

## Inquiry into the Strategic importance of the Indian Ocean Territories

Submission  
on  
Terms of Reference (ToR) Items:

- The changing regional security environment and security contingencies;
- Defence capability in the territories and associated infrastructure development;
- The scope of maritime, air and other cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners; and,
- Impacts on local communities.

# Enhancing ADF Basing Infrastructure in the Defence of Australia's Indian Ocean Approaches

***“The primary mission of any Defence Force is to maintain and sustain peace. This is best achieved through a robust strategy that encourages others to stay neighbourly a.k.a. Deterrence.”***

***“If you want peace, prepare for war.”***



### **Air Power Australia Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories**

Submission Structure: 7 Pages (incl Title Page) plus 1 Page of Enclosure 1

(Revised with hyperlink link to National Library Archive of APA 2012 Paper, as requested)

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## Recommendations:

1. Australia should without delay construct a fully hardened AFH-32-1084 “heavy load” compliant 11,000 foot parallel runway military (dual use) airfield, Hardened Aircraft Shelters, and supporting fuel and munitions storage facilities on West Island in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, capable of operating the full range of combat aircraft types operated by the Royal Australian Air Force, and United States Air Force;
2. Australia should without delay construct a fully hardened naval replenishment facility with a MIL-HDBK-1025/UFC compliant pier plumbed for POL, and capable of Roll-On Roll-Off transfers of vehicles and materiel, equipped with submarine sheds, in the area of Direction Island in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, capable of supporting applicable Royal Australian Navy and United States Navy assets;
3. Australia should without delay redevelop the existing airfield on Christmas Island into a fully hardened AFH-32-1084 “heavy load” compliant 11,000 foot parallel runway military (dual use) airfield, with Hardened Aircraft Shelters, and supporting fuel and munitions storage facilities, capable of operating the full range of combat aircraft types operated by the Royal Australian Air Force, and United States Air Force;
4. Australia should without delay enhance Christmas Island port facilities to permit all season maritime resupply and replenishment capability for the redeveloped airfield;
5. All new and redeveloped facilities on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Christmas Island should be constructed with proper measures to protect the unique local environment, and utilised for environmental remediation, restoring where possible the original ecosystem;
6. Australia should without delay redevelop the existing RAAF airfields at Learmonth, Curtin and Tindal to provide fully hardened AFH-32-1084 “heavy load” compliant 11,000 foot parallel runway military (dual use) capability, Hardened Aircraft Shelters, and supporting fuel and munitions storage facilities;
7. Australia should without delay install hardened high delivery rate fuel replenishment infrastructure for the existing RAAF airfields at Learmonth, Curtin and Tindal;
8. Australia should without delay redevelop the Truscott-Mungalalu Airport to provide an 11,000 foot runway rated for the sustained operation of Airbus A330-200 and Boeing 767 size aircraft;
9. Australia should without delay install hardened personnel accommodation at extant RAAF airfields at Learmonth, Curtin and Tindal, and the proposed dual use facilities on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Christmas Island;
10. Australia should without delay invoke provisions in the ANZUS treaty and consult with the United States on the intent underpinning the proposed basing upgrades, and agree upon contingencies that would justify joint operations from these bases;
11. Australia should without delay consult with neighbouring nations and Indo-Pacific partners to explain the intent underpinning the proposed basing upgrades, and their potential uses in supporting disaster relief operations across the region;
12. Australia should explore non-traditional options for contracting the proposed basing upgrades, including an independent entity to define, procure and manage the upgrades (modelled on infrastructure schemes like the NBN), or procuring via FMS (Foreign Military Sales) the services of United States government to perform specialist design and construction tasks, while utilising to best effect domestic construction industry capabilities. This recommendation stems from much of what ails and is broken in Defence, today, that is yet to be fixed; as exemplified by the RAAF’s current plans for RAAF Base Tindal.

## **Enhancing ADF Basing Infrastructure in the Defence of Australia's Indian Ocean Approaches**

Australia is now confronting the greatest changes to its strategic environment seen since the end of the Cold War. The US Senate confirmation hearings in January 2017, during which the Trump Administration nominee for Secretary of Defense, Gen James Mattis (Retd), responded to the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator John McCain, provide no better illustration of this: *"I think it's [the current world order is] under the biggest attack since World War Two sir, and that's from Russia, from terrorist groups and with what China is doing in the South China Sea....Russia is raising grave concerns on several fronts and China is shredding trust along its periphery. ... I think deterrence is critical right now, sir, absolutely, and that requires a strong military"*.

