Dear Chair

I am pleased to provide the Expert Panel with the enclosed submission on behalf of the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC).

The ILC notes the themes identified by Defence for submissions to the paper and has focused its submission on the theme *Defence and Regional Australia*.

Underpinning our submission are the synergies between greater investment in land management of the Indigenous estate, and the ongoing investment in defence related information and human capital in northern and regional Australia. The ILC has significant experience in Indigenous training and employment and the facilitation of successful partnerships across the north and is well placed to contribute to a job ready Indigenous workforce.

The ILC gives permission for this submission to be published by Defence.

M C Dillon
Chief Executive Officer
SUBMISSION TO DEFENCE WHITE PAPER CONSULTATION PROCESS

Executive Summary

Indigenous interests are key players in northern Australia. They own over 30% of the land, and are a majority of the long term population outside major centres.

Investment in building enterprises, community capacity, participation and employment in mainstream jobs – while respecting Indigenous peoples cultural concerns – will strengthen our national security.

The Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) is keen to work with Defence to better link our respective employment programs. There are very significant synergies between expanding Indigenous involvement in community development, land management, and cultural activities on the Indigenous estate and Defence needs for better infrastructures and human capital in remote and northern Australia.

About the ILC

The Indigenous Land Corporation is an independent Commonwealth Corporate entity, established in 1995 following passage of the Native Title Act 1993 and now operating under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005 (ATSI Act). The ILC’s legislated purpose is to assist Indigenous peoples to acquire and manage land to achieve economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits, through land acquisition and land management. While the ILC’s northern operations are the primary subject of this submission, the ILC has a national focus, and is not purely focused on northern or remote Australia.

The ILC has a long history of involvement in socio economic development on Indigenous held land and specifically in contributing to training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people. The Minister for Defence states in his foreword to the Defence Issues Paper 2014 that the Defence White Paper will be developed in ‘parallel with complementary work including the Developing Northern Australia White Paper’. The Issues Paper notes Defence’s ‘significant contribution to the development of regional Australia’, while the Green Paper on Developing Northern Australia (June 2014) acknowledges the substantial Defence presence in northern Australia (15,200 service personnel and public servants), given northern Australia’s strategic significance. It is in this context that the ILC is pleased to make this submission to the development of the Defence White Paper with a clear focus on highlighting the opportunities for Indigenous people in north Australian arising from increased Defence investment in the area.

ILC Commitment to the development of Indigenous-held Land across the north of Australia

Since its inception in 1995, the ILC has acquired properties with a combined area of over 4 million hectares, and contributed to bringing additional existing Indigenous-held land into production, across northern Australia. The acquisitions have ranged across remote pastoral properties, urban commercial properties and significant cultural properties. The ILC works with Indigenous landholders to assist in developing viable and sustainable landholdings through its land management function. Responding to landholder aspirations, the ILC has effectively partnered with Indigenous landowners, industry and governments to deliver a range of land-based projects bringing property management planning, infrastructure, plant and equipment and established complex multi-property and regional enterprises (such as the Indigenous Pastoral Program in the NT and the Indigenous Landholding
During the period from 2008 to 2014 the ILC has funded multi-site projects encompassing training, planning, property management planning and complex regional land management projects at a cost of more than $30M.

The ILC submission to the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia (Developing Northern Australia) focused on impediments to and opportunities in the development of the agricultural, horticultural and tourism industries in northern Australia and the significant contribution and potential for growth inherent in the Indigenous estate. Most relevant to the terms of the Defence consultation paper, the ILC submission emphasized the opportunities for enhancing genuine engagement of Indigenous people in the development of the north, the benefits achievable through appropriate regional training and employment for building leadership and the impediments to development presented by the poor social infrastructure provision and labour market disincentives characteristic of the remote north in particular. The ILC submits that sustainable development of northern Australia cannot be effectively delivered without the engagement of Indigenous people. This engagement is equally critical in the effective maintenance and development of Australia’s defence capacity in the strategically important north.

There is considerable potential to leverage benefits for Indigenous Australians through effective development investment in Northern Australia. Outside of major centres, the significant majority of long-term residents of northern Australia are Indigenous. In northern Australia, the Indigenous estate currently accounts for approximately 30 per cent of the landmass (over 500,000 km2) and consists predominantly of land that is owned by Indigenous people under land rights or native title legislation or other freehold title. This proportion increases significantly in the Northern Territory, with more than 40 per cent of the land and over 85 per cent of the coastline currently Aboriginal-owned1. The socio-economic status of Indigenous Australians is therefore very important to the development of northern Australia, from both an economic and a strategic perspective.

