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Defence White Paper 2015
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Russell Offices
Department of Defence
PO Box 7901
CANBERRA BC ACT 2610

SUBMISSION FROM THE SHIRE OF DERBY WEST KIMBERLEY

Overview

The Shire of Derby / West Kimberley appreciates the opportunity to provide comment as part of the preparation of the 2015 Defence Force White Paper. The Shire has highlighted the following key points within its submission:

1. The Shire of Derby-West Kimberley supports an increased presence of the ADF in association with the Curtin Airbase and Yampi Training Ground which is consistent with the strategic directions recommended in previous Defence force reviews. The use of existing assets limits mobilisation costs to achieve this outcome. Housing in Derby is also relatively affordable as opposed to many communities in Northern Australia.

2. The community and the Shire embrace new industry and have previously fully supported the use of Curtin Airbase for alternate government operations. ADF operations or other government operations linked to the base will continue to receive full support and assistance from the Shire and community into the future.

3. Logistics and supply chain limitations for marine and road access have proposed solutions, below, which should mitigate risks in supporting any Kimberley deployments and infrastructure in the future:
   - Flood Mitigation Works along Great Northern Highway in the Kimberley Region by the State of WA;
   - impending private investment to increase the use of the Derby Wharf in conjunction with the private sector, State of WA and Shire of Derby-West Kimberley;
   - connecting of the Goldfields Highway to the Great Northern Highway reducing the travel distance and time from the east coast into the Pilbara and Kimberley Region.
major investment in the enhancement of the Broome Wharf (220km from Derby) and landside infrastructure to support intensified use; and

broad policy endorsement to facilitate the sealing of the Tanami Road greatly enhancing east-west road links across northern Australia.

4. The broader national benefit of a heightened presence in northern Australia may deliver greater employment and engagement opportunities for indigenous people. This would assist in closing the gap by providing access to employment, tertiary training and education.

5. The ADF should consider developing a policy basis for the broader use of assets (i.e. bare bases) which are underutilised, only required for use on an occasional basis or not required for full operational purposes for the medium to long-term. This would deliver economic development opportunities to regional communities and other industries and could support further growth and development of Northern Australia.

The Shire welcomes the opportunity to discuss any matters raised within this paper and looks forward to further opportunities to positively contribute to the development of the 2015 Defence White Paper.

1. Introduction

The Shire of Derby/ West Kimberley (SDWK) thanks the Australian Defence Force for the opportunity to provide input into the preparation of the 2015 Defence Force White Paper. The Shire has a long history with the Australian Defence Force linked to a number of assets located within the Local Government Area. Leading into the future we foresee great potential and opportunity for the ADF to strengthen its presence around these existing assets to support its diversified role within the Australian Community.

Our submission focuses on the following key themes:

- ADF Posture and Bases
- Personnel
- Defence and Regional Australia.

2. ADF Posture and Bases

SDWK supports previous findings of the 2012 Defence Force Posture Review and 2009 White Paper with respect to the established need to invest in expanded operations in North-West Australia.

We note that at 30 June 2011, just 5% of Australia’s defence personnel and 11% of its reserves were based in Western Australia. Of this number, Census data indicates that a mere 5 defence personnel, or 0.006% of the ADF personnel is located within the Kimberley Region. The difficult terrain of the northern coastline of the Kimberley Region, alongside a smaller overall population may suggest a smaller presence is warranted. However, with reference to a broader strategic posturing of our defence force, we note the region’s:

- proximity to South-East Asia and Indo - Pacific region;
- Extensive coastline and sheer mass in area (roughly equivalent to the size of the State of Victoria);
- significant economic assets onshore and offshore (i.e. Browse, West Canning Basin, Agricultural Assets); and
- higher than average population growth rate for any region in Australia with an average annual growth prediction of 3.65% per annum (Source: Kimberley Regional Blueprint) as opposed to a national average of just 1% (source:ABS)
In our view, existing assets, being Curtin Air Base and Yampi Sound Training ground in SDWK provide an affordable and accessible basis to foster an increased presence in the area.

