

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY REGARDING THE DEFENCE PSE CAPABILITY.

Thank you for this opportunity to make this submission.

I am concerned regarding the lack of training opportunities and identifiable career paths available to potential aspirants to become civilian technical tradespeople in the Department of Defence (DoD).

I am deeply concerned of the lack of governmental will to initiate critically needed (and identified) reforms to ensure that vital technical skills and knowledge are developed and retained.

I have no doubt that unless a drastic change of direction is made to governance practices in this matter, the DoD must inevitably stumble into the practical equivalent of an old mineshaft. There will be little point in trying to retrieve the body, he will be very dead and it will take one or two generations to repair the damage that prolonged neglect has made almost inevitable.

I am in my fifties and have spent the majority of my working life in defence. I am a technical tradesman in military air traffic control (ATC) and have served overseas as a frontline serviceman. I am proud that my family and I have served to enhance Australia's security. This same pride compels me to express my concerns regarding the institutionalised malaise and neglect that defines the current approach to Defence PSE.

The only training path that exists for people to become Australian Public Service (APS) Technical Officers in the ADO ATC stream is by first becoming an Air Force Communications Electronics Technician (COMMELEC). Since my time, the quality and duration of the COMMELEC trade has so diminished as to almost ensure that uniformed members upon discharge do not and will not view transition to the APS as a desirable option. The piecemeal support that the ATC environment receives from the RAAF (compared to that for flying squadrons) is the nail in that particular coffin as evidenced by the very low uptake rates in recent years.

Two years ago (despite the APS employment drought created by the recruiting freeze), advertisements for three APS 5 level ATC Maintenance Managers attracted *no applications at all*. Later this embarrassing fact was mitigated somewhat when a recent retiree returned to one of the vacated positions at around 70 years of age. And this position maintains a radar that is directly relied upon by Air Services Australia.

The catastrophic decline of TAFE services has all but extinguished electronics training courses from regional Australia. It is not possible for me to upgrade my qualifications from where I live. The abolition of DoD (plus Air Services / CASA & Telecom) technical apprentice schemes in the 90's plus the Technical Colleges has lit the fuse on a skills time bomb which is already in the process of detonating.

APS technical career progression does not exist. Period. We badly need technical broadband positions to allow staff to naturally develop and be compensated accordingly. We need additional technical specialist employment streams to be raised (not extinguished).

The artificial disconnect that has resulted between ADO uniformed service personnel and APS and contractor staff through political obsession with capping ADF uniformed personnel numbers has hidden the real worth of the latter two categories. All roles used to be performed by service personnel just a few decades ago and all are equally vital to the nation's security.

Ultimately though, in order for our nation to have the DoD that it badly needs, it needs to be properly funded and that will not occur as long as we are locked into crumbling fiat money edifice that is destroying the national economy.

The parliament of Australia is empowered (nay obligated) under the federal constitution to ensure that an honest money system be in place. We can no longer afford the luxury of fractional reserve banking and almost open ended (and secretive) M3 money supply parameters.

To quote Thomas Jefferson:

"And I sincerely believe, with you, that banking establishments are more dangerous than standing armies; and that the principle of spending money to be paid by posterity, under the name of funding, is but swindling futurity on a large scale."

I appreciate that I have appeared to have drifted well of topic but I think I have earned the right. I have previously been a member of a major political party and used to serve on that party's "Defence, Trade and Foreign Affairs Advisory Committee".

In conclusion:

- We need defined civilian training paths that attract young people and give them a meaningful career.
- We need to protect, develop, support and retain technical APS employees.
- We need the funds to ensure that all this can be achieved.
- We need the above reforms to be implemented in such a way that protects them from our wastefully short, cyclical parliamentary terms.
- The DoD needs one person to oversee, manage, resource and be accountable for the health of military ATC technical support, both uniformed and civilian.

I thank you again for this opportunity,

J. Laird