**Submission by the Rockhampton Regional Council for the 2015 Defence White Paper**

**Introduction**

The Prime Minister and Minister for Defence announced on 4 April 2014 Defence would produce a White Paper in 2015 to guide Australia’s long-term defence capability.

This submission by the Rockhampton Regional Council contends that in the medium and long term the Rockhampton Region should be further developed and utilised as a geographically, strategically military hub.

In the short term, the following four recommendations need to be achieved, as they will help lay the base for the Region to become a strong defence hub:

- Develop a discrete military precinct at the Rockhampton Airport;
- Relocate an Armoured Cavalry Regiment (ACR) to Parkhurst, North Rockhampton;
- Should the relocation of an ACR not be possible, construct storage in the Rockhampton Region to facilitate support, including maintenance, for armoured vehicles, related equipment and stores; and
- Use Port Alma for the importation of bulk explosive ordinance, which could then be stored at the Bajool Explosives Facility.

**Executive Summary**

Rockhampton Regional Council wishes to make the following submission for inclusion in the 2015 Defence White Paper.

The location of Rockhampton gives it strategic reach to northern Australia, Papua New Guinea and also to other countries located in the South West Pacific. This, coupled with the transport options offered by Rockhampton Airport, close proximity to the Port of Gladstone, all weather road and rail links and access to a wide range of support services are such that Council submits the Rockhampton Region should be developed as a strategic military hub for the basing of elements of the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

The location of Rockhampton to Shoalwater Bay Training Area (SWBTA) is such as to provide ready access for training in an area, which is well established and recognised by local communities as a Defence training area. SWBTA offers training opportunities that are unmatched elsewhere in Australia.

In the immediate term the following projects should be undertaken by Defence in the Rockhampton Region:

**Rockhampton Airport Defence Precinct**

For almost 15 years Defence has leased the Optech Building and the nearby military apron at the Rockhampton Airport from Rockhampton Regional Council for military exercises in SWBTA.
Following an incident to a Defence helicopter in 2011, Council has considered how best to progress the continued use of Rockhampton Airport by Defence and other allied forces.

Council would like to build a separate military precinct south of the existing terminal which will permit Defence to conduct uninterrupted operations at the Airport, while allowing current and future day-to-day use of the Airport to be maintained. Council wishes to enter into a long-term lease with Defence for the new precinct. In addition to enhancing security for Defence users and their equipment, a defence precinct would also offer financial savings for Defence.

Relocation of an Armoured Cavalry Regiment
The ACR, which is to be based at Enoggera, is confronted with two important issues: the first is the difficulty of moving armoured vehicles on public roads with the second being the time it takes to reach appropriate training areas.

Rockhampton Regional Council suggests Defence relocate an ACR to Parkhurst, North Rockhampton, which has convenient access to the Bruce Highway and to SWBTA, where there are ample options for armoured vehicle manoeuvre and live-fire training.

The Parkhurst site also has effective access to the Bruce Highway, which can be used by flatbed transporters.

The site boasts excellent transport links to other Australian cities and regions as well to other destinations in the Asia-Pacific Region.

Military Storage Facilities
The construction of storage facilities in Rockhampton, similar to the facilities constructed at the Rockhampton Airport by the Singapore Armed Force, would make great financial sense for Defence, which spends considerable amounts each year in moving stores and equipment from locations across Australia to support training at SWBTA and then returning them to their base locations.

Should the relocation of the ACR from Darwin not be possible, such facilities could be used to cater for the Regiment’s armoured vehicles and related equipment.

This facility, which could also be located at Parkhurst, would have good access to SWBTA as well as to Australia’s road, rail and sea transport networks.

This facility could also be of considerable assistance to other nations, such as the United States and Japan, which may use SWBTA for training.

Port Alma and Bajool Explosives Facility
Council suggests Defence should use Port Alma for the importation of bulk explosive ordinance rather than remEDIATE Port Wilson in Victoria and expand the storage of ordinance at the nearby Bajool Explosive Facility.

Council is committed to advancing the Region’s capabilities through its investment in road and rail networks and airport capital works. It will also work with the Queensland Government to develop the Bajool Explosive Facility further.
**General Strengths**
The Rockhampton Region contains a reliable pool of qualified and skilled labour, is able to respond to the seasonal nature of Defence, and has demonstrable expertise in supporting equipment storage, maintenance and logistics.