2.1. Curtin Airbase

RAAF Base Curtin is a Royal Australian Air Force base located on the north coast of Western Australia approximately 40km south of Derby. It was constructed as a bare base that could be used for exercises or when required for national defence. It has only occasionally been used to support military training and operations.

The Defence Posture review and subsequent white paper recommend Curtin be upgraded to support Joint Strike Fighters. Although main flying operations will not be based at Curtin, the proposal notes that amongst all other air bases, Curtin will be used for occasional operational and training purposes.

We understand the position to limit Curtin’s use to training as opposed to full operations links to the provision of on-site infrastructure and logistical access with respect to sustainable fuel supply. The State of Western Australia, through the ‘Western Australian Regional Freight Transport Network Plan’ has provided a medium to long term plan to improve the regional freight network linking the east coast through to the Kimberley. This includes:

- major flood mitigation works to the Great Northern Highway which will improve certainty in supply into the Kimberley by limiting the impacts of the Wet Season;
- investigations underway for direct fuel support through Derby Wharf;
- inland connection of the Goldfields Highway to Great Northern Highway which will reduce the direct route from the east coast through to the Kimberley; and
- upgrades to the Broome Port Wharf and development of additional landside infrastructure (approximately 220km from Derby).

These initiatives by the State Government will assist in alleviating concerns with respect to land based logistical supply chains into the Kimberley to service operations at Curtin Airbase.

The long-term vision to strengthen east-west connections across northern Australia (i.e. sealing of the Tanami Road as recommended in the Final Report by the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia) may in the longer term further improve landside logistical supply to support operations in the Kimberley Region.

SDWK itself is also working closely with the Department of Transport and the Kimberley Ports Authority to provide a plan for the future use and development of the Derby Wharf, located approximately 40km from Curtin Airbase. This has resulted from genuine market demand to enhance the operational capacity and access of the Wharf, leading to an open market Expression of Interest released in October 2014. The overall trend of this process, and the genuine market interest in the development of the wharf suggests substantial improvements will occur to the Wharf in the medium term. The result will be improved marine logistical supply capabilities to support any enhanced operation in the Kimberley by ADF at Curtin Airbase or other facilities.

In summary, since the completion of the 2009 White Paper and 2012 Defence Force Posture Review, logistical issues which appear to have been partial deterrents to enhanced or permanent operations at Curtin Airbase are in the process of being resolved in the medium term. The possibility of improved logistical marine and road supply chain to Curtin Airbase greatly enhances the possible escalation of the site from a bare base to an operational base. This will support a more resilient defence force in Australia’s North-West.
2.2. Yampi Training Ground

Yampi Sound Training Area consists of 566,000ha, 35km south of Koolan Island on Yampi Sound, Western Australia. It was acquired in by the Defence Department in 1978. The previous 2012 Posture review noted the opportunity for new training exercises around the Derby area noting the area is ideal for ‘joint exercises, including land forces such as RFSU units, and other relevant Government agencies, with a focus on contingencies involving maritime security and vital asset protection’. Utilisation of the site, in conjunction with the Curtin Airbase could provide the ideal space to facilitate such training exercises.

Despite an assumed historical difficulty to access due to the condition of Gibb River Road, increased tourism activity of the area is driving ongoing investment in the upkeep of public infrastructure and investment by private corporations to enhance the services on offer to the broader community and tourists. This positive growth pattern will lead to greater accessibility into the Training Ground from Curtin and Derby.

3. Personnel

The issues paper released by the ADF to inform public submissions includes no reference to improved engagement or recruitment of aboriginal people within the ADF. This is despite Northern Australia, where previous documents have focused on defence force investment, is home to 30% of Australia’s aboriginal population and makes up more than 16% of the population within this region.

