

Opportunities for closer internal coordination and collaboration

- 3.1 Pacific Island states are facing an increasing number of potentially existential challenges, including domestic security instability, climate change and geopolitical rivalries.¹
- 3.2 This warrants the need for Defence to investigate opportunities for closer collaboration and coordination with Australian Government departments and non-governmental organisations to meet these emerging challenges. This chapter will consider such opportunities as submitted to the Committee.

Defence and the Office of the Pacific

- 3.3 Defence's partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) Office of the Pacific (OTP) is noted as being at the forefront of Australia's strategic leadership in the Pacific.² The Committee heard that the Department of Defence acknowledges the success of its long history of collaboration with DFAT in the Pacific, particularly in the humanitarian assistance and disaster response space, as an area that has called for the 'full spectrum of Defence skills and capabilities'.³
- 3.4 Defence elaborates on the utility of its partnership with DFAT as it relates to disaster response:

The increasing use of Defence assets in response to disasters in the Pacific has seen the relationship with DFAT strengthen over recent years. In the Pacific, DFAT and Defence have successfully

1 Professor John Blaxland, *Submission 1*, p.1.

2 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.12.

3 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.10.

coordinated in response to a range of crises, including Tropical Cyclones Winston, Pam and Gita; volcanic activity in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Vanuatu; the 2018 earthquake in PNG; and the measles crisis in Samoa.⁴

- 3.5 Similarly, the Committee heard that collaborating with DFAT in the Pacific has resulted in a strengthening of Defence's ability to holistically secure the region's interests. In particular:

Under the strategic leadership of the OTP, we [Defence] have committed to an ambitious agenda to build a region that is strategically secure, economically stable and where states are politically sovereign. With OTP guidance, our approach continues to focus on delivering support that enhances whole-of-government coordination and consistent with the priorities of Pacific countries.⁵

- 3.6 The Department of Defence also recognises the necessity of future collaboration with the OTP:

Over the coming decades we will increase our investment in the region. We will work with the OTP and, learning from our experiences, continue to evolve our approach to security-related engagement in the region.⁶

- 3.7 Further, Defence noted that present work with DFAT pertaining to identifying complementarities between the Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP) and DFAT's investment in sustainable fisheries in the Pacific will be an important agenda to take forward to protect Pacific Island maritime interests.⁷

- 3.8 It is important that Defence continues to work collaboratively and cooperatively with DFAT, whilst simultaneously enhancing opportunities for further Pacific engagement to assist Pacific states in facing existing regional challenges.

4 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.10.

5 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.12.

6 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.12.

7 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.11.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends the Department of Defence and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, via the Office of the Pacific (OTP), continue to improve collaboration to effectively monitor, evaluate and respond to diplomatic, environmental and defence challenges in the Pacific region.

Whole-of-Government synchronisation

3.9 The Committee heard that Defence's collaboration with the OTP is important; however, it is but one piece of a much larger picture of crucial whole-of-government cooperation. The multifaceted needs and challenges present in the Pacific region require Defence to collaborate with other relevant Government departments and agencies to best protect Australia and the Pacific's long-term interests.⁸

3.10 Defence has a longstanding history of working closely with inter-agency partners to deliver the Australian Government's approach to regional security in the Pacific.⁹ Mr Hugh Jeffery, First Assistant Secretary of the International Policy Division at the Department of Defence, gave evidence as to the importance of Defence coordinating efforts with relevant Australian Government agencies. Mr Jeffery noted that Defence was 'very focused' on contributing to and enhancing the whole-of-government efforts in support of the Pacific Step-up.¹⁰ Elaborating further, Mr Jeffery highlighted:

The concerns and development needs of our Pacific partners cannot be addressed by any one department in the Australian government; it has to be a whole-of-government effort if we are to work with our partners to improve and strengthen the region's security and prosperity. We are very focused on making sure that everything that we do is aligned through the whole-of-government effort and also is reflective of the security, economic and social needs of our Pacific partners, as they see them.¹¹

3.11 Defence contributes to Australia's whole-of-government efforts to ensure that the Boe Declaration on Regional Security in the Pacific effectively

8 Mr Benjamin Cronshaw, *Submission 4*, p.7; Professor John Blaxland, *Submission 1*, p.1.

9 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.9.

