

UNCLASSIFIED

Senate Standing Committee Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Parliamentary inquiry – Implications of climate change for Australia's national security - 20 March 2018

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: SSCFADT - Implication of climate change for Australia's national security - 20 March 18 – Q13 – Gallacher

Question reference number: 13

Senator Alex Gallacher

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 6 April 2018

Question:

The submissions from Defence and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade both noted the effects of climate change may foster conflict, crime and terrorism. How is this likely to occur? How is Defence responding to this threat?

Answer:

Defence acknowledges the potential for climate change to impact Australia's national security. Climate change can act as a threat multiplier, intersecting with issues such as population density, poor governance, weak government institutions, poverty and adaptation risk. The national security threats that may emerge include inter-group rivalries, water, food and resource shortages and irregular migration.

Although the full ranges of impacts are not yet able to be precisely determined, there is potential for climate change to exacerbate existing threats. For example, political instability that is exacerbated by the impacts of climate change could create a governance void that is filled by extremist groups or other violent non-government organisations. This void could foster terrorism or encourage the proliferation of extremist ideology. Opportunistic entities, such as transnational organised crime syndicates, will likely also exploit periods of instability, and this may result in increased criminal incursions into Australia's territory and Exclusive Economic Zone. An increase in illegal foreign fishing or irregular migration to Australia may also result from the effects of climate change.

The potential for climate change to exacerbate threats to national security is a national and global challenge that requires collaboration. Defence, along with Australia's other law enforcement and national security agencies, has an important role in the Whole-of-Government (WoG) task of deterring, denying and defeating threats to the safety, security and freedom of Australians. In addition to Defence's principal task of high-end war-fighting, other Defence contributions to WoG Australian national security include: counter-terrorism operations, international peacekeeping, provision of security support to major events, border security operations, Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief, and support to WoG responses to counter criminal acts such as piracy, human trafficking, drug trafficking and illegal fishing.