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Name: Professor Lawrence Cram  
Organisation: Australian National University

Submission: Defence White Paper Community Consultation

Submission by The Australian National University

The Australian National University is pleased to provide comment on the Defence Policy Discussion Paper. We note the high level questions asked in the paper and, within the limits given, would like to comment on the important role of research institutes in answering these questions.

The Australian National University is a national resource with a strong tradition of working with the Department of Defence and the ADF. The University is well positioned to continue to serve in these roles, in terms of defence studies and policy, and in terms of the science and engineering base for supporting defence human and material capital.

Whatever the future shape of the ADF, it will perform better if it can rely on the support of Australia's best researchers.

University researchers contribute in two complementary ways: helping to shape the future for the ADF especially in advanced technologies, and supporting the ADF in times of crisis.

The Australian National University is the home of the Centre for Strategic and Defence Studies. The Strategic and Defence Studies Centre is a leading academic body in Australia specialising in studies on strategy and defence. It is Australia's oldest-established centre for the study of strategic, defence and wider security issues. Research undertaken at the Centre includes military, political, economic, environmental, scientific and technological aspects of strategic developments. Strategy, for the purpose of the Centre, is defined in the broadest sense of embracing not only the control and application of military force, but also the peaceful settlement of disputes which could cause violence. The Centre has assisted the major defence training institution, the Australian Defence College, with the strategic studies sections of its courses. Members of the Centre provide advice and training courses in strategic affairs to the Department of Defence and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

In addition to specialist knowledge in the area of strategy and defence, the expertise of humanities researchers, particularly in those working the Asia-Pacific studies can provide many insights into the culture and economics of our nearest neighbours.

Our College of Science and College of Engineering and Computer Science are also well placed to assist in defence matters. Work conducted there includes energy research, robotics and thinking systems, and material science. The Australian National University also houses one of the five laboratories of the National Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Centre of Excellence (NICTA). In a world of rapidly technological advancement it is worth investing in Australia's capability.

To ensure that the full benefits of Australia's research community are realized, the respective roles of DSTO and research-intensive universities (especially the Australian National University) should be delineated. DSTO will find it increasingly difficult to maintain an internal capacity and capability to cover all of the knowledge that the ADF requires in the national interest, and new arrangements for supporting the nation's defence technology capability will need to emerge over the next few years. More active engagement of the research community would decrease the burden on maintaining in-house specialist knowledge on the breadth of topics relevant to defence, and increase the strategic foresight of the nation in terms of security

issues, early resolutions and defence capacity.

In addition to more proactive consultation with the research community on strategic and policy issues, the contribution that research can make in defence innovation, often through non-traditional disciplines, could be better recognized in procurement processes. For Australia to get best value for money in its procurement of defence science to support future equipment of the armed services, it should consider progressively bringing in full competition such that the best provider can be selected. This might be DSTO, Universities or industry, or a combination of the three. To a certain extent this already happens with 'above the line' support but even this would benefit from opening up to full competition.

Systematic collaborations between Government and research institutes in the area of defence would assist in placing Australia in a proactive position within its region, and improve its ability to be a forward looking nation on the world stage. Opening up procurement processes would also allow Universities to compete against and in partnership with traditional Industry suppliers for defence contracts, and increase the degree of innovation and added value in defence science and technology. This would go a long way to building and protecting defence skills and IP in Australia.

1 October 2008

I agree to my submission being published on the Defence website

I agree to my submission being quoted in the Community Consultation Report