Gen Mattis was referring to multiple disputes between China and its neighbours, including China's construction of heavily defended airfields on artificial islands along the southern arc of the South China Sea, and China's territorial claims on the Senkaku Islands, claimed by Japan for at least a century, as well as Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, and its intervention in the Syrian civil war. The incoming Trump Administration has stated its intent to confront both China and Russia over their overt challenges to the post World War II world order. Trump Administration nominee for Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, observed to the Congressional Senate Foreign Relations Committee in January, that *"We're going to have to send China a clear signal that first the island-building stops and second your access to those islands is also not going to be allowed"* and *"This is a threat to the entire global economy if China is allowed to somehow dictate the terms of passage through these waters"*.

None of these developments are surprising, or indeed, unexpected. China has invested in an immense military build-up now running for 25 years, during which its Cold War era defensive capabilities were progressively replaced with not only newer, but also significantly longer ranging offensive capabilities, many of which are competitive, and some of which are superior, to capabilities used and planned to be used by Western nations. These choices in military equipment were driven by a very carefully considered and well developed strategic doctrine, centred on developing the capability to dominate the region inside the *"First Island Chain"*, and deny the use of the region inside the *"Second Island Chain"*, the latter extending through Guam and arcing across the Indonesian archipelago. China's strategic agenda is often described, in part, as *"pushing the United States out of Asia"*, and the evidence supports that argument.

While the strategic situation involving China is of direct concern to Australia, Russia has also conducted a *"Pivot to China"* since falling out with the West over its invasion and annexation of Crimea. Not only has Russia expanded its economic ties with China, but it has also exported more advanced high technology weapons to China, previously not available for export due to fear of Chinese industry reverse engineering this equipment. Last year Russian naval forces conducted joint exercises with the Chinese Navy, and late last year China took the first deliveries of the advanced Russian Su-35S Super Flanker fighter.

Australia needs to address the changes we are observing in the strategic environment with more than token measures or bureaucratic rhetoric. Incoming US President Donald Trump has made it abundantly clear that allies of the United States will be expected to make robust investments in their own defence, and that the US will reconsider its treaty obligations where allies are seen to be shifting defence expenditure burdens on to the US. This resembles a *de facto* revival of the *"Nixon Doctrine"* of the 1970s.

There are two key investments Australia should be making to improve its deterrent posture in the region, to discourage further escalation in the ongoing dispute in the South China Sea.

The first, proper investment in suitable combat aircraft and sufficient aerial refuelling, is outside the scope of this Inquiry, and remains to be addressed in ADF planning despite multiple parliamentary inquiries and what is obvious and real. The second, credible military basing infrastructure to support operations in the Indian Ocean, the Air-Sea-Land Gap and the South-West Pacific, is of direct interest to this Inquiry.