10 Mr Hugh Jeffery, Department of Defence, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 July 2020, p.19.

11 Mr Hugh Jeffery, Department of Defence, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 July 2020, p.19.

guides the region in responding to emerging security threats. This includes expanding the concept of regional security, promoting the rules-based order and advocating freedom from external interference and coercion.¹²

- 3.12 Defence notes that cooperation in the Pacific maritime security and fisheries domain reflects key synergies across Defence, DFAT, the Department of Home Affairs and the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AMFA).¹³ This collaboration in particular has presented new opportunities for the Australian Government to deepen existing inter-agency cooperation in support of the Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP).¹⁴
- 3.13 The PMSP aims to support maritime security in the Pacific through measures including integrated aerial surveillance, upgraded patrol boats, and enhancements to regional cooperation. Opportunities for cross-agency collaboration exist within the PMSP, including diversification efforts to improve maritime domain awareness, reduce criminal activity at sea, improve policing efforts and manage the movement of irregular people in the region.¹⁵
- 3.14 Notwithstanding Defence's existing efforts to support cross-agency collaboration, there is recognition that more can be done to utilise opportunities for further government cooperation. In particular, the Northern Territory (NT) Government submission makes a case for pursuing further collaboration between Defence and federal government agencies with state government partners in support of the Pacific Step-up.¹⁶
- 3.15 The NT Government noted that collaborative work between state governments and with Pacific states to date highlight avenues for broadening the scope of government synchronisation. In particular, the NT Government highlighted previous work with the Queensland Government to invest in strengthening maritime support capabilities in the Pacific. It is argued that this not only reflects the ability of state government collaboration to generate positive security outcomes for the Pacific, but was also a vehicle to assist Australia's broader soft diplomacy efforts in the region.

12 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.10.

13 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.11.

14 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.11.

15 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.11.

16 Northern Territory Government, *Submission 14*, p.1.

[The NT] Government is keen to continue working with Defence, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrade and north Australian states to support the Defence Cooperation Program and Pacific Step-up Policy, and I look forward to this collaborative approach strengthening in 2020.¹⁷

- 3.16 Accordingly, the NT Government encourages Defence to broaden the scope of possibilities for various levels of government to cooperate to ‘facilitate partnerships and the sharing of capabilities’ to improve the Australian Government’s overall approach in the region.¹⁸
- 3.17 The success of Defence in the Pacific is built-on cooperation with the wider whole-of-government effort. It is critical that Defence continue to explore further opportunities to deepen internal collaboration and coordination to effectively respond and deliver with real security and capability outcomes for Pacific partners.
- 3.18 To assist this approach, Defence should also explore opportunities for further cooperation with industry partners to ensure Australia’s defence efforts in the Pacific are agile and innovative.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends the Government pursue further opportunities for collaboration with state government partners to support Australia’s Pacific Step-up. This would broaden the scope of possibilities for various levels of government to cooperate, facilitate partnerships and share capabilities in support of the Pacific Step-up.

Defence and Industry

- 3.19 Looking beyond cooperation with Government bodies, it is also important that Defence leverage and improve existing successful partnerships with industry bodies to bolster Australia’s defence relationship with the Pacific.
- 3.20 The Northrop Grumman Australia submission reinforces the criticality of Defence-Industry partnerships, as many of the challenges faced by Pacific states can be addressed through promoting better integration between Government and Industry, particularly to promote the design and

17 Northern Territory Government, *Submission 14*, p.1.

18 Northern Territory Government, *Submission 14*, p.2.

execution of innovative defence solutions.¹⁹ Northrop Grumman Australia contend that:

Industry plays a key role in the design, production and sustainment of Australian Defence Force (ADF) assets that support Defence's operations and cooperative activities with Pacific Island Countries (PICs).²⁰

3.21 Northrop Grumman Australia goes on to suggest that Defence should examine further opportunities for collaboration with Industry:

Industry can provide the ADF with the capacity to augment sustainment teams deployed on operations and provide insights into innovative capability solutions to support Australia's regional priorities...Australian industry can also provide opportunities to integrate local Pacific Island industry in support of ADF operations, generating both capability and economic outcomes for PICs...[this] will produce capability and economic outcomes for PICs through exposure to best-practice processes and the development of local industry capability, in addition to the economic benefits associated with the employment opportunities that these partnerships could generate.²¹

