Submission to Defence White Paper 2015 Consultation

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Executive Summary

Australia has direct strategic interests in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. ADF assets and capabilities are critical in supporting Australia’s interests and fulfilling Australian obligations in this region. The Defence White Paper 2015 should note Australia’s interests and reaffirm Australia’s unequivocal commitment to the values and principles of the Antarctic Treaty.

Australia, the ADF and Antarctica and the Southern Ocean

Australia has direct strategic interests in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. It has sovereign territory in the sub-Antarctic (Heard Island and McDonald Islands and Macquarie Island) and has a cooperative surveillance and enforcement treaty with France over the waters of the Kerguelen Plateaux including Heard Island and McDonald Islands. The ADF and civilian assets have been used to support Australia’s interests in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, in particular helping to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, as well as obligations to search and rescue (SAR) in the region. ADF assets and capabilities are critical in supporting Australia’s interests and fulfilling Australian obligations in this region.

Maintaining and supporting The Antarctic Treaty and the Antarctic Treaty System, including the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), are central to Australia’s interests.

The Defence White Paper 2015 should reaffirm Australia’s unequivocal commitment to the values and principles of the Antarctic Treaty. This includes ‘de militarisation’ of the region as stated in Article I (i) of the Antarctic Treaty. At the same time Australian should continue to support and utilise the provision of Article I (ii) of the Antarctic Treaty; “the present treaty shall not prevent the use of military personnel or equipment for scientific research or for any other peaceful purpose”.

In committing to make the Antarctic Treaty System as strong as it can be, Australia, as a ‘claimant state’, balances national interests with commitments to the values and principles of consensus, peaceful use and collaboration, which have contributed to the enduring relevance of the Antarctic Treaty.

Strong political bipartisanship towards Antarctica has enabled Australia to advocate change within the Antarctic Treaty System in the face of external criticism, while at the same time been conscious of the need for the system to evolve and develop, for example in its advocacy for environmental protection or in work in addressing IUU fishing.

Continued efforts should be undertaken to ensure Australian parliament and community are aware of Australia’s interests, responsibilities, current activities and achievements in the Antarctic and Southern Ocean. This includes addressing the crucial role ADF assets and capabilities play in supporting Australia’s interests in the region. The Defence White Paper 2015 will be a key vehicle for advancing such awareness.

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