

ADDITIONAL STATEMENT
by
SENATOR HAMER

The Report correctly establishes that a ship, possibly nuclear armed, is no greater a threat when in dry dock than it would be alongside at a nearby wharf.

However, I consider the Report does not deal adequately with the industrial relations problems of dry-docking ships which may be, accurately or inaccurately, described as carrying nuclear weapons. In recent years we have had examples of this with HMS Invincible and HMS Edinburgh. I believe that foreign ships which might be nuclear armed would not be prepared to take the risk of being dry-docked in Australia for minor repairs, because of the danger that once in dock they would in effect be hostages to militant Australian trade unions. The fact that the unions would be behaving absurdly, in view of the fact that if the risks were real their aim surely should be to get rid of the ship as quickly as possible, would unfortunately not mean they might not take such action; and the risk of them doing so would be a strong disincentive for foreign warships to be dry-docked here, and if dry-docking for emergency repairs to (say) the steering or propulsion systems is known to be impracticable in Australia, foreign warships may be reluctant to come here at all.

The Navy has, in recent years, endeavoured to establish bases for its operational ships which are clear of civilian manned dockyards, and which are manned exclusively by Naval personnel, and are not therefore subject to industrial disruption and blackmail. HMAS Stirling in Western Australia, and the new fleet base at Woolloomooloo are examples of this.

Nevertheless there is a clear gap in the campaign to make operational ships immune to militant industrial campaigns.

Operational ships, during their tour of duty - typically four years - between dockyard refits, may nevertheless require to be dry-docked, either for inspection or for minor repairs. These repairs could probably be performed by Naval personnel, but the dock itself in Sydney - the Captain Cook dock - is operated by civilian personnel, who are subject to trade union discipline and political objectives. The number of men concerned in operating the dry-dock is probably not more than 20, but they could render an operational warship non-operational.

The problem is even more acute for visiting warships which may be nuclear armed. The recent fiasco of the visit to Melbourne by the aircraft carrier HMS Ark Royal and her accompanying supply ship, demonstrates this. After that fiasco, when the maritime unions refused to provide tugs for the berthing of the ships, the Minister for Defence took action to provide Naval-manned tugs which I understand will be in service by the end of the year. I believe, for exactly the same reason, the Government should take over the operation, with uniformed disciplined personnel, of the dry-docking facilities in the Captain Cook dock in Sydney, so that those facilities are always available for the operational ships of the RAN, and for visiting warships.

It is quite unacceptable that the operation of our fleet, and the willingness of the warships of our friends and allies to visit this country, should be in the hands of militant unions whose motives and behaviour may have nothing to do with the national interest.

I accept that the Captain Cook dock, at Garden Island, Sydney, has two roles - to provide emergency dry-docking facilities for operational warships (including visiting foreign warships) and also to be used during the refits of our own ships, when the ships are being overhauled by civilian dockyard personnel. I also accept that with the commercialisation of Garden Island, the Captain Cook dock may be an important commercial asset of the

dockyard in seeking non-Naval income. Nevertheless I think, of these two roles, the operational availability of our fleet is the overriding one and that therefore the dry-docking facilities, like the berthing facilities at the fleet base at Woolloomooloo, should be under direct Naval control.

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