Submission by the Northern Territory Government to the Australian Government Defence White Paper 2015 Public Consultation Process

October 2014

The Northern Territory Government welcomes the opportunity to lodge this submission to the Australian Government Defence White Paper 2015 public consultation process. The rapidly changing circumstances in Northern Australia, along with an increasing emphasis on Australia’s Defence engagement with Asia, create a real opportunity for fresh strategic thinking on the role of the Northern Territory in our national security.

Developing and sustaining the conditions and infrastructure to support a long-term Defence presence in the Northern Territory will be further enabled by strong leadership and a long-term commitment to implementing the policies and initiatives which will be contained in the 2015 Defence policy paper. The White Paper is a blueprint for Australia’s national security strategy; and there is no more serious government responsibility than providing for the defence of the nation state and its citizens. Few areas of Australia grasp the gravity of this task – or the consequences of getting it wrong – like the Northern Territory.

A capital city that has lost over 200 of its citizens to hostile air attack fully comprehends the value of a strong Defence presence. A port that was the operational departure point for a regional intervention force understands the importance to Defence of proximity to Asia and sustained logistical support from Northern Australia. The principal destination for thousands of post-war Vietnamese asylum-seekers has a keen appreciation of border security challenges. The rapid deployment of Defence medical teams from Darwin to Bali saved the lives of many Australian bomb victims. And Northern Territorians need no convincing of the need for a swift response to the range of natural calamities common across our cyclone- and earthquake-prone northern neighbourhood.

The Northern Territory has enjoyed a long relationship with Defence. In short, Defence needs the Northern Territory and the Northern Territory needs Defence. The partnership is strong, with the potential for this Defence White Paper to consolidate the relationship even more closely, to the benefit of all involved. This submission outlines:

- the current state of Defence presence and involvement in the Northern Territory;
- those agents of change providing impetus for rethinking the Northern Territory’s place in Defence planning;
- how to deliver mutual support and sustainment for national defence;
- the role of infrastructure and the current resource extraction boom;
- the importance of geographic location and vast spaces as strategic enablers;
- the changing concept of border security;
- opportunities for expanding the US presence;
- the Northern Territory as a hub for regional military training and Defence engagement; and
- a vision for the Northern Territory and Defence in 2030.
Defence in the Northern Territory

Defence involvement in the Northern Territory involves two broad strands:

- its traditional role of sovereign protection and the contemporary role of responding to the need for humanitarian assistance or disaster relief; and
- its role in the strengthening ties with our regional neighbours and assisting them in meeting our shared security challenges.

Most recently, the Australian Government’s approach to guaranteeing our border security, and the imminent formation of the Australian Border Force, has added an additional dimension to the potential role of the Northern Territory in the defence of Australia.

The Northern Territory understands intuitively the practical role and contribution of Defence on national, regional and local levels. The community is welcoming and united in its support for Defence members and their families, who play a positive social role in Defence hubs like Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs.

Across Army, Navy and Air Force, the Northern Territory is home to nearly 10 percent of Australia’s permanent Defence personnel. Along with their families, they account for more than six percent of the Northern Territory’s population, while in Katherine RAAF families account for some 25 percent of the population. Our surveys of Defence families show that well over 90 percent would recommend the Northern Territory as a posting destination.

A growing number of Defence platforms are now based in the Northern Territory; seventy percent of Armidale Class Patrol Boats are home ported in Darwin. A similar percentage of Army’s Tiger Armed Reconnaissance Helicopters and Abrams Main Battle Tanks are located at Robertson Barracks, along with a large fleet of armoured vehicles. A squadron of F/A-18 Hornets train and operate out of RAAF Base Tindal.

The Northern Territory Government has a keen appreciation of the part Defence plays in our society and our economy whether personnel, families or platforms. An expanded Australian Defence Force (ADF) presence in the Northern Territory would be fully supported and warmly welcomed by the Northern Territory Government and community.

At a geostrategic level, much is changing today that increases the importance of the Northern Territory in Australia’s national defence. From the 1987 Defence White Paper until now, prominence has been given to Northern Australia as a focal point of Australia’s Defence strategy. The relocation of RAAF assets from Malaysia to Tindal in the 1980s; the establishment of regional surveillance forces; and the move of an Army brigade group to Darwin in the 1990s occurred in response to this policy. However such troop redeployments to the north of our continent, along with the development of a capacity to sustain their systems and platforms locally, have remained largely static for decades. Despite this, there are strategic developments and shifts occurring nationally and globally which give pause for a rethink of the Northern Territory’s role in how we seek our security in and with the region. For example:

- The Northern Territory’s industrial maintenance and support infrastructure is expanding steadily, in lockstep with the increasing volume of large oil, gas and resource extraction projects; more than 80 percent of Australia’s oil and gas production currently occurs in or near the Northern Territory – and this percentage is growing exponentially.
Australia is in the process of purchasing and introducing a range of major platforms and weapon systems to support its regional operational capability offshore, particularly in amphibious operations, such as: LHD, AWD, Joint Strike Fighters, Submarines, P8 and UAV’s.

