



## **Supplementary Submission No 34**

### **Inquiry into Australia's Maritime Strategy**

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**THE ROYAL UNITED SERVICE INSTITUTION OF NEW SOUTH WALES**  
**Incorporated**

**COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENT INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S  
MARITIME STRATEGY – SYDNEY HEARINGS 11 MARCH 2003**  
**Supplementary Submission**

**Committee's Request for Further Information**

At its hearings on 11 March 2003 in Sydney, the Defence Sub-Committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade requested that Vice Admiral D. W. Leach, AC, CBE, LVO, RAN (Retd) and Brigadier D. R. Leece, PSM, RFD, ED (Retd) provide further written advice on:

- the ADI Submission (Submission No. 27), particularly the suitability of the proposed littoral vessel to Australia's needs; and
- conditions of service for Defence Force personnel and their families.

**Personal Views**

The constitution of the Royal United Services Institute of Australia precludes both it and its constituent bodies, of which The Royal United Service Institution of New South Wales is one, from proclaiming any particular position or view on strategic or defence matters. Senior members of the Institute, however, are encouraged to publicly state their personal views and it is in this context that the following advice is provided.

**Amphibious Operations Capability and the ADI Submission**

Our primary submission, dated 18 October 2002, was based on *Defence 2000 – Our Future Defence Force*, the Commonwealth Government's defence white paper. A supplementary white paper was subsequently issued in February 2003 titled *Australia's National Security – A Defence Update 2003*. The comments that follow take both documents into account.

*Defence Update 2003* argues that the strategic environment has changed, with increased emphasis now on global terrorism, weapons of mass destruction and governance/socio-economic difficulties in Australia's immediate region. These matters, however, were encompassed by *Defence 2000*. They do not necessitate a fundamental change to our strategic approach, although they may demand greater attention in the short term than other issues canvassed in *Defence 2000* and so may warrant some adjustments to the Defence capability plan. Of these 2003 high focus issues, we consider the problems in our immediate region should be given greater attention by Defence. In this context, our amphibious capability, in particular, warrants close examination.

We agree with the ADI Submission's argument that greater attention needs to be paid to "littoral operations in the Australian strategic setting" and that "we need to consider the implications .... in regard to our maritime capabilities". Indeed, we put similar arguments in our primary submission. The archipelagic nature of, and state of infrastructure in, Australia's immediate region dictates that military operations in the region will inevitably involve an amphibious component for force lodgements, logistic support, evacuations and the like. History and recent experience bear this out. Amphibious operations, however, are not mentioned explicitly in *Defence 2000*, although some provision is made for them in the capability plan. We consider this to be a weakness.

We consider, though, that the ADI Submission has over-emphasised low-level asymmetric threats by small groups of terrorists and that this has distorted its assessment of the types of amphibious ships that Australia needs. Our view is that it is quite realistic to expect over the next couple of decades that the ADF may be called on to deal with situations involving well-armed sub-national militia groups and rogue elements of national defence forces in the region. In this context, humanitarian and logistic support, expatriate evacuation, peace keeping and peace enforcement operations may necessitate a conventional amphibious lodgement to secure a beach-head by a battalion group or even a brigade group.

We are not arguing here for the capability to conduct an amphibious assault against a well-defended beach. We are arguing, though, for the capability to lodge a force of up to brigade group strength across an apparently undefended beach, to secure the beach-head against subsequent attack, and to use the secured beach-head as a firm base for developing operations into the hinterland. Please note that this is a different type of operation to a commando raid launched from an amphibious ship by helicopter and/or inflatable boat and which normally would not involve the securing of a beach-head.

As a planning guide, to secure a beach-head and develop a firm base in such circumstances would normally require at least a battalion group, with two rifle companies deployed in the first wave. The amphibious ship should be able to support this. It is not clear to us that the littoral vessel proposed by ADI in any of its variants could support a landing on this scale, although it may well be able to support a small commando raid.

In our opinion, the type of ship we need as our primary amphibious landing platform would have the following basic characteristics:

- the capacity to embark and support an infantry battalion group (some 800 troops) for an extended period;
- the capacity to transport in and launch from a floodable dock, sufficient infantry landing craft or amphibious tracked vehicles to lift two rifle companies in their tactical elements in one lift (e.g. eight landing craft each capable of a platoon lift);
- the capacity to transport in hangars and operate from its deck troop lift helicopters sufficient to lift a rifle platoon in its tactical elements in one lift (e.g. 4 x *Black Hawk*) plus two direct-fire close support helicopters (e.g. *Cobra/Lynx*);
- the ability to provide naval gun-fire support to troops ashore;
- command, control and communication facilities;
- hospital facilities; and
- excellent sea keeping characteristics, survivability, endurance and speed.

