Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in relation to the Defence white paper.

In my opinion, the overriding objective of Australia’s defence policy should be to promote peace in our region and good relations with our neighbours. This should be achieved by keeping the overall defence budget at a level that is not excessive compared to our neighbours and ensuring that weapons are of a defensive nature only and are not designed for offensive purposes.

The current defence budget is more than adequate to promote the security of Australia, however the budget could be refocused more appropriately.

Major defence acquisitions should be subject to competitive tender processes and given that Australia is a small country, proven off-the-shelf technology should be favoured over technology at a developmental stage.

Greater attention should also be paid to the evidence of past wars in making defence acquisitions.

In examining current spending priorities, I would argue that:

- There is too much focus on purchasing relatively large surface warships for the Navy. Past wars (eg. Falklands 1982) have shown surface warships to be very vulnerable to air and submarine attack. Consideration should be given to reducing the size of the surface fleet of the Navy and redirecting funding elsewhere ie. to the Army/Airforce or towards submarines, or smaller surface vessels that are still able to be armed with a surface to air missile capability.
- Ships such as the Canberra Class LHDs serve little or no defensive purposes and in the event of a major conflict would be extremely vulnerable to air or submarine attack. Consideration should be given to selling or disposing of these ships and redirecting funding elsewhere.
- The performance characteristics of the F-35 appear to be in many respects worse than the aircraft that they are proposed to be replacing ie. the F/A-18 A/B. (in spite of the astronomical cost). Statistics associated with the aircraft concerning thrust to weight ratio, drag, wing loading etc. indicate that it is likely to have very poor air-to-air combat capabilities. Similarly, it would be reasonable to assume that the “stealth” coating makes the aircraft very vulnerable to ground fire. A proper analysis of the “stealth” capabilities also needs to be undertaken. For example, how did Yugoslavia shoot down the F-117A during the Balkans conflict of the late 1990s?
- There are a number of alternatives to purchasing F-35s and these need to be properly explored, including factors such as purchase/maintenance costs, performance reliability etc. Other aircraft in production such as the F-16, Gripen, Eurofighter etc. would appear to have lower cost, greater reliability and in many respects greater performance capabilities. Given the lower costs, a larger fleet of aircraft could presumably be purchased compared to the extremely expensive F-35.
- Past wars have shown that smaller and light-weight fighter aircraft have been highly successful. Contrast the performance of the United States Air Force in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. In Korea, the small, lightweight F-86 achieved a greater than 10:1 air-to air kill ratio against opposing forces. In Vietnam, the F-86 had been replaced with larger and heavier aircraft such as the F-4 and F-105, which were destroyed in much larger numbers by smaller and lighter
Vietnamese MIG-17s and MIG-21s. The trend towards larger and heavier aircraft such as the F-35 and F/A18 E/F over the F/A 18 A/B is disturbing in this regard. Statistics such as thrust to weight ratio and wing loading indicate that the F/A 18 E/F may actually be less capable than the F/A 18 A/B in an air-to-air role due to its larger size and heavier weight (although this is somewhat offset by more powerful engines).

- Helicopters have proven somewhat useful in a variety of conflicts, however they are relatively vulnerable to surface to air missile attacks due to lack of relative turning ability. Consideration could therefore be given to acquiring a plane such as the A-10, which at relatively low cost, has been extremely effective at supporting ground troops in a variety of conflicts such as the Gulf War.

- A plane such as the A-10 would complement a light-weight fighter and could form the bulk of Australia's future air force (excluding AWACS, refueling etc).

- Australia lacks an adequate ground-based surface to air missile capability, which would be important in terms of defence against air attack. There are a number of systems in production which could be purchased relatively cheaply by diverting funds from other areas (eg. surface warships or the F-35).

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission.