

# Agreement concerning the use of Shoalwater Bay Training Area and associated facilities in Australia

## Introduction

- 6.1 The *Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the Republic of Singapore concerning the use of Shoalwater Bay Training Area and the use of associated facilities in Australia* (the Agreement) will replace the 1999 agreement which expired on 31 December 2004.<sup>1</sup>

## Overview

- 6.2 The Agreement will enable the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) to continue to have access to the Shoalwater Bay Training Area, Queensland (SWBTA) and associated use of storage facilities in Australia. The SAF have had access to SWBTA since 1995.<sup>2</sup>
- 6.3 Singapore does not have access to domestic training areas and values access to SWBTA. The Agreement is expected to:

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1 As the 1999 agreement has expired, the Parties implemented an interim agreement which mimics the terms of the final agreed text of the proposed Agreement. The interim agreement allows for short term planning of the use of the Shoalwater Bay Training Area. National Interest Analysis (NIA), para. 5.

2 The SAF also have access to RAAF Base Pearce (Western Australia) for pilot training, the Army Aviation Centre at Oakey (Queensland) for helicopter training, and conduct fighter deployments to Darwin, Townsville and Amberley. NIA, para. 6.

- contribute to the Australia-Singapore bilateral defence relationship
  - improve the effectiveness of SAF as an exercise and training partner
  - promote Australia's policy of increasing regional security.<sup>3</sup>
- 6.4 SAF training exercises conducted at SWBTA under the Agreement are unilateral with no immediate benefit to the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The SAF possess highly sophisticated technology from which the ADF benefits from exercising with them. Many of the assets used at SWBTA, in particular aircraft, are employed elsewhere in bilateral and multilateral exercises involving Australia. The SAF's defence capability contributes to regional security and to its effectiveness as a coalition partner. The proposed Agreement will also benefit local industry through increased access to commercial arrangements with the SAF.<sup>4</sup>
- 6.5 In relation to the benefits of unilateral exercises under the Agreement, the Department of Defence commented:
- At a practical level, there is a lot of information sharing between Australia and Singapore, and I think what this activity does for us is allows us to build trust in other areas. It allows us to talk about advances in defence scientific cooperation and meet either at Shoalwater Bay, where sometimes things are tested, or, more frequently in Singapore and elsewhere. We do not have any issues where we would think the visiting forces had access to something that we might not necessarily wish them to, nor would we expect that we would in their case either.<sup>5</sup>
- 6.6 As the proposed Agreement is broadly similar to the 1999 Agreement, non renewal of the proposed Agreement could jeopardise Australia's long standing political, defence and trade relationship with Singapore.
- 6.7 The proposed Agreement will maintain the existing requirements of the 1999 Agreement, including: elements relating to notification and approval of a detailed concept of training prior to the planned SWBTA utilisation dates; environmental assessment of training and environmental restoration works on completion to ensure the sustainable use of SWBTA; and full cost recovery.<sup>6</sup>

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3 NIA, para. 7.

4 NIA, paras 8-9.

5 Mr Shane Carmody, *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 June 2005, p. 16.

6 NIA, para. 10.

6.8 The Agreement also maintains the limit of 6600 troops. The number of vehicles that may be deployed to SWBTA will increase slightly.<sup>7</sup>

6.9 This Agreement also establishes an Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG). The purpose of the EMG is to monitor environmental compliance and provisions on training and workplace safety.<sup>8</sup> In relation to the environmental management of SWBTA, the Department of Defence stated:

The Department of Defence has a positive history of environmental management at Shoalwater Bay and we are committed to responsible environmental management. Rehabilitation processes are in place, monitored by both the department and the Singaporean armed forces. While normal range control restrictions apply, the Environmental Advisory Committee members have opportunities to inspect training areas during the exercise if required.<sup>9</sup>

6.10 The Department of Defence also informed the Committee that it has implemented three recommendations made by the Committee (39<sup>th</sup> Parliament) in relation to the 1999 agreement.<sup>10</sup> The first recommendation related to consultation with the local business community during preparation of any future agreements to ensure that its interests were incorporated where possible. Two other recommendations related to the environmental impact of major exercises and meetings and circulation of documents to the Environmental Advisory Committee.<sup>11</sup>

6.11 The Australian Government is not considering entering into similar agreements with other ASEAN<sup>12</sup> countries. The Department of Defence stated:

The Singaporeans are the ones most in need of training area—most in need of land and operating space. Both the training that you mentioned in Oakey and the training you mentioned in Pearce are important to them, but the field training environment that we provide is important. I do not believe

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7 NIA, para. 11.

8 Mr Shane Carmody, *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 June 2005, p. 14; NIA, para. 11.

9 Mr Shane Carmody, *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 June 2005, p. 15.

10 Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, *Report 29*, December 1999, pp. 37, 40.

11 Mr Shane Carmody, *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 June 2005, p. 14.

12 The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) includes: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

that we have had any requests from other nations to do anything of this scale, and I am not convinced that many regional nations would be able to operate at the high end-the end at which Singapore operates. Within the agreement, over 6000 troops can be deployed. We have not considered inviting anyone else, mainly because there is no one else operating at quite that level. The relationship provides us with the opportunity to do something special for Singapore.<sup>13</sup>

## Implementation and costs

- 6.12 The Agreement does not require any change to legislation and will not impose any foreseeable direct financial costs to Australia. Australian support provided under the Agreement is on a full cost recovery basis.<sup>14</sup>

## Consultation

- 6.13 States, Territories and the local Rockhampton and surrounds business community were consulted about the proposed Agreement. Responses received were either supportive or provided no comment about the proposed Agreement. The Rockhampton and Capricorn Coast Chambers of Commerce requested an increase in business opportunities for the local area.<sup>15</sup>

## Withdrawal

- 6.14 The Agreement may be terminated by either or both Parties if they give written notice twelve months prior to the intended date of termination. The Agreement remains in force until 31 December 2009 unless otherwise agreed by the Parties.<sup>16</sup>
- 6.15 Concerns were raised about the provision of immediate withdrawal where unexpected issues arose. The Department of Defence stated

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13 Mr Shane Carmody, *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 June 2005, p. 15.

14 NIA, paras 30-31.

15 NIA, Consultation Annex.

16 NIA, para. 34.

that under Article 5 of the Agreement an ADF Liaison Officer has the power to intervene for safety or security reasons.<sup>17</sup>

- 6.16 Further, the Department noted that SAF only have access to SWBTA for a certain amount of time during any year and the withdrawal provisions of the Agreement could adequately address any security problems which could arise.<sup>18</sup>

## Conclusion and recommendation

- 6.17 The Committee supports and believes the proposed Agreement will continue to strengthen the Australia-Singapore bilateral defence relationship. More broadly, the Agreement will also promote Australia's policy of increasing regional security. The Committee also welcomes the implementation of the recommendations made by its predecessor.

### Recommendation 7

***The Committee supports the Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the Republic of Singapore concerning the use of Shoalwater Bay Training Area and the use of associated facilities in Australia and recommends that binding treaty action be taken.***

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17 Ms Anne Sheehan, *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 June 2005, p. 17.

18 Mr Shane Carmody, *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 June 2005, p. 17.