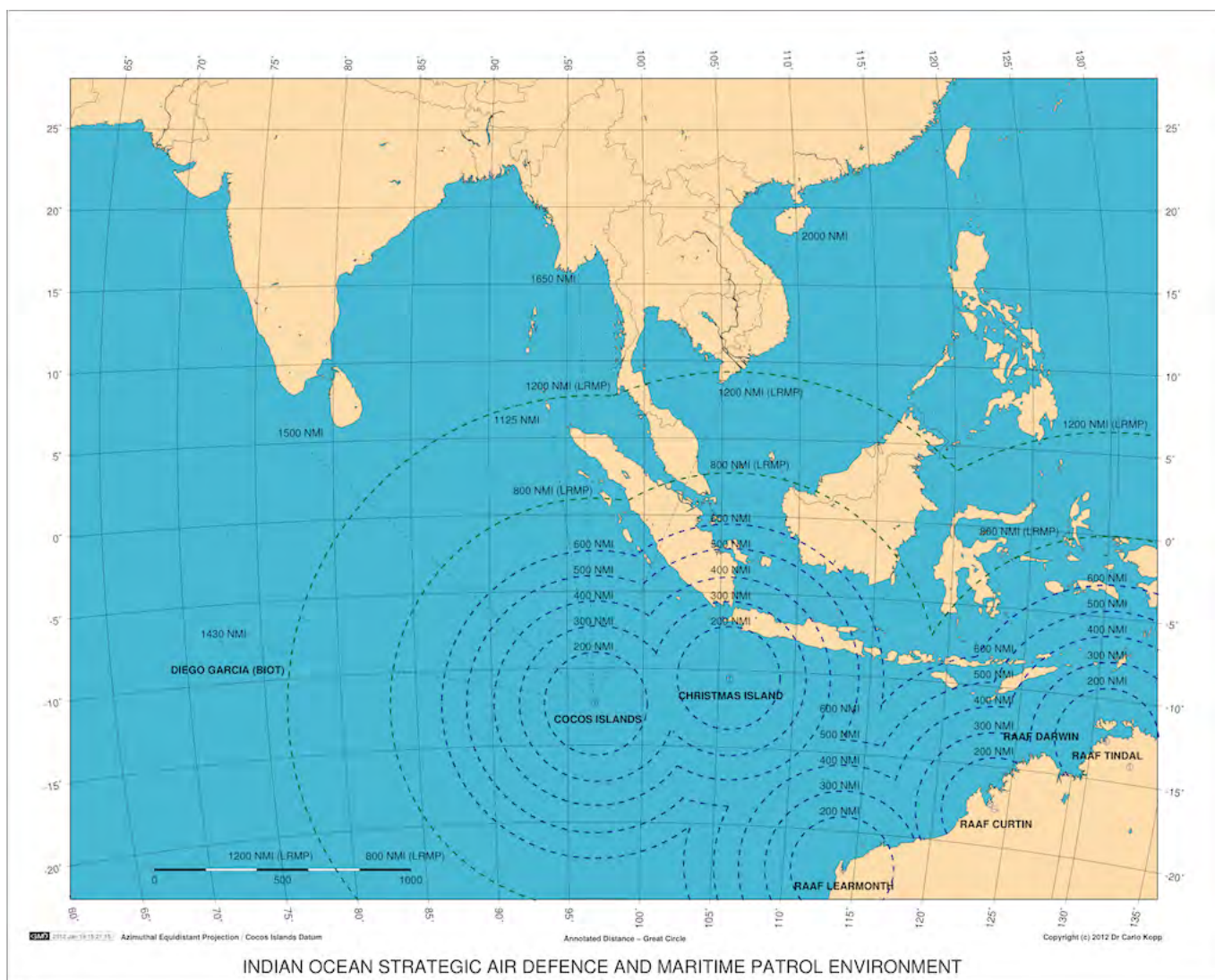


Figure 1: Air Defence and Maritime Patrol Coverage From Australian Sites (Air Power Australia, 2012).

In February 2012, five years ago, *Air Power Australia* published a major study entitled “*Basing Infrastructure Considerations in the Defence of Australia's Indian Ocean Approaches*” that specifically advocated the construction of modern hardened military airbase facilities on the Cocos Islands, and Christmas Island, and *Strategic Forward Operating Base (SFOB)* facilities to support submarine operations (Enclosure 1 - Shortened Version of Study). The purpose of this basing is detailed in the 2012 study, but can be summarised as (cite):

*“Basing sites located in the Pilbara, Kimberley, but especially the Cocos (Keeling) Islands represent valuable assets under such conditions, as they can be used to replenish submarines and surface warships with munitions and fuel, and if needed, crew. Moreover, these bases significantly increase available time on station during LRMP [Long Range Maritime Patrol] sorties.*

*Considering operations deeper into the region, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands also dramatically reduce the demand for tanker aircraft, where tactical fighters need to be deployed. The old adage about “unsinkable aircraft carriers” applies, with the added capability for high volume logistical resupply.*