Traditional concepts of Defence and National Security, along with the elements of national power involved, are transforming. The imperative to guarantee the sovereignty of Australia’s maritime borders, especially in the north, is becoming increasingly a government priority – the planned formation of an Australian Border Force is a prime example of this.

The geostrategic impact of China’s rise is having knock-on effects, particularly where territory ownership is contested, making parts of the Indo-Pacific potentially more volatile. There is also an upward trend towards collective training and exercising among SE Asian armed forces, driving the need for larger, instrumented ranges.

Australia’s security interests are now defined as being with, rather than from, Asia. This shift is causing a strategic gravitational pull between Australia and SE Asia.

The US rebalance to Asia is manifest practically in a rotating USMC presence in Darwin, along with the greater use of northern Australian training areas by US troops. An expanded US military presence in northern Australia is viewed by the federal government as a desirable by-product of the ANZUS Alliance.

Regional Defence budgets are growing significantly, along with expenditure on updating weapons and equipment. For example, Indonesia’s Defence budget has grown by almost 150 percent in the last two years.

The White Paper writing team should consider these trends when mapping a Defence policy aimed at future-proofing Australia’s national security. In various ways, each of these developments brings even greater importance to the Northern Territory’s role in national defence.

The Northern Territory Defence Support Industry

The Northern Territory is now home to a strong, skilled and capable Defence support industry, particularly when considered in light of the synergies provided by the Northern Territory’s expanding resources sector. This support base includes both those ‘companies and sectors that provide goods and services to the Department of Defence’ and ‘the provision and sustainment of capabilities required by the ADF for the conduct of its operational missions’, as Defence industry is defined in the Australian Business Defence Industry Submission to the 2015 Defence White Paper (30 September 2014, p 2).

The Northern Territory Government is proactive and committed to the development of its capacity to support those Defence elements based in or transiting through the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory Defence Support Industry Development Strategy 2007-2017 was a comprehensive plan for local industry to grow and align its capability to meet the needs of Defence, and to bid successfully for and participate in Defence support projects. Seven years on, this plan is being reviewed and recast to update those elements which have yet to gain purchase with Defence and to take account of changing strategic circumstances. The (small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which comprise the Northern Territory’s Defence industrial support base are today ready and able to cooperate with DMO and prime contractors to leverage and develop the skills of their people in support of Defence. This will also assist in achieving the growth and employment objectives of the Federal Government’s 2030 Vision for Developing
Northern Australia (*June 2013*) and Green Paper on Developing Northern Australia (*June 2014*).

The Defence Support Hub just outside Robertson Barracks, initiated and funded by the Northern Territory Government to facilitate the local repair and maintenance of military vehicles and weapons located in the Barracks, could be better utilised. Given the importance of preserving the backbone of a local Defence industry support base, the Northern Territory Government’s aim is to turn this around, leveraging the support of the 2015 Defence White Paper.

The Northern Territory Government understands that Defence needs secure basing and staging areas for training and operations, as well as assured priority access to ports and other facilities in times of emergency. Defence requires access to an assured, cost-effective, long-term labour market with the necessary skills and supply chains to repair and maintain major assets, on time and on budget. We equally realise that Defence families need the health, educational, housing, transport and other infrastructure to make medium- and long-term residence in the Northern Territory an appealing and natural choice. These changes are rapidly occurring – quality schools and well equipped hospitals are being established to keep pace with the demographic shifts accompanying the resource extraction boom. The vision of the Northern Territory Government is that the Northern Territory will become a preferred home for Defence members, as it is for some 240,000 Australians today.

It is not the job of a Defence policy paper to mandate changes to the competitive processes which underpin the purchase and through-life support of Defence’s major platforms. Nor is it the remit of Defence to direct that prime contractors shift the focus or location of their business operations to sustain Defence capability in certain regions of Australia. The Northern Territory Government fully comprehends this. But decisions on whether and where to base large platforms and the personnel who operate them should also be taken with defence and national security considerations uppermost in mind, including response times and strategic reach, rather than being locked into extant inflexible business models.

