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Member for Mining & Pastoral Region
Government Whip

2 March 2012

Ben Coleman
Assistant Secretary
Australian Defence Force Posture Review Secretariat
R1-1-A061 Russell Offices
Department of Defence
PO Box 7901
CANBERRA BC ACT 2610

Dear Mr Coleman,

ADF POSTURE REVIEW SUBMISSION: TANAMI ROAD, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Thank you for your letter of 3 February 2012 on behalf of the Minister for Defence, inviting me to make a further submission to the ADF Posture Review, following the release of the Review's progress report on 30 January 2012.

My submission hereby highlights the potential strengthening of existing ADF operations in the North West of Western Australia, through an investment into civil infrastructure and the sealing of the Tanami Road.

From a national interest perspective, the Tanami Road represents a linkage between the North-West of Australia and the major cities in the Eastern States, via the red centre, providing a significant security route across the nation. Savings of up to 1100km between major centres such as Melbourne and Broome (port facilities) or Derby (Curtin Air Base) would mean substantial reductions in travel time for existing and potential users of this route.

The ADF posture review progress report states that there is a case for adjusting ADF posture to meet current and future needs. Notably, the report highlighted;

Potentially significant weaknesses and risks have been identified in our force posture that mostly relate to the capacity of ADF bases, facilities and training areas, particularly in Australia's north and west regions, and our ability to sustain high tempo operations beyond a few months in Northern Australia and our approaches, the immediate neighbourhood and the wider Asia-Pacific region. (Attachment C, p15).

The dependence of northern bases such as RAAF Tindal and Curtin on fuel supply by road, which could be challenging during extended high tempo operations, with some routes also vulnerable to closure during the wet season. (Attachment C, p 24)

Highlighted here are serious weaknesses in the ADF's logistical capacity to support operations in the North West, making particular mention of road-based fuel supply to Curtin air base. A sealed Tanami Road would provide a critical strategic boost to the logistical and mobilisation capacity of the ADF in Australia's North West.

The ADF Posture Review makes several preliminary conclusions which I believe support a proposed investment into the Tanami Road. In bold I have commented on the significance of the Tanami Road in relation to these conclusions.

Infrastructure and Logistics Capacity

(5) *While permanent Navy bases in the North West are not operationally necessary, there is a case for Defence to pursue improved access arrangements at commercial ports such as Exmouth, Dampier, Port Hedland and Broome.*

An upgraded Tanami Road would provide more direct road linkage to Broome Port.

(6) *Defence (Joint Logistics Command) to carry out an assessment of civil infrastructure and its logistics capacity available to support operations in the North West in a range of contingencies.*

An assessment of the logistics capacity of an upgraded Tanami Road could be undertaken by the Joint Logistics Command.

Domestic, Demographic and Economic Impacts on ADF Posture Review

(13) *Defence posture planning, including initiatives emerging from the 2014 White Paper, to involve frequent consultation and relevant state or local authorities, or the private sector, with engagement as early as possible, to allow long term planning and adaptation.*

Sealing the Tanami Road is a long-term, major civil infrastructure project which would require engagement from the WA State Government (Main Roads), the Shire of Halls Creek (local government authority), adjacent Indigenous communities and mining sector interests.

Air Force

(25) *Defence to consider upgrades to the base at Curtin for KC-30 and P-8 operations, to provide a more resilient posture for major combat operations in our Northern and North West approaches.*

(26) *Defence to rigorously assess fuel and EO requirements for forward air bases during high tempo air operations and identify potential risks, deficiencies, and mitigation measures.*

Strategic Logistics – Fuel and Explosive Ordnance

(37) *Defence to conduct risk assessments on the strategic logistics of ADF bases and facilities to sustain high tempo operations....*

b. risk mitigation for air bases as per Tentative Finding 26.

As part of risk assessments on the strategic logistics of Curtin Air base, road infrastructure needs to be analysed alongside the risk mitigation potential of an upgraded Tanami Road.

Mobilisation Planning

(41) Defence (VCDF) to consider how options for significantly adjusting the facilities, infrastructure and logistics capacity of Australia's force posture might be incorporated in its planning for the mobilisation of a larger ADF.

Adequate road infrastructure to support potential mobilisation efforts could shape part of Australia's long term strategic defence capabilities. A sealed Tanami Road would provide a more direct link to the North West and improved access during the wet season, when other main roads may be impassable.

The local government authority currently responsible for the Tanami Road is the Shire of Halls Creek. A civil infrastructure upgrade of this significance would require our State Minister for Transport to change the status of the road to a State Road attracting Commonwealth funding.

Attached to this letter and as part of my submission you will find a document prepared by the Shire of Halls Creek entitled *The Strategic Significance of the Tanami Road*, as well as a copy of a broader report *Upgrading the Tanami Road: Economic Impact Study 2011*.

I strongly believe that the Tanami Road is of national interest and if sealed, would reduce the logistical limitations outlined in the Review's progress report and strengthen the operational capacity of the ADF at existing bases, such as Curtin.

Planning for a major strategic civil infrastructure project such as this needs to commence in the short term, with a view to incorporating the upgrade of the Tanami Road as part of long-term recommendations and the 2014 Defence White Paper.

I look forward to the final report of the ADF Posture Review and its consideration of the Tanami Road as per this submission.

Kind Regards



HON KEN BASTON MLC
MEMBER FOR MINING & PASTORAL REGION

CC Senator the Hon Alan Eggleston, Senator for Western Australia
Senator the Hon David Johnston, Senator for Western Australia
Mr Barry Haase MP, Member for Durack
Mr Warren Olsen, Shire of Halls Creek
Ms Elsie Archer, Shire of Derby
Mr Graeme Campbell, Shire of Broome