

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On 15 October 1981 the Senate referred to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for inquiry and report the reference:

Australia's defence co-operation with its neighbours in the Asian-Pacific region, with particular reference to the present scope, purpose, effectiveness and flexibility of such co-operation.

The Committee advertised for written submissions in November 1981, but shortly afterwards the inquiry was deferred while a reference on East Timor was examined.

In June 1983, towards the end of the East Timor inquiry, the defence co-operation reference was re-advertised.

The Committee's report on 'Human Rights and Conditions of the People of East Timor' was presented to Parliament on 8 September 1983.

Public hearings began on the defence co-operation reference towards the end of the Parliamentary Summer Recess. Public hearings were conducted on 23 February, 9 March and 6 April 1984.

Purpose of the Inquiry

It is apparent to the Committee that there is only minimal awareness within Australia of Australia's defence co-operation policies and programs with countries in the Asian-Pacific region. Public discussion of defence co-operation policy and program content has been non-existent, nor has much been written directly on the subject of defence co-operation.

The Committee felt that it was necessary for the public to be made aware that a Defence Co-operation Program existed and to give Departments concerned the opportunity to put on the public record the purpose, objectives, policies, management and achievements of Defence Co-operation Programs (DCPs).

Approach Taken

The inquiry covers the geographical area comprising the countries of South East Asia and the South West Pacific, including Papua New Guinea. The South West Pacific is bounded to the north and east by Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Western Samoa and Tonga.

The Committee believes that there is little value in examining defence co-operation arrangements without placing them within the context of the security of the region.

It is for this reason that the report considers the main influences on regional security, including the role of external countries.

Organisation of the Report

The Report is organised into seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic and explains how this Report has been produced. Chapter 2 examines the Purpose of the Defence

Co-operation Program. Chapter 3 studies the Defence Forces of South East Asia. Chapter 4 is an Overview of Security in the South Pacific. Chapter 5 covers the Defence Forces in the South Pacific. Chapter 6 examines the history of Australia's Defence Co-operation Program, and looks at each of the countries concerned with the program. Chapter 7 views the issues of contention within the Defence Co-operation Program.

Evidence Received

In gathering information about the Defence Co-operation Program the Committee was assisted by those who presented written submissions and gave oral evidence (see Appendices 7 and 8).

The Committee received a wide range of evidence covering a number of areas that were not within our terms of reference. These included human rights in recipient countries, a nuclear free zone in the South Pacific and the possibility of providing military assistance to small island states in the Indian Ocean. Thus while the Committee acknowledges the importance and complexity of these issues and makes some preliminary remarks on them in the report, it has not examined them in detail. The Committee nevertheless appreciates the amount of work which has gone into the preparation of these submissions.