NORFOLK ISLAND GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION
DEFENCE WHITE PAPER 2015

Introduction

Norfolk Island is currently a self-governing External Territory under the authority of the Commonwealth of Australia.

This Submission is limited to Norfolk Island’s strategic positioning in the Pacific Ocean and its importance to the Australian Defence Forces both as a sea and air base.

The 1976 Australian Nimmo Royal Commission into Norfolk Island suggested that one of the key reasons Australia should retain Norfolk Island was its strategic positioning and its potential to be a key link in a “future defence chain”. It also recommended “that the airport be upgraded by Australian Army and Royal Australian Air Force engineers to enable the airport to cater for both immediate and foreseeable demands and to yield maximum flexibility …”

Geographical Positioning

Norfolk Island is located in the South Pacific Ocean at Latitude 29 degrees 02 minutes South and Longitude 167 degrees 56 minutes East. Norfolk Island is 1600 km north-east of Sydney, 1500 kms south-east of Brisbane, Australia and 1000 km north-west of Auckland, New Zealand. The closest Pacific nation being the French special collectivity, New Caledonia, 700kms to the north.

The Island is an isolated volcanic outcrop with an area of approximately 34.5 square kilometres. There are two small uninhabited islands, Nepean and Phillip to the south.

Norfolk Island is at the extremity of the eastern boundary of the Australian Defence Primary Operating Environment and is considered a vital component of Australian interests in protecting trade routes, fishery operations, surveillance, transnational crime and people smuggling.

Norfolk Island Sea Ports

Norfolk Island has two jetties, one to the South, Kingston and one to the North, Cascade. These jetties are Commonwealth assets but maintained by the Administration of Norfolk Island. They are designed for local small boat use. Large vessels, both cargo, cruise and visiting defence vessels are required to anchor off-shore with cargo, passengers and/or equipment ferried ashore using smaller craft.

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1 Report of the Royal Commission into matters relating to Norfolk Island, October 1976, page 335
2 Page 141
Kingston jetty was upgraded in 2005 but requires dredging alongside for use during low tide. Cascade Jetty is to be upgraded by lengthening and strengthening through a Community Development Grant, however this will not remove the need for vessels to be moored off-shore. Substantial additional improvement to the jetties would be required to enable a larger vessel to moor alongside.

**Norfolk Island International Airport**

The Norfolk Island Airport is used for defence purposes, and was used as an airstrip for emergency landings and a staging post for Australia, New Zealand and South Pacific flights and as a base for anti-submarine patrols in the Pacific during World War II.

The Airport has continued to be used by the Royal Australian and New Zealand Air Forces and French Navy aircraft. The Norfolk Island Airport is central to any eastern approaches to the Pacific Island community and New Zealand. A prime example was during the 1987 Fijian Coup d'état when Norfolk Island facilities provided an evacuation and forward response base for Operation 'Morris Dance' which enabled Australian Defence Force military personnel to be transferred to/from Royal Australian Navy ships enroute to the Fijian area.

Details on the Norfolk Island Airport can be accessed at: [http://www.norfolkisland.gov.nf/niservices/niservices.html#airport](http://www.norfolkisland.gov.nf/niservices/niservices.html#airport)

Detailed technical data can be obtained from the Airport Manager on manager@airport.gov.nf

**Norfolk Island Fuel Depot**

There is a bay on the east coast of Norfolk Island (Ball Bay) where the Island’s fuel and gas storage facilities are located. The fuel storage tanks are refilled by fuel and gas tankers anchoring off-shore within the Bay and fuel/gas is transferred to the tanks by fuel line from ship to shore.

Ball Bay has also been the site for construction of temporary groynes to enable barging in large machinery and equipment for major public constructions, e.g. upgrade of the Norfolk Island International Airport pavements and runways; road reconstruction and civil engineering projects.

**Australia’s External Territories: The Forgotten Frontiers**

The Norfolk Island Government supports the key findings and recommendations of the 2008 Future Directions International Occasional Paper 1 entitled ‘Australia’s External Territories: The Forgotten Frontiers” which amongst other things proposes that:

1. “In the future, the External Territories will be the leading geopolitical edge of Australia’s presence in its surrounding region” and in terms of the Pacific Ocean, the authors suggest that “Australia will have to expand its defence and strategic planning to consider additional areas of operation and flanks which were previously considered secure, often due to their inaccessibility.”
2. A rethinking of the External Territories position with regards to national defence is important”; and
3. Consider the ability of the Australian Defence Force to adequately protect its External Territories, and ensure a dedicated Australian Defence Force planning capability relative to the Territories. 

**Recommendations:**

The Norfolk Island Government recommends:

1. It is in the best interests of the Australian Defence Forces to ensure that facilities in Norfolk Island that would support the Australian Defence Force during emergencies or day to day operations are in a condition that could be utilized by it immediately.

2. That the Australian Defence Force consider improvements to the Norfolk Island jetties in any review of Defence facilities for foreseeable demands.

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Government of Norfolk Island  

24 October 2014

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3 Australian’s External Territories: The Forgotten Frontiers, Future Directions International FDI Occasional Paper 1