

Submission
regarding the forthcoming
Defence White Paper

Defence White Paper Team
Defence Establishment Fairbairn
F4-G-015
26-28 Fairbairn Avenue
Canberra ACT 2600

from

THE MORNINGTON PENINSULA HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP

Contact:

John Howells
4 Capri Grove Sorrento 3943
(03) 5984 4753
h.j.howells@bigpond.com

THE MORNINGTON PENINSULA HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP

A Response to

A Defence Policy Discussion Paper

"Key Questions for Defence in the 21st Century"

Introduction

Those whose signatures appear at the foot of this paper are members or supporters of the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group, a small grass-roots organisation committed to promoting understanding of and respect for human rights. None of us has expert knowledge of the military, but all of us are old enough to have lived through the wars and controversies of the second half of the twentieth century. We write out of this experience and our reflections upon it. We try to be responsible, well-informed citizens.

1. War is to be deplored

We deplore war and protest at its continuance in the world. War deprives people of their basic human rights, especially "the right to life, liberty and security of person" (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*). "To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" is the first purpose of the United Nations, as set out in the preamble to its Charter. The scourge of war involves the slaughter and maiming of both combatants and civilians, the ruin or long-term impairment of the biosphere and the destruction of homes, cities and so much that humanity has built. War and the weapons of war should never be glorified.

2. But war still happens

Given the human capacity for evil, war still happens. We live with a knowledge of war being waged in some part of the world throughout our lifetimes. We know, too, that under certain circumstances most people are capable of chauvinism and of committing such things as torture, ethnic cleansing and acts of terror. War and the use of force, therefore, cannot be avoided even by the most peace-loving nation. We accept the need for our nation to have defence forces.

3. Limiting war and its effects

Our concern is that the resort to armed force

- should be taken by our nation only as a last resort after the failure of negotiations
- should be authorised by the United Nations
- should be aimed at achieving a just resolution of the dispute and a lasting peace
- should not create more harm and suffering than it seeks to remedy.

4. The core Defence mission

We accept that "the protection of Australian sovereignty is the core Defence mission" (chapter 4.2). Armed threats to Australia today are more likely to come from non-state groups than from any nation in our region. Our preparedness to defend our land should involve less emphasis on acquiring conventional strategic weapons and more on dealing with asymmetric techniques.

5. A regional capability edge

Chapter 4.2 of the Discussion Paper asks, "should we seek to maintain a regional capability edge and can we afford such an edge?" Elsewhere (chapter 3.1) the Paper points to "the increasing armament of nations, including in our own region". Maintaining an edge, therefore, could involve us in an arms race and all the dangers that entails. In chapter 3.2 we are told that the Government

has committed to providing a 3 percent real growth per year in Defence spending until 2017-18. In chapter 3.3 it points out, however, that the cost of high technology and complex weapon systems is rising at a real rate of 3-4 percent each year. The implication would seem to be that we cannot afford to maintain the present type of edge, and this would be even more so if we found ourselves in an arms race.

6. The expanding range of Australian Defence Force tasks

In chapter 4 the Discussion Paper lists a number of tasks that have been given to Defence in recent years. They include:

Fighting Terrorism

Terrorism is described as a destabilising force that will remain for the foreseeable future, but is unlikely to threaten Australia's freedom of action. While military action cannot address its underlying causes, Defence has a role in dealing with terrorist threats, and we support that role. Of equal concern to us, however, is the threat to the rule of law in Australia through our draconian anti-terrorism laws.

Providing Military Support to Australian National Security Responses

Defence will continue to have to provide military support services to combined operations with other government services such as in: border protection, defence of sea and air lanes, bomb disposal, search and rescue, special event security, domestic disaster relief, security of computer systems, etc. This is likely to be an increasing responsibility and it has our strong support.

Providing Military Support to Australian Statecraft & in Support of the International Rule of Law

This includes regional and international defence cooperation activities, peace-keeping and peace-enforcement in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions. We applaud Australia's past and continuing roles in Bougainville, Timor Leste, Fiji and Solomon Islands, and strongly support the maintenance of our forces' capacity to undertake such roles.

