

The Secretary
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee
Parliament House Canberra.

Attention: Senator Mark Bishop, Chair, Legislation Committee.

On behalf of the Anti-Nuclear Alliance of Western Australia, I make the following comments regarding the

Defence Amendment (Parliamentary Approval of Overseas Service) Bill 2008 (No 2)

ANAWA fully supports the amendment put forward by Senator Scott Ludlam on September 17th 2008, which is a fitting follow-on from the amendment first put forward by Senator Colin Mason in 1985. The Australian Democrats have passed carriage of this amendment to The Australian Greens, which is entirely appropriate seeing both parties have strong views against war.

As a Senator during Bob Hawkes' Prime Ministership, I was horrified that he too, called out Australian troops to support senior President Bush's war against Iraq in 1991, without reference to Parliament before he made the commitment. A special sitting of Parliament was called (at great expense to the taxpayers of this country) in January, 1991, to endorse the decision to go to war, which the Prime Minister had already made. It was a very sad state of affairs – no one in the Labor Party had the gumption to disagree publicly with their leader, although there were a few significant absences from the Chambers, when the votes were actually taken.

The fact that a Prime Minister can, in a most cavalier fashion, without bothering to consult his Parliamentary colleagues on this most important of issues, is a failing of our current relative democracy. Sending Australians off to foreign wars is reprehensible in any situation, but especially so, when there has been no formal consultation or any transparency in the decision-making process. It is not good enough for a Prime Minister, of whatever party, to cosy up to cronies in the United States, putting their interests before those of the Australian people. It is a disgrace. Both Bob Hawke and John Howard have betrayed the Australian people in this regard.

In both of these instances, the Australian public was aware of the issues, and many thousands, in both cases, stated very clearly to the Government that the idea of war against Iraq was not a good decision, for a variety of very sound reasons. It is shocking that a bad decision in 1991 was repeated in 2003.

The amendment put forward by Senator Ludlam will ensure that such undemocratic behaviour cannot occur in the future. Surely it is time to learn the lessons of history, so that we do not repeat failures such as these, which have had extremely negative consequences.

We should think well beyond the impacts on our service men and women, bad enough as they are: loss of life, severe injuries and exposure to a cocktail of

destructive chemicals with long-term effects. The psychological impact should also be factored in..... what our service men and women experience in a theatre of war can have devastating repercussions on mental health for the rest of their lives.

We should also be considering the destructive impacts on the families of Iraq, mostly innocent bystanders in a war not of their making. Civilian casualties have been extremely high, despite the United States Government's attempts to cloak the "collateral damage" in euphemistic spin to suit their purposes. Whilst an unpleasant dictator has been dispatched, that job should not have been abetted in any way by Australian forces.

Wherever the United States government has been involved in war since 1990, its forces have routinely used so-called "depleted" uranium, which is of major concern to our alliance. The radiological properties of this material put it in a category different from any other weaponry in the arsenals of warring parties. So while we are spared the explosions from nuclear weapons, many of the negative attributes still apply. Use of this material, a leftover from the nuclear industry, is one way of getting rid of some of the waste, an intractable problem which no country anywhere has managed to solve, despite sixty seven years having elapsed since the dawn of the nuclear age, with the commencement of the Manhattan Project.

The effects of the use of depleted uranium are of course, not subject to transparent scrutiny. It is not in the interest of governments, either of the United States or their allies to probe too deeply into "Gulf War Syndrome" for example. Troops from various countries who suffered unusual illnesses during and after the first gulf war, were told it was from a cocktail of injections they were given, prior to being deployed on the ground. It is this kind of careless exposure to radiation of not only warring combatants, but of the civilian populations, that is so offensive to us, striving as we do to prevent people and the land from being contaminated by radiation.

To date, forty one countries are known to have access to weapons using depleted uranium, which has a half life of 4.5 billion years..... it is almost unimaginable to most people that any substance could retain its contaminating properties for that length of time. Depleted uranium is 1.7 times more dense than lead. It is pyrophoric, with the capacity to ignite and burn through hard targets.