This is a minimum capability. Desirably, there would be a greater capacity to embark helicopters, particularly medium-lift helicopters and additional fire-support helicopters and, in a separate hull or hulls if necessary, a squadron of medium tanks, a squadron of light armoured vehicles and a battery of medium artillery. The additional helicopter capability might necessitate a flat-decked vessel along the lines of the traditional helicopter carrier (e.g. a smaller version of HMS *Bulwark*), possibly a flat-decked container ship taken up from trade if one were available.

A comparison of some key features of amphibious support ships currently or recently in service with the Royal Australian Navy with the proposed ADI littoral ship and the amphibious landing platform that we consider is needed is tabulated below.

Ship	End of Life	Size	Aircraft	Tanks	Personnel	Cargo
<i>Tobruk</i>	Late this decade (now 22 years' old)	3300 t light 5700 t loaded	4 x Sea Kings	Leopard squadron + wheeled vehicles	311 - 564	1300 t cargo
<i>Manooral/Kanimbla</i>	Early next decade	4900 t light 8900 t loaded	4 x Black Hawks; or 3 x Sea Kings; or 1 x Chinook	Nil	450 (small battalion + associated vehicles)	2 x LCM8
<i>Jervis Bay</i>	N/A	1250 t	Nil	Nil	500 + associated vehicles	or 380 t cargo in lieu of troops
ADI Littoral Ship	N/A	1200 t	2 x small helicopters	Nil	125-500 (?) + associated vehicles	?
Amphibious Landing Platform	N/A	?	4 x Black Hawks + 2 x Cobras	Nil	800 + associated vehicles	8 x landing craft (infantry platoon) in floodable dock

From the above tabulation, a larger, more capable, updated and purpose-built version of HMAS *Kanimbla* or HMAS *Manoora* would probably meet the requirement we see for an amphibious landing platform. We need at least three of these in our inventory, one of which should be a variant designed to transport armour and artillery. They should be progressively brought into service as *Tobruk*, *Manoora* and *Kanimbla* are paid off. While the use of advanced composite construction materials should certainly be considered, steel offers advantages in terms of cost and survivability and the trade-offs should be evaluated very carefully before a final choice of construction material is made.

That said, it may also be useful to have some ADI-style littoral vessels for high-speed logistic support operations, but in addition to, not instead of, three operationally capable amphibious landing platforms of the type that we envisage. No doubt the littoral ships could do the specialist low-level operational tasks for which they were designed very well. The trouble would be that they would be unable to do higher-level tasks which required more capable ships with better war fighting characteristics. In contrast, the more capable ships would be able to provide the support needed for low-level operations, albeit not as quickly.

The ADI proposal should be considered in the light of the comments that we made in our primary submission about taking up ships from trade to support amphibious operations. On 19 February 2003, we made a supplementary submission dealing with Australian-flagged merchant shipping which concluded that there is virtually no capacity in Australia now to take up ships from trade to support Defence Force operations. Although we advocated the re-creation of an Australian merchant marine in our primary submission, in the short to medium term, Defence may need to acquire and own the merchant-type shipping needed to support maritime operations. The ADI littoral ship, in a logistics configuration, may well go a considerable distance to meeting this need. Indeed, if a civilian use could be found for such ships, they may form the basis for re-creating an Australian merchant marine, consisting of Australian-flagged vessels crewed by

Naval Reservists, which are available to be taken up from trade to support Defence Force operations as and when required.

Finally, in our evidence on 11 March 2003, we indicated that the amphibious lodgement role was a highly specialised joint one, quite distinct from that of the amphibious commando raid, and that Army should have a brigade group that specialised in it. We were asked following our evidence where we thought Army would find another brigade group to specialise in amphibious lodgements. This is a very good question, given that the Regular infantry battalions are all committed to other specialist roles. It may be necessary to allocate it to a Reserve brigade, but, if so, the Reserve brigade's levels of training and operational readiness would need considerably improved by comparison with those of the current Reserve brigades [see our comments on conditions of Reserve service below].