The ADF has strong and positive history with respect to employment/engagement with aboriginal people. It has numerous policies/strategies to increase aboriginal recruitment. An example of success in this area is Australia’s NORFORCE. The regiment, comprising 60% aboriginal people is based in Darwin, covers 1.8 million square kilometres, encompassing the entire Northern Territory and the Kimberley region of Western Australia; the largest of any military unit in the world today.

SDWK considers there is a strategic competitive advantage, in terms of recruitment, that can be achieved through a heightened presence in Northern Australia and the Kimberley. In relation to the Kimberley Region, aboriginal people have a labour force participation rate of just 41% and unemployment rate of 15%. This is compared to a national participation rate of 64.6% and unemployment rate of 6.1%. This is despite a clear and increasing recognition of the desire for aboriginal people in remote locations to enter into the workforce. The creation of job opportunities in these remote areas is however the issue.

The Issues Paper outlines:

The ADF today has to compete in a dynamic marketplace for skilled labour. As a result, it has to present itself as an employer of choice to young Australians.

An enhanced presence in the Kimberley Region and broader Northern Australia is consistent with the longer term posturing indicated through previous Defence Reviews. It also offers an opportunity to recruit a workforce that, in our experience, has often sought to obtain work opportunities still close to Country.

Despite the direct benefit in terms of recruitment and diversification to the ADF, the broader benefits to the nation are significant. Flow on affects through access to stable sources of employment as well as genuine careers pathways and tertiary education and training opportunities would greatly assist in the bipartisan approach to ‘Closing the Gap’.

4. Defence and Regional Australia

The current contribution defence makes to Australia in certain regional communities
can't be understated. As highlighted early, the overall contribution of the ADF in the Kimberley is very limited despite the existence of major infrastructure assets in the region. SDWK encourages a greater presence in the region in the medium term consistent with the previous posture review and white paper.

SDWK acknowledges that ultimately defence decisions should be driven by the priority of producing essential military capabilities for the defence of Australia and our interests. As indicated however, there are other opportunities to facilitate broader economic development in regional Australia through the use of its assets.

Shared use of infrastructure for domestic passenger movements, such as that at Curtin and Learmonth provide regional communities connectivity to major cities. A broader shared Infrastructure Policy for the use of ADF, which highlights access and usage provisions for limited use infrastructure for the private sector is strongly supported by SDWK.

The expert panel has likely noted the Joint Select Committee’s Final Report on Developing Northern Australia with respect to infrastructure. The Executive Summary of the Report highlights:

“several priority recommendations target urgent infrastructure with the capacity to rapidly facilitate economic development”

SDWK considers bare bases should be made available to support freight and logistics operations linked to economic development of Northern Australia. Guided by appropriate policy and operating mechanisms, allowing bare bases such as Curtin to be open to the private sector could facilitate new export markets to adjoining countries. This would particularly apply to agriculture and aquaculture which are two long-term economic development sectors the Joint Select Committee report highlights as being hindered by suitable infrastructure. The co-use of these assets could possibly also benefit the ADF by creating a new source of revenue which may maintain bare bases during times of reduced ADF utilisation.

In this context, ADF’s own assets could deliver substantial regional development opportunities to communities such as Derby and Exmouth in regional northern Australia.

5. **Conclusion**

The Shire of Derby-West Kimberley appreciates the opportunity to make this submission as part of the 2015 Defence White Paper preparation. The Shire is and its community have previously embraced Federal Government operations at Curtin Airbase. We will continue to actively support the ADF and other agencies wherever possible and facilitate smooth use and operations of the ADF within the West Kimberley.

Our submission aims to highlight a number of simple points we believe are practical or provide significant opportunities to benefit the ADF and the broader nation.

We look forward to your consideration of this submission and the release of the White Paper in 2015. If any additional information or consultation is required, the Shire President, Elsia Archer and CEO, Stephen Gash welcome the opportunity to visit the expert panel and advisors in Canberra to discuss matters further.

Regards

[Signature]

Stephen Gash
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Chief Executive Officer
Shire of Derby/West Kimberley