Council invites Defence to meet with Council to discuss the proposed projects contained in this submission and to understand the commitment and investment the Region offers the White Paper.

**Detailed Submission**

**Rockhampton Airport Defence Precinct**
Rockhampton Airport, which has a 2628m high strength (ACN72/C/1400mpa) main runway, taxiway and aprons, is regularly used by the ADF and the Republic of Singapore Air Force, and each two years by United States Defence as part of Exercise Talisman Sabre. The Optech Building, which is leased to Defence, and associated aprons are located to the north of the Rockhampton Airport passenger terminal.

In future Council wants to use the facilities leased to Defence to cater for increased civilian aircraft and passenger movements. These will be used to grow FIFO and charter operations, as well as for site maintenance, hangar facilities and freight distribution centres.

An incident involving an attack on a defence helicopter in 2011 during Exercise Talisman Sabre highlighted the vulnerability of military aircraft to sabotage when parked in the general aviation area at the Rockhampton Airport. This incident prompted Rockhampton Regional Council, which owns and operates the Airport, to look for a more secure solution for parking military aircraft at its Airport.

The proposed defence precinct, which resulted from this strategic re-consideration, is located 500m south of the existing Rockhampton Airport passenger terminal.

It notionally has space for four fast jet and transport aircraft, eight fighter aircraft and 24 helicopters. Vehicular access will have an improved degree of flood immunity with Hunter Street and the access road both being significantly upgraded.

Concept design plans and costings have been prepared by Rehbein Airport Consulting. These plans, copies of which have been provided to Defence, have taken into account the requirements Defence outlined to Council.

Council seeks to lease the new stand-alone defence precinct to Defence under a long term lease. Once the precinct is covered by a Defence lease, it is exempt from the requirements of the *Aviation Transport Security Act 2004* and Defence can design and build the facility to suit its requirements, including Defence security and safety standards.

Council proposes that the capital cost of constructing the defence precinct be offset by reduced rental and exercise establishment costs.
Council has consulted with Defence through Head of Infrastructure John Owens who agreed in principle to the development of the new military precinct.
Relocation of an Armoured Cavalry Regiment

The intent of Army Plan Beersheba to establish a Multi-role Combat Brigade (MCR) based at Enoggera Barracks, which is ringed by suburbia, will present Defence with significant challenges, particularly in relation to access to training areas. Two issues are the challenges involved in moving armoured vehicles on public roads and the time required to move convoys to training areas. Of the training areas available, SWBTA offers far greater utility, particularly with regard to manoeuvre and live firing. Although Wide Bay Training Area is located much closer to Enoggera, the size of the training area is such as to limit manoeuvre and the live firing of artillery and the main armament of the Abrams tank.

The difficulties involved in transporting armoured vehicles have been recognised in the Australian Government’s Australian Defence Force Posture Review (30 March 2012), under Army ‘Plan Beersheba’, pps. 37-38, Section 6.45 states: “If the movement of heavy vehicles between Enoggera and 7 Brigade’s main training area becomes a problem, Defence should consider maintaining an establishment of armoured vehicles and related equipment and stores near Shoalwater Bay Training Area. This pre-positioning approach would be similar to the Singapore Armed Forces’ equipment storage arrangements in Rockhampton that facilitate its use of Shoalwater Bay Training Area.”

An option worthy of consideration is to base an ACR at Parkhurst, Rockhampton’s most northerly suburb, which would have numerous advantages. Such a base could contain extensive, covered hard standing for storage and maintenance.

Basing the ACR at Parkhurst would provide ease of access to SWBTA, which is located 60km from Rockhampton. Armoured vehicles could self deploy and tanks and other heavy equipment could moved by flatbed transporters without causing undue problems to traffic in North Rockhampton, or on the Bruce Highway. Public roads and bridges between Rockhampton and SWBTA are part of the Bruce Highway and have carried a great deal of sophisticated military and civilian traffic for the past 50 years.

Transport

Queensland Rail’s Northern Line transverses through Parkhurst. Aurizon plans to masterplan its Parkhurst site next year to determine how it can best be used. It may well be a convenient time in the near future to construct loading facilities on the Northern Line, which would enable tanks and other associated heavy equipment to be moved by rail.

