

CHAPTER 10

RECOMMENDATIONS

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Australia's Role in the Region

The Committee recommends that Australia should continue to work through political, diplomatic, trade, aid and cultural initiatives to ensure the peaceful development and stability of the region. Even if the size of our contribution is limited by virtue of our human and physical resources, economic factors and lack of common ground with some nations, this should not inhibit our attempts to demonstrate a genuine concern and a willingness to work for the welfare of the region. Australia's national interests can best be served by ensuring that our role in the region is one of affinity with other nations which are striving to reduce tensions and eliminate existing human and economic disparities.

### Zone of Peace

While the Committee endorses the concept of a Zone of Peace in the Indian Ocean it is difficult to foresee its inception while there is no inclination on the part of the superpowers to leave, while there is no concise agreement among member nations in what form or criteria such proposals should be consolidated, and while regional suspicions over the superpowers' successors persist.

### Superpower Presence

The Committee agrees that the Indian Ocean and the region should ideally be free from superpower rivalry, however it

would not be in the best interests of the region to have one superpower left to dominate if the other withdraws. In the light of the modest numerical naval strength of the superpowers the Committee concludes that it is meaningless to attempt an assessment of whether a "balance of power" exists between them in the Indian Ocean. In a peacetime situation comparisons of ship days, weighted ships days, port visits, fire power etc., cannot clarify the question. The presence of other navies, such as France, Iran and India does not affect that assessment. The "balance of power" remains a hypothetical ponderance and the Committee accepts that a "matching presence" exists between the superpowers in the Indian Ocean and the likelihood of an arms race developing is limited.

### Disputes

The Committee agrees that Australia's best interests are not served if we are seen both regionally and globally to take sides in such issues as the Sino-Soviet dispute, events of that nature are not of Australia's making and we cannot expect to influence their outcome without prejudicing our relations with one or the other disputants, or with others.

### The Soviet Naval Presence

It is the Committee's finding that no direct threat to Australia exists at present from the Soviet Union's naval presence in the Indian Ocean, nor is there a threat of Soviet interdiction to the multinational merchant fleets that ply their trade throughout the region. That is not to say that at some

future time this situation cannot alter but currently an over-reaction to the Soviet presence only serves to enhance the cause of Soviet propaganda in vulnerable areas.

### Aid and Assistance

Australia should continue its bilateral and multilateral aid programs and seek new initiatives and directions for providing assistance to the countries of the region. There should be a constant review of the type of assistance we are able to give particularly to meet the requirements of recipients. The scale of aid and assistance is not as important as its effectiveness, but efforts should be made to extend our program of assistance wherever this can be done in a way which serves the needs of recipients.

### Defence

The Committee recommends that increased attention be given to the efficient naval and maritime air surveillance capabilities of Australia's defence forces in the north and north western region of Australia. As a nation Australia must demonstrate that it is prepared to accept increased responsibility for its own defence. We should continue to share our defence facilities and engage in defence co-operation with our allies and friendly nations as a contribution to securing the stability of the region.

## Drug Trafficking and Smuggling

The Committee recommends that added resources be made available to Australian Customs authorities to increase their capacity to interdict smuggling and drug trafficking activities by seacraft and aircraft along our remote coastline. Possible forms of closer co-operation between Customs and Defence authorities should be pursued to increase the effectiveness of measures against illegal trafficking and incursions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the commencement of the inquiry the Committee sought and received written submissions from Commonwealth and State Departments, academic experts, interested organisations and individuals. The Committee wishes to express its sincere gratitude for the time and effort donated by all the individuals involved in preparing submissions and giving verbal evidence whether as members of Departments, organisations or in a private capacity. In addition the Committee expresses its appreciation to those members of the overseas Diplomatic Corps who gave valuable assistance to our deliberations. Appendix F lists those from whom written and verbal evidence was received and the Diplomatic Missions which made information available.

The Committee through the good offices of the Minister for Defence, thanks the Commander 5th Military District, the Officers and Staff at Swan Barracks, the Special Air Service Regiment at Campbell Barracks, the Naval Officer in Charge, Western Australia, Officers and Staff H.M.A.S. Stirling and the Department of Construction in Western Australia, for their most informative briefings and demonstrations during our field visit to these establishments.

Public hearings commenced on 28 May 1976 and the Committee met on six occasions to hear evidence from witnesses. Whenever possible the Committee took evidence in public and only two in camera sessions were held. The hearings took place in Canberra, Melbourne and Perth and included a field visit to Western Australia. Public hearings concluded on 26 August 1976.

The Committee, from the outset of its examination of the reference has taken care not to isolate the Indian Ocean region as something unique or separate from the overall world situation. To the contrary we have been very aware that the region is an integral part of the whole complex and as well as contributing to the global situation is subject to influences prevailing throughout the world.

Throughout its inquiry on the reference the Committee has been aware of the great importance and sensitivity of the events in the Indian Ocean region and Australia's role in these events. It is evident that the Indian Ocean and its littoral is an area of rapid changes which have an ever increasing global significance. The growing importance of the region has been impressed on the Committee throughout our public hearings and the constant coverage it receives in the news media. The Committee received varied evidence on the issues involved and although in some instances opinions on the subject differed it is gratifying to see a broadening of public interest in the region and particularly in Australia's role and presence in the Indian Ocean.

The Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence has the honour to present this Report.

J.P. Sim  
Chairman

The Senate,  
Canberra  
November 1976