

---

Good afternoon, Chair and Senators,

It is a pleasure for me and my colleagues to represent the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) at these Senate Estimates. It is, as far as we can tell, the first time that ASPI has been called before Estimates. For clarity, ASPI operates under a dual governance framework, regulated as a Commonwealth company under the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act and structured as a public company limited by guarantee under the Corporations Act. The Minister for Defence serves as ASPI's Responsible Minister and Key Management Personnel. Our Charter ensures that we are non-partisan, operate independently of government and that the analysis, judgments and opinions expressed are those of the individual analysts and in their names, not ASPI which does not have institutional views.

And while it is the first time to be called to Senate Estimates in ASPI's almost 25-year history, in my view there has never been a more important time for a defence and security think tank given the threats facing Australia, both at home and abroad. We value the accountability mechanisms provided by parliamentary committees and the Estimates process and welcome the opportunity to be here today. We take great pride in our own transparency, including being one of the only think tanks to publish an Annual Report which discloses all our funding sources, produce a Corporate Plan and, where appropriate, report under the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme. The Department of Defence is our largest source of funding but ASPI has a diversified funding model, involving research projects, major events and international partners.

For decades, Australia was comforted by relative regional stability and global certainty, but we are now in a more dangerous and uncertain period than any since the Second World War. Conflicts and rising tension across the globe have implications for Australian safety, security and sovereignty and, to understand and respond to the danger and uncertainty, those in power need accurate information and tested advice to make the most informed decisions.

Providing contestability and alternative policy advice is the very reason ASPI was set up by government in 2001 and it is the foundation of our work. Since its establishment, ASPI has supported the Australian government, policymakers and Australians navigate extraordinary challenges, first in shaping generational defence investments, then during the global war on terror and, more recently, confronting the spectre of foreign interference. Today, as continuous, concurrent and cascading risks become a permanent state, ASPI's role in delivering contested policy ideas and options, and strengthening public policy discourse, through data-driven research and analysis is more vital than ever.

---

Security is no longer confined to the traditional domains of defence and foreign policy but extends to a complex web of technology, international economics and social cohesion. And where ASPI began in a time before social media to ensure policymakers and the public had access to an independent voice on security, the Institute is now sought after to sift through the relentless noise, falsehoods and foreign interference to keep the public aware of the reality of the threats and ensure national leaders are still making informed decisions.

Our role is to challenge assumptions, forecast emerging threats and provide policymakers with contestable, evidence-based advice. Indeed, the national benefit from ASPI, and the other great Australian think tanks, is that our open-source work on defence and security matters can be communicated with the public in ways which government either cannot or does not. In this way, ASPI carries out its three underlying purposes of providing alternative sources of input to government decision making, nourishing public debate and nurturing the development of strategic policy expertise in Australia.

The dedication of our Council and management is central to this mission. An unwavering commitment to ASPI's charter, which requires us to be fiercely independent and non-partisan, is the crucial safeguard of our credibility. It is their guidance that enables ASPI to navigate the complexities of our funding model while preserving our research integrity and independence.

Behind the published work lies a team of dedicated and highly capable staff. They are the engine of this organisation—a blend of academics and analysts, policymakers and practitioners, from diverse backgrounds, including defence, diplomacy, intelligence, international affairs and corporate. They operate with a deep commitment to intellectual rigour as individual analysts with a collective sense of purpose: to contribute to Australia's security and prosperity. It is their expertise and work ethic that allows ASPI to produce timely, relevant and impactful analysis that informs and shapes public debate not just domestically but internationally, with our work across defence funding, China policy and the intersection of critical technologies, minerals and infrastructure with national security having global reach. Several research initiatives have been internationally recognised for their unique data-driven analysis, including the Critical Technology Tracker and the China Defence Universities Tracker. These products, like our research more broadly, provide governments, industry and civil society with increased understanding of both the current and emerging challenges to national security and potential practical solutions.

In an era in which we have simultaneous conflict, instability and rapid technological change, the need for a think tank that can provide a clear-eyed and unsentimental view of our strategic circumstances has never been greater. As ASPI celebrates 25 years in 2026, ASPI stands ready to continue fulfilling that critical role, underpinned by a firm commitment to intellectual independence, rigorous analysis and informing public debate.

Thank you.