Of greater concern to the Northern Territory Government is the anecdotal evidence that some prime contractors are choosing not to base significant elements of their workforce and capital close to ADF units in the Northern Territory on the strength of outmoded stereotypes of Northern Territory industrial capacity and capability. Decisions on where equipment and systems can be most efficiently supported are being taken based on recollections of the Northern Territory’s industrial base of 10 years ago, presuming that little has changed. In fact, large scale heavy industry has undergone wholesale transformation in recent years – it continues to grow in line with the resource sector and broader industry growth. Local industry is equipped to support the large, sophisticated platforms arriving into the ADF’s inventory for deployment and operations in the region and will have the capacity to continue to respond to emerging Defence needs. The Northern Territory Government is keen to rectify the persistent myths around the Northern Territory’s Defence industry infrastructure, workforce and costs, which are doubtless causing suboptimal business decisions by some prime contractors.

For a range of reasons, the art of the possible has fewer limitations in the Northern Territory than in other regions of Australia. The Northern Territory Government will discount no approaches to encouraging a wider presence by contractors in Defence industry. A greater presence and more active involvement by industry could also have potential societal implications, such as helping to close the gap in Indigenous employment outcomes.
History demonstrates that developed, capable and sustainable Defence support infrastructure and industry in the Northern Territory, from ports to parts, is a vital part of Australia’s national security. In view of the shifts and changes in our regional circumstances, nurturing such a national capability is in the interests of all Australians, not just those local industries and employees who stand to benefit from greater interaction with Defence and Defence industry. The Northern Territory Government believes that, with the right policy settings and strategic choices, Darwin will become a natural home port and land base, as well as a staging point, for some of the ADF’s largest and most sophisticated platforms and systems.

Partnering to Accelerate Infrastructure Development

Increasing utilisation by Defence of the dual-use infrastructure currently being developed in the Northern Territory to support the resources sector would also assist in ensuring the growth and sustainment of Defence industrial capacity in the north. There is an obvious strategic risk for maritime operations in and around Australia’s near north, especially in vital shipping lanes like the Malacca Strait, if Australian and allied naval assets have the limited choice of either Henderson in Western Australia or Singapore for repair and maintenance facilities.

Darwin’s Marine Industry Park, planned for the East Arm Logistics Precinct, will eventually provide a valuable third option for HMA and Border Force Ships to undergo scheduled or other maintenance. Establishing the precinct as a maintenance, transhipment, resupply and crew relief and replacement hub will encourage a larger Darwin footprint by prime contractors; greater experience of the tropical conditions in which these platforms will primarily operate; as well as the growth of the Defence industry base necessary for Australia’s long term security with the region.

There is a growing cluster of manufacturing and service industries taking advantage of the increasing demand for service, supply and logistics support for the oil and gas industry. There are additional plans to develop new deep water and industrial ports in Darwin. As the Northern Territory’s port precinct expands, there will be potential for Australia’s naval forces to leverage economies from these facilities. Over time, a more permanent and cost-effective presence in Darwin of a Defence industry support hub will evolve. This could extend to the development of vocational training courses and higher level industry-related R&D at, for example, Charles Darwin University.

In addition to ports and marine services, dual use infrastructure also supports ADF training and logistical mobility over vast distances across the Northern Territory. Rapid growth in transport infrastructure began in the last decade, due to major public and private sector investments. A key rail-port link from Adelaide to Darwin jump-started the development process. Now major gas and other private investments are completing the picture. These are logical developments given that the Northern Territory sits centre-north in the continent, with Australia’s northernmost port and railhead – enabling other states to increasingly connect to that infrastructure.

Connection options include the long proposed rail line from Mt Isa to Tennant Creek to connect north-western Queensland with the AustralAsia line to Darwin, and a rail link from Western Australia’s Kimberley region, including Ord River, to Katherine, to also connect with the Australasia line to Darwin. Sealed, all-weather road networks will complement rail connections across Northern Australia, unlocking potential and enabling development. This will require closer cooperation and collaboration between Defence and local transport authorities to orchestrate optimal means and times for shared investment, use and upkeep of the transport infrastructure serving a wide base of the Northern Territory’s community and economy.
The Northern Territory Government intends to partner even more closely with Defence on mitigation strategies as road and rail links develop, to maximise the efficient movement of heavy vehicles and equipment, while minimising both the degradation of roads and potential disruption to other users, such as the resources, or tourism industries.