Providing Security in Stabilisation Operations

Providing sufficient forces quickly to restore civil authority and with a minimum of violence will be a continuing responsibility, especially in the South West Pacific. We strongly support this task for our defence forces.

Providing Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief

We applaud the way these roles have been performed by our defence forces in places such as Iran, Pakistan, West Papua, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands, and trust they will continue to be able to perform them. They have our strong support.

7. Being a good international citizen

All these roles for our defence forces have our strong support and, we believe, the strong support of the Australian community. We think there will be an increasing demand for these roles, and we hope Defence will be able to meet this demand. Chapter 4.1 suggests that armed force is no longer the principal and most significant tool of national security. We agree, and urge that these newer tasks for our defence forces are seen as essential elements in an integrated, whole-of-government approach to national security. While it cannot guarantee our security, being a good international citizen aids both our own security and that of our neighbours.

8. High-intensity wars

The Discussion Paper (chapter 4.8) lists *Providing a Military Contribution to Coalition Operations in High-Intensity Wars* as one of the tasks now expected of our armed forces. We demur. We believe that the wars in Vietnam and Iraq have been colossal blunders on the part of

the United States and, because we followed the American lead, of Australia also. Both were against the will of the Australian people and both lacked UN authorisation. Both caused immense loss of life and destruction and mired America's reputation, and Australia's by association, through the use of unacceptable practices, e.g., torture, defoliation of jungles, the use of anti-personnel landmines and cluster bombs. Neither achieved its proclaimed objectives. We are opposed to Australia's participation in such wars unless they fully meet the conditions set down in paragraph 3 above.

9. Effective and efficient management

Chapter 4.9 is titled *Managing Defence Core Business*, and states that "Defence is responsible for managing its core business effectively and efficiently". This refers to both financial and human resources. We agree. We are concerned at continuing press reports of the bastardisation of recruits, of less than adequate care of war-damaged personnel, of the unsatisfactory refitting of submarines and of the controversial purchase of expensive war planes.

10. Unacceptable munitions

Landmines

Landmines have been laid in about 80 countries during conflicts around the world and continue to be lethal for many years after the conflict has ceased. Some 20,000 people are killed or injured each year by landmines, mostly civilians and many of them children. We applaud the fact that Australia was one of the original signatories in 1997 to the *Convention on the Prohibition on the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and their Destruction*. We applaud, too, the fact that Australia destroyed its stockpiles of these mines within two years of signing the Convention.

Cluster bombs

Each cluster bomb is designed to release over 200 small bombs which on exploding kill or maim everyone in an area the size of two sports fields. Because many do not explode on hitting the ground, they cause civilian deaths for years after being dropped. Some estimates suggest that 40 percent of the deaths are of children. Despite claims that newer versions are fail-safe, there is evidence that the safety provisions are far from perfect. A Diplomatic Conference attended by over 100 nations in May of this year in Ireland adopted the *Convention on Cluster Munitions*. It is planned that the Convention will be opened for signature in Oslo on 3 December 2008. In 2007 Australia spent \$14 million buying SMARt bombs, the supposedly fail-safe cluster bombs. We urge that Australia sign the Convention and destroy its stocks of these weapons.

This statement was adopted by a meeting of the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group on 25 August 2008 as its submission to the Federal Government's White Paper on Defence process.

The following people have endorsed the statement:

David Ball
Patricia Ball
Merle Baring
Marguerite Brennan
Mary Burgess
Rosemarie Draper
Catherine Eaton
Elspeth Fleming
Andrew Grummet

Andrew Grummet
Margaret Grummet
Tony Helm
Helen Howells
John Howells
Robyn Hughan
Val Johnson
Joan Kent
Joe Lenzo
Margaret Mackie
Margaret Ray
Val Kent
Sally Montgomery
John Kent
Patricia Rodriguez
Bruce Sangster
Charles Sherlock
Pat Spencer
Bill Tingate
Nan Vassallo
Tony Vassallo
Steve Warne