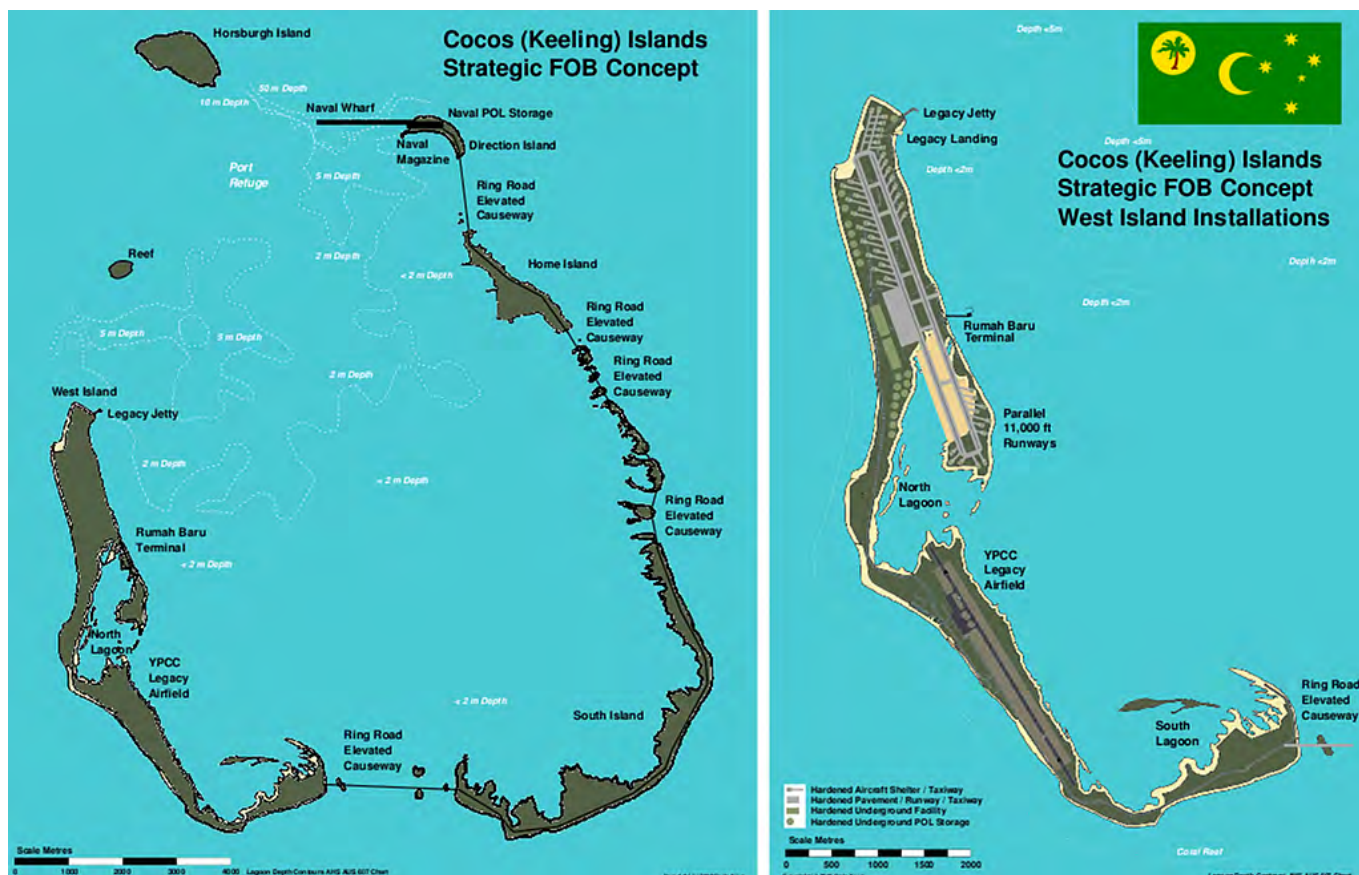


Figure 2: Cocos (Keeling) Islands Strategic Forward Operating Base Concept (Air Power Australia, 2012).

*If Australia intends to protect its outer Western maritime approaches, and perform both maritime denial and sea control operations in the Indian Ocean, then the Cocos (Keeling) Islands are ideally located. Moreover, the location offers the potential for air strikes into South East Asia, Burma, and the South China Sea, with sufficient tanker support. While the latter may appear “valueless” in the current peacetime regional environment, any major shifts in the political and military alignment of regional nations away from the US Alliance could change that assumption literally overnight.*

*Therefore, the safest strategy for Australia is to properly develop the military potential of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, as a naval replenishment site, and an air force “Strategic FOB” along the lines of the SEAC [South East Asia Command] effort in 1944 – 1945.*

*It would demonstrate across the region that Australia has the intent and means to defend its sovereign territories and broader strategic interests in the Indian Ocean.*



*Christmas Island could play a similar role, although it is located within 260 nautical miles of Jakarta, and thus is highly exposed in any military situation where Indonesia is occupied by another power, aligns itself with another power, or actually becomes an adversary in its own right. Contemporary tactical ballistic missiles, ground launched cruise missiles and even the smallest tactical fighters can easily reach Christmas Island from any number of sites in Java."*

