

The single most significant factor in my ability to continue to serve in the Australian Defence Force is the impact on my family. Increasingly, limited posting opportunities (to locations other than our preferred locality) are foremost in discussions with my family about whether I will continue to serve or not.

My length of service has been extended because I have been able to attend reasonable tenure in my current posting locality, and because I was able to negotiate a one-off posting to my home locality in the last five years for the birth of my daughter. Had my posting choices been restricted to even less desirable locations, I would have discharged some years ago.

It is important to my family, and that of many Defence families I have met, that Defence continue to recognise that most Defence spouses do not prefer to live in remote or Northern localities. Whilst measures such as improved amenities (air-conditioning, leave travel etc) can mitigate the impact of living in these areas, nothing really compensates families for being away from their extended family in eastern/southern states, or for the isolation experienced during the birth of children, or the significantly curtailed employment opportunities brought about by living in cities such as Townsville or Darwin.

The ADF should take the opportunity to examine aspects of Fly-in-Fly-Out operations which have been adapted by mining companies. 92 Wing (RAAF) have successfully adapted this method to support Op RELEX and other northern operations which has permitted the Unit to continue to support operations whilst providing a degree of normality for Defence families based in Adelaide.

There is always the argument that if you can no longer tolerate the imposition on your families lifestyle, then you are free to leave Defence. Inevitably some members will find themselves in a position where their continued service is incompatible with the requirements of the ADF to base its forces where required, however when you examine the costs of deploying a fighting force from a southern locality to a northern Area of Operations in the unlikely event of a conflict in northern Australia, it is likely to be significantly less than the cost of replacing an experienced, trained and contented workforce.

There is a lot of truth in the expression - 'a happy wife is a happy life'. I will only continue to serve in the ADF as long as I can balance the needs of the Service with my family's long-term need for familial contact and support. Any review of ADF disposition and Defence Estate needs to account for the potential impact on ADF families posed by the relocation of ADF units to remote and northern Australian localities.