Tank fired DU projectiles have long range and high accuracy. United States M1A1 tanks have recorded an effective firing range of 3,500 metres. A British Challenger tank destroyed an Iraqi tank from a distance of 5,100 metres (www.iaceanter.org)

"What we want to be able to do is strike the target from further away than we can be hit back We don't want to fight even. Nobody goes into a war and wants to be even with the enemy. We want to be ahead and depleted uranium gives us that advantage." (Colonel James Naughton U.S. Army Material command Pentagon briefing prior to March 2003 invasion of Iraq.)

Tanks designed with DU armour plating are impenetrable by conventional weapons Bunker busters are designed with DU for deep penetration into the earth. Consequently, the land itself is a huge loser in any terrain where depleted uranium is used, because of the release of minute particles of uranium oxide into the air. Soil

and water samples from Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan have all shown levels of depleted uranium, as has the urine tested on service personnel and civilians in those countries.

Estimates reveal that from 320-800 tons of depleted uranium was dumped on Iraq during gulf War 1. That amount of radioactivity, dispersed into the environment, is estimated to be 14,000 -36,000 times greater than the atomic bomb delivered to Hiroshima (Prof. Katsuma Tagasaki, science panel: www.uraniumweaponsconference.de).

From the civilian viewpoint, the use of DU is totally unacceptable... Not only do families suffer the bombings, killings, displacements and deprivations of the actual fighting time in a war, but the effects are long-lasting, and visited upon children of future generations. Depleted uranium can cause modifications of the human and non-human gene pools – a very serious charge.

Cancer, leukaemia and birth defects have risen sharply in Iraq since Gulf War 1. In Basrah, the incidence of cancer increased from 11/100,000 in 1998 to 123/100,000 in 2002 and mortality increased 19-fold within the same period. Basrah University research revealed a 100% increase in the incidence of leukaemia among children from 1990-1999 and has related this to DU exposure. (Dr. Jenan Hassan, science panel: www.uraniumweaponsconference.de)

Australian personnel too, were exposed to DU during the first gulf War. Some naval veterans exhibit the same medical symptoms as US. Service personnel who have tested positive for DU contamination. Sirens on board Australian frigates to alert the crew of nuclear, chemical or biological contamination were activated during this deployment in the gulf area. (Philip Steele, veterans' panel: www.uraniumweaponsconference.de).

Australian army personnel were also deployed to protect Kurdish refugees, and Ed Grant an Infantry medic trained as a nuclear biological and chemical defence instructor, who was stationed there now exhibits symptoms of ill health that are consistent with international service personnel who have tested positive to uranium contamination. He advises that none of the women who were stationed in his unit, have been able to conceive since that deployment. (Ed Grant, veterans' panel: www.uraniumweaponsconference.de)

ANAWA's contention is that, if Australians knew more about the use of depleted uranium by our ally in various wars, then there would be even more opposition to Australia engaging in foreign exploits. The radiological weaponry puts another dimension into the already strong disfavor with which most Australians view getting involved in war.

The deliberate obfuscation of the truth about the use of depleted uranium is yet another casualty of war. All the more reason for having open debate in the community and in the Parliament before any future Prime Minister can commit Australians to fighting any war.

ANAWA would also contend that war is obsolete as well as immoral. At the end of almost any war, "peace talks" occur, and post conflict agreements have to be made. Why not cut out the killing and destruction phase? It would be far preferable from every conceivable viewpoint (except perhaps that of the arms manufacturers and stubborn sabre-rattling governments) to move right into the negotiated outcomes phase before there is bloodshed and mayhem, which as we know, can blight the opportunities of future generations to produce healthy children.

We totally support the intent of the proposed Defence Amendment (Parliamentary Approval of Overseas Service) Bill 2008 (no. 2), in the hope that not only is it approved by the Senate, but that it serves to preclude any future war adventurism occurring in this country.

Yours sincerely,

Jo Vallentine
Chairperson, Anti-Nuclear Alliance of W.A.
5 King William Street, Bayswater, 6053.
9272 8786
anawa.org.au