*"In the context of supporting United States operations in Asia, well developed air and naval basing infrastructure on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Christmas Island, Pilbara and Kimberley would become a valuable capability in its own right, which Australia could offer the use of in a major contingency. These sites would provide a genuine basing capability "gap filler" located between the major bases in Guam and Diego Garcia."*

*"What the Indian Ocean Offshore Territories offer is depth in the defence of the sea-air gap. An opponent must first overwhelm the bases on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Christmas Island before they can even consider attacks against targets in the Pilbara and Kimberley. In effect, military airfields emplaced on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Christmas Island extend Australia's defensive depth in the sea-air gap out to well beyond 1,000 nautical miles."*

As detailed in the 2012 study, the proliferation across Asia of modern precision guided munitions along with the growth of A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) capabilities and supporting strategies in Australia's region of interest makes it imperative that any basing infrastructure constructed on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Christmas Island, as well as Northern Australia be sufficiently hardened to survive attacks using such weapons (cite):

*" Three primary design considerations are prominent:*

- 1. The ability to survive attacks using a range of Precision Guided Munitions;*
- 2. The ability to sustain prolonged high intensity operations for months, or even years;*
- 3. The ability to support all ADF platforms which might need to use the base, or in an escalated contingency, United States platforms;"*

The *Australian Defence Force Posture Review (ADFPR)* of 2012 did not fully address Australia's developing strategic needs, and fell short in a number of areas. Of particular concern is that the proposed enhancement of RAAF airfields was constrained to aircraft significantly smaller than types operated by the United States, severely limiting the usefulness of these airfields in supporting any joint operations with the United States in an escalated wider regional contingency. Of no less concern is that the proposed hardening measures for airfields were very poorly defined, and failed to specify (cite) *"the use of Hardened Aircraft Shelters and hardened bunkers for facilities, leaving the outcome open to interpretation."* The ADFPR proposed only limited upgrades for the Cocos (Keeling) Islands airfield, and did not propose any enhancements to Christmas Island facilities.

The recommendations provided to this Inquiry reflect the conclusions from the cited strategy research conducted by Air Power Australia between 2004 and 2012, and more recent observation of the deteriorating regional strategic picture, resulting from a failure of deterrent posture in the region.



Figure 3: Great Circle Distances From Australian Sites (Air Power Australia, 2012).

**Enclosure 1: Air Power Australia Analysis 2012-01**

**ENCLOSURE 1:**  
**APA Analysis Paper APA-2012-01**

Follow hyperlink to paper:

[Basing Infrastructure Considerations in the Defence of Australia's Indian Ocean Approaches](http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/46210/20150402-0813/www.ausairpower.net/APA-2012-01.html)  
[ National Library of Australia Mirror]

URL: <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/46210/20150402-0813/www.ausairpower.net/APA-2012-01.html>

**Title:** Basing Infrastructure Considerations in the Defence of Australia's Indian Ocean Approaches

**Abstract:**

*This study is another in the continuing series of publications exploring strategic problems and possible solutions for the Australian Defence Force (ADF). It is specifically focussed on determining optimal basing arrangements for Royal Australian Air Force and Royal Australian Navy assets in the North Western Region of Australia's strategic interest, the Indian Ocean region. Given the considerable cost of basing construction and long term maintenance, determining an optimal basing arrangement is not a trivial problem. Poor choices would impose serious constraints on the ability of the ADF to operate in the Indian Ocean and deny options in supporting United States alliance commitments, while incurring unnecessary and large expenditures of resources during a period of fiscal challenge, coinciding with a period during which the ADF force structure sorely needs to be recapitalised. Given the importance of this strategic problem, the study explores the full range of critical problems which must be addressed in producing the best possible outcome, in terms of long term capability and flexibility. The central conclusion this study draws is that a deep and comprehensive upgrade of the basing infrastructure in the Pilbara and Kimberley is essential to permit Australia to maintain its strategic position in the region, safeguard the economically important energy and resource industries of the North-West, and that further important strategic advantages can be gained by the construction of modern hardened basing infrastructure in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and on Christmas Island. Moreover, there are other important strategic and political payoffs in such basing upgrades. These include enabling and supporting "Military Operations Other Than War", better supporting Australia's principal ally the United States, and in directly facilitating the growth of Australian Industry by providing dual use capabilities in key basing locations. Of equal importance, basing upgrades will require that the fragile environment in this geographical region be respected and carefully addressed in any base upgrade or new construction planning.;*

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