## **Conditions of Service**

### ***Recruitment/Retention***

In our primary submission we noted that recruitment and retention are currently problematic throughout the Defence Force. Unless the Defence Force can recruit, train and retain sufficient full-time and part-time personnel to give effect to the strategy, it will be to no avail. The issue is bigger than just maritime strategy but is fundamental to it. The rigidities in the current training system need to be removed and replaced by emphasis on competencies, including greater recognition of civilian trade/professional qualifications; conditions of service need to be reviewed with emphasis on making service life-style more attractive to families; retention bonuses warrant re-examination; and contingency plans are needed for the use of call-out provisions to make reserve units and sub-units (as opposed to the current reliance only on individual reserve volunteers) available during sustained operations.

### ***Service Life-style***

Service life-style issues can affect the ability of Defence to both recruit and retain personnel. This is frequently a significant consideration for Defence Force personnel with families who are in mid-career and in whom Defence has invested quite heavily.

Modern families in the main seek to have two incomes and the spouse's career can be as important to the family as that of the Defence member. It is, however, increasingly difficult for small communities to provide the career opportunities that two-income families seek. It can also be difficult for them to provide the range of educational, health, sporting, social and cultural facilities and activities that modern families, especially those with teenage children, have come to expect. It is desirable, therefore, wherever practicable and consistent with service needs, that Defence Force units and personnel be based in centres with populations sufficiently large to support the life-style and aspirations of modern families. Where this is not possible, families should be posted to small communities for as short a time as possible. It should also be noted that families, once established in a community, can be reluctant to move at the end of a posting cycle and, wherever practicable, steps should be taken to maintain this stability where it is desired.

### ***Injury in Service***

The issue of injury/death sustained by Defence personnel in service, and the compensation that it attracts or fails to attract, was highlighted by the *Black Hawk* helicopter, accident involving Special Air Service personnel, near Townsville a few years ago. To date, the issue has not been addressed satisfactorily, it remains a very pressing one for both service personnel and their families and it is a factor that many consider when deciding whether to continue serving or to seek employment elsewhere.

We understand that new legislation is being drafted to address the issue. Among other things, it needs to address specifics such as: provision of housing for life for severely injured personnel who can never work again; basing compensation on "reasonable expectation" of career prospects, had injury not intervened; and taking "payment for risk" into account – for example, Special Air Service corporals serving in Iraq currently are being paid at an annualised rate of \$138 000 tax free, reflecting the risks involved.

### *Salaries*

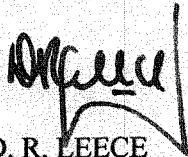
Salaries for the Defence Force, in effect, are determined unilaterally by the employer. We understand that this is a matter which rankles with many service families when they contrast this system with the system that pertains in the general community, which is characterised by balanced advocacy on behalf of both employer and employee and determination by an independent arbiter. Further, Defence Force personnel do not have the lever of industrial action available to them. The perceived lack of procedural equity, transparency and accountability in the Defence Force system is another factor that many families consider when deciding whether or not to leave the Defence Force.

### *Defence Force Reserves*

*Defence 2000* requires Defence Force Reserves to provide sustainability for contemporary military operations, rather than continue their traditional role of providing a mobilisation base for major conflict, because such conflict is unlikely in the foreseeable future. *Defence Update 2003* has reinforced this assessment. The Reserves' new role requires much higher levels of training and readiness both of individual reservists and reserve units than those that have pertained heretofore, coupled with a guaranteed willingness/availability to participate in contemporary operations. We have seen little evidence that reservists and the community that supports them have really understood and come to accept the implications of this new role. A cultural change is required and major selling by government may be needed to bring it about.

For instance, the extra training required may warrant reservists undertaking 6 – 12 months' full-time training on enlistment. Similarly, use of reserve units to sustain operations may necessitate reserve units being available for call-out for continuous training and operational service for say 6 – 9 months in any 4-year period. The Defence Force's need for reservists needs to be spelled out along these lines, if this indeed is the requirement, and reservists, their families and employers need to be made aware of, and helped to adjust to, this new reality. The training and mobilisation readiness administrative arrangements employed by the US Army Reserve and US Marine Corps Reserve, for example, might serve as a useful model for us.

We understand that Defence has been working on a paper for more than 12-months which would address these issues, as well as support for self-employed reservists when called out, among other things such as reservists injured in service. The matter is urgent and finalisation of the paper should be accorded high priority.



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Secretary & Public Officer

1 April 2003