3.22 Complementing this, the Committee also heard that there also exist further opportunities for Industry to assist Defence's humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR) responses in the Pacific.²² PAL Aerospace and Air Affairs Australia concur with the suggestions of Northrop Grumman Australia, noting that Industry can assist Defence capability by providing 'immediate turn-key solutions' to support Australia's relationships with Pacific Island countries.²³ For example, PAL Aerospace and Air Affairs Australia suggest:

Private sector industry could be useful to provide an additional or surge capability for aerial surveillance in support of key annual and ad hoc activities through the PMSP strategy.²⁴

3.23 In addition to seeking new opportunities for improved collaboration and coordination with Industry bodies, Defence could leverage existing opportunities with non-government organisations, including academia, to deliver increased defence outcomes in the Pacific.

19 Northrop Grumman Australia, *Submission 3*, p.4.

20 Northrop Grumman Australia, *Submission 3*, p.11.

21 Northrop Grumman Australia, *Submission 3*, p.11.

22 Northrop Grumman Australia, *Submission 3*, p.12.

23 PAL Aerospace and Air Affairs Australia, *Submission 5*, p.6.

24 PAL Aerospace and Air Affairs Australia, *Submission 5*, p.6.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Government pursue further opportunities to integrate Australian Defence Force cooperation with Australian Industry to provide capability solutions in support of the Pacific Step-up.

Defence and Non-Government Organisations, including Academia

3.24 The Australian Government and Defence maintain numerous working relationships with a range of non-government organisations to support objectives in the Pacific. Two specific groups that actively support Defence's role in the Pacific are academic bodies and the Australian Veteran Community.

Academia

3.25 The Committee heard evidence from Professor Joanne Wallis that reinforced the importance of people-to-people links cultivated through defence education and exchange ties between Australia and the Pacific.²⁵

3.26 Professor Wallis emphasised the potential for the Australian Government, including Defence, to promote study opportunities for Pacific Islanders in Australia.²⁶ Professor Wallis contends that there is a lack of incentive for Pacific Islander postgraduate students to study in Australia, resulting in many completing further study in other countries including China:

It's somewhat disappointing to me now that, when I'm encountering young Pacific thinkers whom I invite to events here in Australia or who approach me to do their PhD or further study, they have done their master's degree in China. I just think it's a wasted opportunity.²⁷

3.27 Professor Wallis encourages the Australian Government to consider incentivising education exchange programs to develop stronger bilateral relationships with Pacific neighbours. Specifically:

25 Professor Joanne Wallis, University of Adelaide, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 15 July 2020, p.5.

26 Professor Joanne Wallis, University of Adelaide, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 15 July 2020, p.5.

27 Professor Joanne Wallis, University of Adelaide, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 15 July 2020, p.5.

There are some of the best and brightest in the region and they're studying to speak publicly and inform strategic thinking in the region, and their education has been shaped by a country that might have interests different to our own.²⁸

- 3.28 Professor Wallis' submission suggests that opportunities exist for Defence to increase soft-power ties and relationships with Australia's Pacific Island neighbours via enhanced education and exchange programs. Such an approach would facilitate knowledge sharing and trust building between Australia and the Pacific, boosting Australia's presence in the region and reinforcing its role as a vital Pacific security partner.²⁹

Veteran's groups

- 3.29 In addition to Australia's academic community, soft-power diplomacy and people-to-people relationships have been strengthened by the participation of Australia's veteran community in supporting Pacific Island development and maintaining defence partnerships.
- 3.30 The Veterans Care Association Inc. (VCA), is an Australian ex-service registered charity organisation which aims to 'reduce the instance of veteran suicide and improve the wellbeing of veterans and their families' The VCA submitted that the strong defence relationships have been formed and maintained between former Australian and Timor-Leste defence personnel through its outreach programs.³⁰
- 3.31 Specifically, VCA's flagship program, Timor Awakening (TA), is a program designed to immerse Australian veterans in Timor-Leste and deliver health education, mentoring and community development. According to VCA, the TA program focuses on utilising and promoting local industry in Timor-Leste, and across three programs per year contributes approximately \$200,000 to local economies.³¹
- 3.32 Australian Veterans, through the TA program, have created strong people-to-people relations within Timor-Leste. This demonstrates the ability of non-government organisations to promote defence relationships beyond governmental levels:

Australian Veterans, through the TA program, have forged a powerful bridge of people to people relations with Timor-Leste. Every President and Prime Minister of Timor-Leste's history has welcomed one or more of the

28 Professor Joanne Wallis, University of Adelaide, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 15 July 2020, p.5.

