DEFENCE RESERVES SUPPORT COUNCIL

SUBMISSION TO 2015 DEFENCE WHITE PAPER

Authority:

This submission has internal authorisation as a result of an action item contained within the Defence Reserves Support Council (DRSC), Supportive Employer Program – Strategic Communications Plan action item 1.1.

In addition, the Vice Chief of the Defence Force encouraged the National Chair and DRSC National vice Chair, to make a submission to the 2015 Defence White Paper.

Introduction:

DRSC believes the role and contribution of Reservists to the defence of Australia must never be underestimated nor undervalued as they provide an integral part of Australian Defence Force (ADF) capability now and into the future. With an ever-changing international political environment and Australia’s desire to responsibly contribute to a united and free world, the professionalism and capacity of our ADF is vitally important and underpins Australia’s strategic footprint.

The high operational tempo since Australia’s military involvement in East Timor recognised that a trained and available Reserve component was vital to the ADF. Since that time, Defence commitments have maintained the spotlight on the Reserve with members being deployed overseas on both warlike and peacekeeping operations; backfilling fulltime positions and deploying on civil aid and humanitarian missions both here and overseas.

The 2013 Defence White Paper together with current and past Chiefs of the Defence Force and the DRSC Strategic Plan 2013 – 2015 have reinforced and highlighted the critical importance of Reserve service in Australia. DRSC believes this level of priority recognition of Reserves must be endorsed in the 2015 Defence White Paper.

The consistent use of Reservists in warlike operations, together with peacekeeping and emergency response deployments has increased the profile and respect by the broader Australian community including the value of Reserve service to national security. This direct link to ADF capability needs to be taken into consideration when determining Australia’s future strategic priorities in the Defence White Paper 2015.
Defence Issues Paper 2014:

The Defence Issues Paper 2014 clearly articulated and recognized the importance of the Reserves to overall ADF capability. The paper also identified the important link that the Reserves provide between the ADF and the wider community.

Capacity and Capability:

The release of Reservists from their civilian employment to render Defence service, including any training necessary to prepare for that service, is mandatory under the provisions of the *Defence Reserve Service (Protection) Act 2001* (the Act). The DRSC works in conjunction with Cadet, Reserve and Employer Support Division of the Department of Defence to educate employers and employer organisations and promote their responsibilities under the Act, undertaking to refer any alleged breaches of the Act to the Office of Reserve Service Protection for investigation. The combination of this education with direct negotiation with, and advice to employers, by the Office of Reserve Service Protection has to date avoided the need for prosecutions under the Act.

Prior to 2001, the *Defence Act* allowed for Reserve members to be called out only for Warlike Operations however, in 2001, the Government amended Section 50D of the *Defence Act*, and created the *Defence Legislation Amendment (Enhancement of the Reserves and Modernisation) Act 2001*. This amendment allows for Reserves to be called out for other reasons, including peace enforcement, peacekeeping, humanitarian relief, civil aid and disaster relief operations.

Apart from overseas operational roles in Iraq and Afghanistan and peacekeeping roles primarily in Malaysia, Timor and the Solomon Islands, Reservists have also served with great distinction responding to the Queensland floods and Victorian bushfires. Their capacity to deploy in a timely manner, both overseas and within Australia, as a professionally led, trans border, well resourced, structured and disciplined capability has achieved many significant benefits for devastated communities within Australia and overseas.

Fundamental to Reserve capacity and capability is the partnership between the ADF, the Community and most importantly, the employers of Reservists. DRSC believes the 2015 Defence White Paper must recognise that without strong and mutually beneficial partnerships, including the “good will” of employers in releasing their staff for training and military deployments, ADF capacity and capability will be seriously compromised.
**Current Domestic Environment:**

Australia’s current threat level listed on the Australian National Security website is "High". The definition of "High" states that a terrorist attack is likely.

The Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) together with the Commonwealth Government and State and Territory Law Enforcement agencies have determined the greatest threat to Australia’s national security is "Homegrown Terrorism".

Whilst State and Territory Law Enforcement agencies are generally the first responders to domestic security incidents, depending upon the magnitude of the threat or civil emergency, ADF permanent and Reserves forces can be deployed at short notice.

With changes to the legislation and recent high-profile capability and performance by Reservists in times of peace keeping and civil emergency, there is no greater time than present to acknowledge and endorse the important role that Reservists perform in domestic security. Their ability to provide “surge capacity” to ADF capability is significant.
Important Investment and Key Messages for the Future:

a. Reserves are an effective asset to Australia’s Defence Force capability because they are utilised on a “as needs” requirement to supplement permanent forces and community needs.

b. Our Reserves forces contribute to Australian’s sense of safety, security and wellbeing provided by the ADF.

c. Reserves are well placed and trained to augment Commonwealth and State resources in a changing domestic security environment.

d. Current Government policy (“Team Australia”) denotes mutual support and assistance with a common goal. Mutuality requires giving and taking; this is achievable with partnerships between the community and employers which are design to enhance public perception and pride in the ADF.

In the current environment, the ADF is asking more from employers. Therefore the DRSC believes there must be a preparedness to negotiate and offer sustainable returns for Reservist availability.

e. Reservists possess unique and often transferable skills highly applicable to ADF capability. DRSC believes Reservists must be adequately recognised and resourced to guarantee retention of these skills.

f. In a recent Lowy Institute Poll, 83% of Australians rated the armed forces as a “very important” player in Australia’s international relations. Reserve forces have significantly contributed to this community based mindset especially in recent humanitarian and peacekeeping roles.

g. The DRSC fully supports the introduction of Plan Suakin and Plan Beersheba for Reserve strategic direction, integration and improvements to resource capability.

h. An effective and well-resourced DRSC will deliver on their key objective — namely, the enhancement of the availability and retention of Reservists for service. The DRSC Supportive Employers Program is designed to achieve this objective.

Recommendations:

The DRSC strongly endorses the statement in the Defence Issues Paper 2014 and believes it is critical for Reserve capability in the future:

“that an appropriate set of roles and missions are defined for reserve forces”

The DRSC recommends the 2015 Defence White Paper includes policy that:

1. Reserves are adequately resourced and modernised by adopting the recommendations of Plans Suakin and Beersheba;

2. the critical contribution employers give to Australia’s national security and wellbeing is acknowledged;

3. recognises and promote enhanced understanding and acknowledgement amongst all Australians of the investment and value Reservists bring to national security;

4. acknowledges Reservists possess unique and often transferable skills that are highly applicable to ADF capability; and

5. enhances community and employer support by adopting the DRSC Supportive Employer Program.

Mr Jack Smorgon AO

National Chair

Defence Reserves Support Council

24 October 2014