

## Introduction

### Background

- 1.1 Australia's maritime strategy is a key part of the overall defence strategy as set out in the Defence *White Paper, Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force (2000 White Paper)*. The *2000 White Paper* states that the 'key to defending Australia is to control the air and sea approaches to our continent, so as to deny them to hostile ships and aircraft, and provide maximum freedom of action for our forces.' The *2000 White Paper* concludes that this means 'we need a fundamentally maritime strategy.' The maritime strategy objectives, in turn, influence Australia's defence capabilities because it is the capabilities that bring effect to the strategy.
- 1.2 In recent years, there has been an ongoing debate about the validity of Australia's defence strategy and whether it is effective in fulfilling our military and geopolitical aims. Critics of the current defence strategy suggest that there is an over emphasis on the key strategic objective of ensuring the defence of Australia and its direct approaches. These critics suggest that the 'defence of Australian territory' results in a disconnect between strategy and practice. That is, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) is, in practice, engaged in a variety of tasks which require it to be engaged regionally and globally. Therefore, Australia's defence strategy should be revised to ensure that it reflects what the ADF does in practice. Consequently, this would have an impact on the ADF's capability plan.
- 1.3 The criticisms about Australia's defence strategy are significant. They have budgetary implications and question the choices made in Australia's defence capability plan. Those groups which defend the current defence strategy argue that central to any proper defence policy is the capacity to

defend Australia and its direct approaches. Second, in order to secure that objective Australia should maintain good relationships with regional neighbours. Third, given that Australia's area of direct strategic interests cover 25% of the world, forces developed to secure this objective would inherently be capable of contributions abroad. These groups point out that while the threat of direct attack on Australian territory is low, this cannot be assumed 15 to 20 years out.

## Objectives, scope and focus

- 1.4 The inquiry has a range of objectives which begin with developing an understanding of maritime strategy. In brief, maritime strategies involve the integration of sea, air and land forces operating jointly. Therefore, the examination of maritime strategy is broad. It is important not to confuse maritime strategy with naval power or naval strategies which are a subset of a maritime strategy. Chapter two examines some of the key concepts of a maritime strategy.
- 1.5 The Minister's letter of referral noted that, in strict terms, the concept of a maritime strategy as set out in the *2000 White Paper* applies only to one of the ADF's four priority tasks, namely the Defence of Australia and its direct approaches. The Minister, however, did not want this fact to narrow the extent of the inquiry commenting that there 'will clearly often be a maritime dimension to the other tasks set out in the *2000 White Paper*: contributing to the security of our immediate neighbourhood; contributing effectively to international coalitions beyond our immediate neighbourhood; and support of peacetime national tasks.' These matters are addressed in Chapter four which examines Australia's maritime strategy against the priority task of Defence of Australia and the three additional tasks that have just been noted.

## Strategy

- 1.6 Australia's maritime strategy is examined from the broader view of where it fits in to the overall strategic framework. For example, Australia does not have an explicit national security strategy but evidence to the inquiry suggested there was a need for this type of framework. These arguments are examined in Chapter three.
- 1.7 Australia's maritime strategy is examined in detail and the objective is to determine the extent to which Australia's maritime strategy fulfils the objectives of a modern maritime strategy. Evidence to the inquiry suggested that Australia has only one element of maritime strategy namely a 'sea denial' capability.

- 1.8 An examination of Australia's maritime strategy is not complete without discussing the influence of the defence budget, and emerging military capabilities. Finally, the validity of Australia's maritime strategy and some of the key strategic objectives as set out in the *2000 White Paper* will be examined. These discussions are part of Chapter four.
- 1.9 The inquiry does not seek to examine defence concepts below that of 'strategy.' That is, there is no examination of the operational or tactical level of military operations or of specific operations.

## Capability

- 1.10 In the hierarchal structure of military planning, capability is subordinate to strategy. That is, when a strategy is determined, capability must be acquired or shaped which will bring effect to the strategy. The findings made in Chapter four on maritime strategy will influence debates about capability. Evidence to the inquiry suggested that while the maritime strategy should be reviewed, consideration should also be given to the impact these debates have on capability. For example, there were a series of arguments for enlarging Army capabilities and amphibious capabilities.
- 1.11 These discussions form part of Chapter five. Note that it is not an objective of the inquiry to develop a capability plan or examine and make findings or recommendations about specific defence 'platforms'. This does not, however, preclude the committee from noting or making observations about certain high profile platforms such as the Joint Strike Fighter or Air Warfare Destroyer.

## Other issues

- 1.12 Outside of the examination of military issues, the inquiry considered a range of related issues which come under the broad umbrella of Australia's maritime strategy. These include examination of Australia's economic exclusion zone, and monitoring and security of sea lines of communication.
- 1.13 The role and capability of Australia's merchant fleet featured in the evidence. The status and capacity of Australia's merchant fleet is examined together with Defence's use of merchant shipping.
- 1.14 A further issue of discussion focuses on Australia's defence industry and its capacity to support Australia's defence objectives. These issues form part of Chapter six.

## Conduct of the inquiry

- 1.15 On 27 August 2002 the Defence Minister referred to the committee the reference for the inquiry into Australia's maritime strategy. On 1 September 2002 the committee issued a press release outlining the objectives of the inquiry and encouraging public comment. Information about the inquiry was advertised in *The Australian* on 4 September 2002.
- 1.16 In addition, submissions were sought from a range of government agencies, non-government organisations and individuals. Information about the inquiry was also posted on the committee's internet homepage at:<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt/Maritime/MSIndex.htm>
- 1.17 Over forty submissions were received which are listed at Appendix A. Almost 20 exhibits were received which are listed at Appendix B.
- 1.18 As part of the inquiry, the committee requested the Information and Research Service (IRS), Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Group, Department of the Parliamentary Library to prepare *A Foundation Paper on Australia's Maritime Strategy*. Representatives of the IRS, including Mr Alex Tewes and Ms Kelly Kavanaugh, briefed the committee on the key issues presented in the paper.
- 1.19 At the start of the inquiry, the committee received a private briefing from the Department of Defence.
- 1.20 Evidence was taken at public hearings in Canberra on 25 and 26 February, 24 March and 16 June 2003. In addition, public hearings were held in Sydney on 11 March and in Melbourne on 12 March 2003.
- 1.21 Copies of the transcripts of evidence from the public hearings and the volume of submissions are available from the committee's secretariat and for inspection at the National Library of Australia. In addition, the transcripts and submissions are available from the committee's website at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt/Maritime/MSIndex>

## Reader guide

- 1.22 The report has been kept as brief and concise as possible. Each section of the report presents the key evidence provided through public hearings and submissions. The conclusions provide a summary of the issues under consideration and most importantly provide the committee's views on a topic. In addition, when recommendations are made the conclusions will include reasons explaining the need for the recommendations.

- 1.23 Readers who do not have the time to read the report in full can read the conclusions separately. The conclusions have been prepared in a 'stand alone' format so that readers can quickly understand the key issues together with the committee's conclusions and reasons for the recommendations.