



Australian Government

Department of Defence

Mr Ben Morton MP

Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Chair

I am writing in response to a request for information raised during the 11 May 2017 Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories' private briefing by Director General Military Strategic Commitments, Commodore Jaimie Hatcher, and Assistant Secretary Strategic Policy, Doctor Peter Sawczak. A question was posed regarding whether Defence would support the raising of an Australian Defence Force reserve group on the Indian Ocean Territories.

As the 2016 Defence White Paper recognises, safeguarding Australia's maritime approaches, offshore territories and borders is essential for Australia's national security. Australia's Indian Ocean Territories provide a further measure of strategic depth for gaining broader situational awareness to Australia's north and north-west, including through deployment of relevant Defence capabilities. The Government's enhancements to Defence's maritime and surveillance capabilities will provide Australia with enhanced situational awareness of activities in our maritime domain, including in relation to our offshore territories, earlier detection of emerging threats to our border security and faster responses to deter and defeat any such threat. As such, an additional reserve capability in the Indian Ocean Territories is unnecessary.

The role of reserve capability is to provide round-out and reinforcement to the Australian Defence Force as a whole and, in extreme circumstances, to provide the capacity for an expansion of the Australian Defence Force. Reserve units are regionally based but they do not operate in isolation from the wider Australian Defence Force nor are they allocated local defence responsibilities, apart from the Regional Force Surveillance Units which have roles in protection against illegal smuggling and fishing, and in border security within defined areas of responsibility.

Furthermore, the Army's Regional Force Surveillance capability relies on significant support from the wider Army and on larger nearby regional centres to provide management, logistics and training. An additional reserve group would require significant resource's which is currently beyond the resource allocation of Defence.

I trust that this response provides the information that the Joint Standing Committee requires.

Yours sincerely,

John Geering

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