Effective transport links are one of the Rockhampton Region’s particular strengths. The Region is particularly well connected to the rest of Australia as well as to the wider Asia-Pacific region. The Bruce, Capricorn, Burnett and Leichhardt Highways all run through Rockhampton, as does the main North Coast rail line providing access north and south by rail.

Rockhampton Airport is capable of catering for the world’s largest military and civilian cargo aircraft and the nearby Port of Gladstone has regularly catered for the United States and Singaporean seaborne cargo requirements.
**Workforce**
The Rockhampton Region is well positioned to provide the specialist maintenance skills to maintain tanks and associated equipment. Similar maintenance is currently provided by Rockhampton-based businesses, Hastings Deering, Aurizon, Joy Mining, SMW, MEM, Mastermyne etc, to the resources and transport sectors.

**Logistic Support**
The Region has a well-qualified workforce, which can handle the seasonal nature of Defence, and has demonstrable expertise in equipment storage, maintenance and logistics.

The Singapore Armed Forces stores significant amounts of military equipment at its Rockhampton Airport base. Locating an ACR at Parkhurst would develop a critical collection of armoured vehicles and other military equipment, which would facilitate the development of support facilities and skills to maintain weapons, electro-optics, radio communications, and engines and transmissions.

**Housing**
The Rockhampton Region and the adjoining Livingstone Shire Council boast numerous housing developments in which Defence members and their families could live. As in Townsville, there is a wide choice of housing types in the Rockhampton Region, which would enable Defence families to be spread throughout the Region and avoid the development of military housing precincts.

**Employment Opportunities**
The Rockhampton Region has a well diversified economy with particular strengths in retail (workforce size 2 per cent above the Queensland average), education (2 per cent above the Queensland average), health (3 per cent above the Queensland average), professional services, power generation and beef processing. This diversity will provide spouses and partners of defence personnel with a wide choice of job opportunities.

By way of comparison, Rockhampton’s current unemployment rate stands at 3 per cent while in Townsville the current unemployment rate is 10 per cent.

**Service Facilities**
As the major service centre for Central Queensland, the Rockhampton Region has an excellent selection of schools, retail and medical services. This is reflected in the service, educational and health strengths of the Rockhampton economy.

**Establishing a Military Storage Facility.**
Defence should consider establishing a military storage facility in Rockhampton. The rationale for this proposal are very significant costs incurred by Defence on a number of occasions each year to move vehicles, stores and equipment to and from SWBTA, which comes at a significant cost to the nation. Much of the equipment transported is from warehouses located across Australia and in the case of exercises, such as Talisman Sabre, equipment has to be moved by sea, air, road and rail from overseas locations.

The model used by the Singaporean Armed Forces that involves maintaining a storage facility for major equipment, including armoured vehicles and artillery, was developed to off-set the costs of
moving such equipment each year to and from Singapore. The storage facility has proven to be a most successful model.

Other factors worthy of consideration in relation to establishing a storage facility at Rockhampton include the potential for other bi-lateral exercises involving the ADF training with countries such as Japan and the Peoples Republic of China.

**Port Alma and Bajool Explosives Facility**

Port Alma is located 62km east of Rockhampton on the southern tip of the Fitzroy River delta. It is a natural deep water harbour offering security and shelter that can accommodate vessels up to 180m in length.

This port has a Class 1 explosives working limit of up to 1500 tonnes which can be handled over its berths 1 and 2, with the prior approval of Gladstone Ports Corporation.

This explosives capacity is amongst the highest in Australia and is an appropriate corridor for the import of these cargos for Defence and the resources sector. The remoteness and unique nature of Port Alma together with the development restrictions maintain the necessary exclusion zones for continued explosive use.

The Queensland Government Explosives Reserve and magazine is located at Bajool, 26km by road from Port Alma. This facility has been used by Defence for explosive import operations.

Port Wilson in Victoria continues to be in need of remediation and Council suggests it is better financial value for Defence to import and export explosives through Port Alma and store the explosives at the Bajool magazine. This benefit is reinforced by the trend to base lager sections of the ADF in northern Australia.