29 PAL Aerospace and Air Affairs Australia, *Submission 5*, p.6.

30 Veterans Care Association Inc., *Submission 13*, p.3.

31 Veterans Care Association Inc., *Submission 13*, p.2.

TA groups in both formal and informal receptions...These occasions have been universally embraced and applauded by Timor-Leste senior leadership. The program has received widespread media coverage in Timor-Leste through every media median and is one of the most widely recognisable international programs in the country. Key to every program are regular community engagements both formal and informal, at village, district and national level.³²

- 3.33 Evidently, opportunities exist for Defence to support non-government organisations' activities as a means of boosting bilateral trust, respect and friendship in the Pacific.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends the Government consider opportunities to enhance Australia's soft-power and people-to-people ties in the Pacific, including educational exchanges and supporting Australian non-government organisations' initiatives.

Opportunities for closer coordination and collaboration

- 3.34 The current regional security architecture could be enhanced by additional focus on existing arrangements, but also by the establishment of new initiatives which may be leveraged so as to benefit Pacific Island nations and support their self-governance and sovereignty while continuing to deepen defence ties with Australia. The Committee heard that one possible means of increased engagement includes the raising of a Pacific Islands Regiment within the ADF.

Pacific Islands Regiment

- 3.35 Mr Chris Gardiner, CEO of the Institute for Regional Security, proposes the establishment of a Pacific Islands Regiment within the Australian Army:

The creation of such a regiment would...be part of geo-political efforts to build stronger relations between the islands communities from which members of the regiment would be drawn and Australia...residency and eventual citizenship [could] be offered to those serving or having served in the Regiment and their family members. One of the aims of Australia's geo-

political strategy should be the political and social integration of the Pacific community as intimated above, and having growing ex-patriot islander communities in Australia would contribute to such a strategy.³³

- 3.36 The Committee also heard that The World Citizens Association (Australia) supports the establishment of a Pacific Islands Regiment as a means to deepen Defence ties in the region:

...A land-based security force, perhaps a Pacific Islands Regiment, to carryout peacekeeping duties both within and outside the region, and if necessary to intervene in 'extra-constitutional crises' in the region. Interventions by such a force would carry much greater legitimacy than a similar intervention by (say) Australian or New Zealand forces, which are always subject to charges of paternalism or neo-colonialism. It could also provide a significant source of employment for some of the smaller islands.³⁴

- 3.37 The Committee heard that a Pacific Islands Regiment, using equipment, training and facilities supplied by Australia and New Zealand, could undertake peacekeeping missions for the UN and could also be deployed to lead security and stabilisation operations within the island states at the behest of the PIF.³⁵ The PIR concept already enjoys support from some Pacific states including Fiji.³⁶
- 3.38 The Committee understands that establishing any military body would have associated complexities including (but not limited) to consideration of status of forces agreements, pay and conditions, and veterans affairs.

33 Mr Chris Gardiner, *Submission 9*, p.5.

34 World Citizens Association, *Submission 8*, p.5.

35 World Citizens Association, *Submission 8*, p.6.

36 <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/defence/fiji-seeks-pacific-regiment-in-australian-army/news-story/bd425f643a0e5bd3247f06bafccf4e27> accessed 15 Feb 21.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Government consider innovative and practical means of actively deepening its defence relationships with Pacific Island states and other powers in the region. This could include increased and enhanced integration of Australian, Pacific Island and other military forces on combined training and operations.

Committee Comment

- 3.39 The Committee acknowledges the efforts by the Department of Defence and relevant Australian Government agencies to collaborate and coordinate Australia's approach to the Pacific Step-up. A number of witnesses to the inquiry, and submissions received, highlighted the ongoing work of Defence to coordinate across various sectors and portfolios to achieve positive outcomes, including with Industry partners.
- 3.40 Nonetheless, the Committee encourages Defence to consider further opportunities to strengthen collaboration and coordination in the Pacific. As highlighted earlier, initiatives range from greater consultation with defence industry to utilise collective industry expertise, to exploring new avenues to foster people-to-people links and soft-power ties through academic cooperation.
- 3.41 Additional efforts in this space would assist Australia in maintaining and enhancing positive defence relationships with Pacific partners.

