Submission to Defence White Paper 2015 by Gary McClelland
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Served 1971 to 1992

This submission will only deal with those topics which I have had personal experience of over my years of service and those which I have become aware of through friends who are still serving. I give permission for this submission to be published.

The first topic I will address is Force Structure. During my service the amount of in house logistic support in Defence was seriously reduced by successive governments with the idea that they would save money on training and have a more combat ready force with most personnel in front or second line units, the fallacy of more teeth, less tail. This became obvious during the Timor deployment when those first on the ground had to live on ration packs, even though refrigeration assets were in place, because there were no refrigeration mechanics to maintain them.

I also believe that an over-reliance on civilian logistic support, especially in the field of equipment maintenance is stripping away irreplaceable skills and knowledge from the Defence Force which will be needed in the future but which cannot be readily replaced in the short term. The idea that any potential conflict can be run to some sort of timetable is totally ridiculous and that we will have time to remedy this shortfall in skills before it hits the fan is equally unlikely.

It is obvious that there is too much reliance on the S.A.S and other special force units to provide initial combat deployment to hostile areas. Whether this is a political decision to try and limit possible casualties and so reduce any political damage to the government of the day is open to question but it means that these units are being over-worked while other supposedly less capable units are held back from sharing the load, as happened in Afghanistan where Infantry battalions were kept out of dangerous operations leading some of our soldiers to state that they were ashamed to be wearing the uniform. This is no longer the case but to prevent a repeat of this it is obvious that the Army needs at least another brigade capable of deployment at short notice to give units more time between deployments.

The next topic I will address is Defence Culture. It has become apparent over the last ten years or so that there is a P.C. driven effort to turn members of the Defence Force into some sort of robots who can be switched from aggression to Sunday school at the flick of a switch. I am aware of a push from some people that there must be a determined effort to rid the Defence Force of its “Warrior Culture”. If this idea ever takes hold you do not have a Defence Force as such, just a bunch of public servants who happen to wear the same clothes to work. Defence is the only employer where those employed can be ordered to and are expected to kill other people.

It is also noted that those on deployment are constrained in reacting to threats by ridiculous restrictions of rules of engagement put in place by those who have never and will never be in a position to be called upon to react in a split second to any threat which may arise.

The third topic I will cover is Personnel. A major point of concern amongst Defence personnel is the problem of posting from one state to another, especially those who are married with a family. This means changing children from one education system to another, changing car registration and other day to day concerns. It is well past time that the Federal Government should be mounting an aggressive campaign to get the states to agree to uniform nation wide laws in all aspects of daily life, or even better to hold a referendum to abolish State governments altogether. This would ease the transition for families and remove one of the major causes of marriage breakdown in Defence.

Another point is posting length. I remember that there were efforts made at one stage to make posting lengths standard, 3 years I believe, but it did not seem to work very well. While I am aware that the needs of Defence must take precedence in any area and length of posting I believe that more could be done to prevent people digging in to plum postings and refusing to move for what are in
most cases spurious or selfish reasons. While this did not affect me personally I do know of some
whose career progressions were adversely affected as they could not be put into a posting which they
were well suited to and deserved owing to the refusal of the person in that job to move.

I will now move onto the subject of Pay and Conditions which needs close examination. During
my service of some 21 years there were only two pay increases granted and there were several
changes in conditions, the most obvious being changes to the Defence Service Home Loan scheme
and the Defence Force Retirement Benefit scheme. Firstly the issue of pay. The current pay offer
being made to Defence members is a total insult and would be rejected out of hand by any other
group of employees in any industry or service provider. An offer of at least 5% per year for the next 3
years should be considered as the absolute minimum.

The next issue is that of the Defence Service Home Loan scheme which should never have been
allocated to one of the major banks and should never have been changed to an interest only loan with
the period of qualifying service, 6 years during my service, not counting towards interest relief,
which meant someone with 10 years service would only get 4 years at the low interest rate before
being put onto the current market rate. This scheme should be restored as it was with an amount
available that better reflects the cost of purchasing property in today’s market. To illustrate my point
I give the example of my father, a W.W.2 veteran who received a loan of 12,500 pounds in 1962
under the War Service Loan scheme, as it was then known, and my own loan amount of $25,000
under the same scheme under a different name. This means that over a period of 30 years there was
an increase in available funds of 0%.

Moving on to the Defence Force Retirement Benefit Fund which was changed to a basic
superannuation scheme in 1992 which gave no guarantee of future economic security and which
seemed to be designed by those in the upper economic strata for their benefit. It was implemented
with very little consultation with those most affected, that is, the lower ranks of the Defence Force.
Again, the original scheme should be restored with the compulsory superannuation contributions
put into it rather than some other bank or industry scheme with no guarantee of return.

Finally, a National Service scheme should be revived but this time should include all eligible
people [male and female] and to have a wider choice of service for those who have genuine objections
to military service, giving them the option of service in ambulance, firefighting or other
emergency service, the period of service to be 2 years full time or 6 years part time.

Lastly, I will deal with Industry and the D.M.O. This topic is probably the most important of
them all as it rolls over into the subject of employment and job creation. It is vital for the security of
this country that as much of Defence Force equipment as possible should be manufactured here, not
only to maintain a viable manufacturing sector but to ensure that these vital skills are not lost, as if
it does become necessary for us to be reliant on ourselves for our own defence we cannot rely on
other countries to provide what we need. We only have to look at what happened when Japan
entered W.W.2 and this country was thrown onto it’s own resources owing to our previous reliance
on those who couldn't or wouldn't come to our aid. Luckily, we did have a small but viable manufacturing
sector and some far sighted and able industry leaders who were supported by the politicians
of the day, namely Essington Lewis and Lawrence Wackett to name two. These two men were
ultimately responsible for ensuring this country was able to manufacture most of the equipment
required by our Services. Now we have the problem of our major manufacturing industries getting
ready to shut up shop and with the flow-on effect to ancillary industries yet to be determined it is
time that the Government start negotiations with Ford, Holden or Toyota to purchase their assets
with a view to setting up a home grown Defence industry with the capacity to manufacture equip-
ment in large numbers should it become necessary. D.M.O.’s role in this should be to sell locally
manufactured equipment to the Defence Forces of allied nations. A case in point being the Bush-
master Protected Mobility Vehicle which performed above expectations in Afghanistan and which a
number of other Coalition Armies were very interested to acquire and in the case of the Dutch to actually purchase a small number. I also believe that the Americans were very interested but owing to the very limited production capacity at ADI in Bendigo decided to pursue other options. This shows that we, in this country, are perfectly capable of designing and building equipment equal to and even better than that available from other countries and this should be a source of pride and commitment from Government and those manufacturers who are involved to make every effort to keep this ability and encourage more businesses to be become involved.

Finally, I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to give my personal input and ideas to the proposed Defence White Paper

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