

JOHN MENADUE.

Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
concerning the HMAS Watson expansion

The Navy is proposing a \$500 million expansion of its training facility at HMAS Watson which is adjacent to the historic South Head National Park. There are good defence, urban, economic and social reasons why naval facilities at Garden Island, Watsons Bay and elsewhere in Sydney harbour should be progressively re-located, probably to northern Australia.

I live in Watsons Bay, so I have concerns about the micro/local problems which will arise from the \$500 million expansion at HMAS Watson. Informed people will attest that there is already major road congestion on the Watsons Bay/South Head peninsula. This will only worsen. There will also be considerable noise and dust. Furthermore, the expansion is unlikely to bring any significant benefits to the Watsons Bay area. The Navy will not be employing people from Watsons Bay or resourcing much from local businesses. All that sounds a bit 'nimby-ish'.

My major concern is why this \$500 million expansion has to be located in central Sydney which is already suffering from major population and congestion problems. Navy often refers to the 'Navy economy' that contributes to Sydney. But Sydney does not need more economic help. The 'Navy economy' would do wonders for northern centres that really do need an injection of wealth. Many Australian communities would welcome the orderly transfer over time of both the Garden Island, Watsons Bay and other naval facilities to more appropriate parts of Australia.

The Navy occupies the most valuable sites in Sydney harbour-Garden Island, Neutral Bay, Chowder Bay (refuelling), Middle Harbour and South Head. There is no rationale for this other than history - 'because we're here'.

The Navy is 'digging in' at both Watsons Bay and Garden Island with huge expenditures, but surely if there is any threat to Australia it will come from the north. Having our prime maritime assets located in Sydney harbour does not make sense. Our two primary vessels, HMAS Canberra and Adelaide, are both moored in Sydney Harbour right now. If they had to respond to an 'incident' to our north, they are two to three days steaming away. These two ships spend a lot of time at Garden Island as all ferry passengers know.

Paul Keating and Kevin Rudd, have both contended that over time the Navy should vacate Sydney Harbour. They are right.

The land that would be vacated by orderly departure of the Navy from Garden Island and Watsons Bay could be put to better economic and social use. The Garden Island land would be very useful in support of cruise ships and the tourist traffic they bring to Australia. Vacated Watsons Bay land could be

transferred to the adjacent South Head National Park to ensure that the public has improved access to this historic and beautiful park.

The longer the Australian government delays facing up to relocating our Naval facilities out of Sydney harbour, the longer Australia will be locked into unsound defence and other policies.

Our children and grandchildren are likely to pay the price for the foolish further entrenchment of the Navy in Sydney harbour.

John Menadue was formerly Secretary, Prime Minister and Cabinet, Australian Ambassador to Japan and CEO of Qantas.