could have been characterised as a Phantom Army.

At that time the committee stated that, in a departure from usual practice, it intended to seek public comment on the report following its release. We did this because, if the model for a future Army that we proposed is to be successful in increasing the capability and efficiency of the Army, it needs to be refined through consultation and discussion. It needs to be owned and supported broadly by the community, the Army and the Defence Department.

There has been considerable change since the release of From Phantom to Force. In the first instance the Government released the Defence White Paper entitled 'Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force'. In this document the Government took up many of the recommendations of the original paper, including a significant boost to Defence spending over the next 10 years. In other areas, such as a change in role for the Reserve, Government policy took a different course from that recommended in the report. In addition there was the important change to Defence Reserve legislation adopted in early 2001 whereby the procedure for calling out Reserves was simplified, and Reserves were given greater employment and education protection.

The committee has taken account of the new information provided by both the community consultation, and the changes in the Defence landscape since the release of From Phantom to Force, and has reviewed the original recommendations. What this report does is consolidate what the committee believes was a well researched and well received report, and update the report's recommendations. It benefits from being an external report and thus not constrained by preconceived ideas, but able to take an objective assessment of where the future of the Army should lie.

In practical terms, the follow-on report:

- reconfirms the requirement for effective doubling of the Army's capability to respond to short-warning contingencies by the creation of four capable, fully staffed and ready brigades;
- has taken into account new evidence regarding the Army's expansion capability and now believes that the Army must be able to expand to 8 brigades within a reasonable warning time rather than the 12 originally recommended; and finally
- reconfirms the committee's original recommendation regarding the establishment of a unified Army personnel structure by aligning the Regular and Reserve components into a single entity for the purposes of employment arrangements, training and operations.

In conclusion, the committee is fully supportive of the great work carried out by the Army and the Defence Force, but remains convinced that action is required to improve Army's capability. I would like to thank the many people who took time to contribute to this inquiry, including private citizens, academics, departmental staff and serving soldiers and officers within both the Regulars and Reserve. The efforts of all these individuals have resulted in a significant report and have made a major contribution to the discussion on our Defence Policy and the future of our armed forces.

I commend this report to the Senate.

Senator COONAN —I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.