To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing in my capacity as a researcher on the relationship between environmental change (particularly climate change) and security, and on Australian security policy.

I am concerned that while wide-ranging, the White Paper Defence Issues paper in advance of the White Paper contains no reference to the looming security challenges associated with global climate change. As a range of analysts (eg Adger, Barnett, Busby, Dupont) and think-tanks (eg CNA, RUSI, Brookings, WGBU) have indicated, global climate change has the potential to act as a threat-multiplier, complicating national strategic planning and potentially encouraging new axes of conflict. These concerns have encouraged international organizations (eg UNEP, Secretary-General and UNSC discussions) to explore the connection between climate change and international security, and encouraged Defence planners in the USA, UK and Germany, for example, to develop wide-ranging and integrated plans outlining the potential role that Defence forces could play in addressing their contribution to climate change and the security manifestations of such change. Australia is already a long way behind these countries.

I believe, at a minimum, the Defence Department should commit to the development of a Climate Strategy. This would entail a focus on the ways in which climate change will potentially impact on homeland security resources; military capabilities; the wellbeing of its personnel; and procurement. In particular, I would hope the department systematically examines the implications of climate change for increased pressures to provide disaster relief at home and abroad and contribute to complex security implications of climate change associated with large-scale population movements in the region, for example. These developments, likely outcomes of climate change according to recent scientific analysis (eg IPCC 2014), have the potential to significantly complicate Australian defence planning and should be considered in the context of the types of resources Australia commits to and procures. In our immediate region, for example, a combination of rising sea levels and an increase in severity and frequency of natural disasters suggest a need to consider how ADF resources (such as amphibious vessels) might be equipped for the rapid evacuation of people. There will almost certainly also be pressure to utilise these resources to respond to domestic emergencies similarly requiring a rapid response.

The Department and ADF also need to do more to integrate emissions reduction planning into its existing programs and practices. Recent and existing defence programs (such as the Combat Climate Change program) are focused on individual awareness rather than a department-wide review of the range of ways in which Defence-related activity contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. The latter is urgently needed, and again other international defence forces are well-advanced in developing and implementing such plans.

I thank you for your consideration, Yours Truly,

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