Through programs such as Norforce, various Land and Sea Management initiatives and through engagement in the pastoral and horticultural industries, Indigenous Australians are currently making substantial contributions to the management, use, care and protection of the land and seas in the region. However, as referenced in the ILC submission to the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia, this could be enhanced if both structural and social barriers to participation were removed and Indigenous people were enabled to make greater contributions through employment and through the valuing of cultural knowledge and practice.

The Australian Defence Force is itself an important existing source of Indigenous training and employment, as well as a pathway to broader employment opportunities in north Australia. Additional investment in and development of current initiatives such as the Defence Indigenous Development Program2 (DIDP) could provide enhanced opportunities for more participants and deepen the available pool of Indigenous Australians in north Australia with capacity to contribute to the strategic goals of Defence. An extension of the DIDP that was effectively articulated with training and employment initiatives in complementary industries would contribute to broader security, social and economic development outcomes.

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Lessons learned from ILC investment and assistance in Northern Australia.

The ILC contributes to Indigenous economic development in the North of Australia through a number of training and employment programs. The Real Jobs program has been transitioning Indigenous citizens into ‘real’ jobs since 2008. An evaluation conducted in 2012 found that the program model is flexible enough to be implemented across pastoral, land management, horticulture and tourism industries and fee for service enterprise.

The ILC also delivers economic development outcomes through its Training to Employment Program (T2E). T2E delivers an innovative training-to-employment model that successfully transitions Indigenous Australians through pre-vocational training through into real jobs in the agricultural and tourism/hospitality industries. T2E is defined by an employment offer guarantee made to all program graduates and through this breaks the cycle of ‘training for trainings sake’.

The structure of T2E is well suited to cooperation and formal collaboration with the DIDP. While this collaboration currently exists at an operational level on a program by program basis, the ILC believes that additional benefit could be achieved through further cooperation and the possible formal articulation of the two programs. The ILC has accepted graduates of the DIDP into the real jobs program and T2E in the pastoral industry, successfully building on the vocational skills established by the DIDP. Were DIDP to be tiered, with the addition of a secondary level of training and skills development, T2E/Real jobs participants seeking employment in the defence force would be provided with a pathway into an additional industry. The seasonal nature of work in the pastoral industry is well suited to availing graduates of combined Defence and ILC training programs to opportunities as reservists or Norforce recruits.

The ILC sees potential to expand the opportunities for Indigenous economic and enterprise development arising from Defence development in Northern Australia. The ILC would welcome discussions relating to potential synergies between Defence and ILC Indigenous employment activities, particularly as it relates to DIDP.

Conclusion

Outside major centres, Indigenous citizens comprise the majority of the long-term residents of northern Australia. Collectively they are the largest landholders, as a result of land rights legislation (most extensively in the Northern Territory) and the operation of the Native Title Act 1993. The socio-economic status of Indigenous Australians is therefore very important to the development of northern Australia, from both an economic and strategic perspective. Currently many residents of remote Indigenous communities suffer severe disadvantage across many areas of life including health, housing, infrastructure, education and employment.

These same citizens, however, have a vital role to play in the defence of Australia (through units such as Norforce), in biosecurity given northern Australia’s relative proximity to our nearest neighbours, and in managing and protecting fragile environments (as environmental managers and land and sea rangers). Indigenous Australians bring unique cultural knowledge and perspectives to bear on matters relating to land management. Indigenous Australians are already an important workforce in

http://www.t2e.org.au/Home
northern Australia, and could potentially play a much greater role if opportunities to strengthen training, education, and work experience are grasped.

The Australian Defence Force is itself an important vehicle for Indigenous training and employment, as well as a pathway to outside employment, and the stronger support and commitment demonstrated by Defence over recent years to expand Indigenous employment opportunities should be acknowledged, and given strong support.

Facilitating Indigenous involvement in northern development and defence should be key national priorities. Ensuring the vast areas of northern Australia are prosperous and populated with active and engaged citizens should be a key Defence priority.

Having the wider Indigenous community engaged in the implementation of the policy responses to the Defence White Paper will be crucial to strengthening Australia’s physical infrastructure and human and social capital in northern Australia, which in turn will strengthen our national security.