The Northern Territory Government is committed to working with Defence leaders and planners, to understand Defence’s high priority roads and other infrastructure requirements across the Northern Territory, to ensure the sustainability of those lines of transport and communication key to ADF mobility and deployment. Additional facilities may be required, with railway potentially the ideal means for moving personnel and equipment across long distances. Preferential access to dedicated, specialised stock for heavy equipment, particularly armoured vehicles, could be negotiated, whether repositioning Defence assets for use throughout the wet season or moving convoys internally to access training areas, such as Bradshaw.

The creation of additional infrastructure will afford opportunities for shared use and deeper consultation between Defence, local transport authorities and other user groups. This will involve not just road and rail networks. The need for such cooperation and coordination will extend to the Northern Territory’s important aviation infrastructure, especially where civilian and military aircraft share common or adjoining facilities. It is also anticipated that Defence might play an important role in supporting the sustainability of the Northern Territory’s commercial air services, which are critical to communities across the vast expanses of the Territory. The Northern Territory Government has made provision for a future second airport in the Darwin region. With such infrastructure a critical component of nation-building across Northern Australia, the Northern Territory Government is committed to a mutually supportive, mutually beneficial partnership with Defence to manage dual use facilities and maximise the efficiencies afforded by ongoing growth in the transport sector.

A critical element of this coordination will be to better understand and harmonise the private-public spend cycle on major infrastructure and other projects in the Northern Territory, particularly to anticipate and sequence with gaps in government spending on Defence and major private sector projects. This will be necessary to smooth the bumps of a boom and bust cycle, which would otherwise see, in leaner times, the departure from the Northern Territory of the skilled labour force currently serving existing projects, such as onshore LNG processing operations. Increasing private sector investment is critical to getting more projects underway. And this will create the potential to share established supply, transport, logistic and supply chain corridors, including by Defence. Only by close consultation and long term planning of current and future projects can the steady stream of major works be orchestrated sufficiently well to ensure sustained economic and demographic growth. This is necessary for retaining a skilled labour force in the Northern Territory, which is in the best interests of Defence, the Territory and Australia.

The Strategic Advantage of the Northern Territory

The Northern Territory enjoys two unmatched competitive advantages in a strategic sense – its geographic location and vast tracts of space. Situated between booming Asian economies and Australia’s already developed south, the connectivity to Asia and proximity to the trade routes through which flows the lifeblood of our economy provides the Northern Territory with a decisive geographic advantage.
The Northern Territory currently has two international airports and Australia’s northernmost railhead and deep water ports. Sixty percent of the world lives within a five hour flight from Darwin and shipping times to Asian ports from Darwin are significantly shorter than from other Australian ports. It is no accident the Northern Territory Government has for some time been growing its connections to and with Asia. This will continue. The implications of the Northern Territory’s unique strategic geography, should the Defence White Paper assess expanded military engagement with Asia as desirable, are readily apparent.

Australia and SE Asia are growing strategically closer together. For example, the defence and security relationship between Australia and Indonesia, formally enshrined in the Lombok Treaty, has been steadily improving since the 1999 East Timor intervention, on the back of bombs in Bali and the Australian Embassy, as well as Australia’s response to the 2004 tsunami in Aceh. The Northern Territory has been constructing close links with Indonesia over many years, with an Indonesian Consul-General resident in Darwin. More broadly, Australia enjoys positive military-to-military relations with almost every ASEAN member nation. And Australia’s small but significant 2014 trilateral Army exercise with the US and China in the Northern Territory may be a sign of things to come. Northern Territory training and exercise areas should become an increasingly important vehicle for Australia’s (and US PACOM’s) Defence engagement with Asia.

There may be additional spinoffs for Defence industry from this enhanced military interaction, including partnerships between industry in certain SE Asian countries, such as Indonesia, given its proximity, its growing economy and the pre-existence of a considerable indigenous Defence industry base. Defence might additionally consider locating more of its regional engagement activities in the Northern Territory, given the world-class conferencing infrastructure now available in Darwin.

The Northern Territory Government and citizens are pleased and proud to welcome our increasing numbers of temporary residents from the US Marine Corps into the Northern Australian community. The Northern Territory Government believes more frequent engagement with other elements of US Pacific Command, including the temporary location of other force elements along the lines of the USMC model, would be mutually beneficial for the US and Australia. Should the Federal Government consider formal approaches to the US inviting a broader footprint by US Armed Forces in Northern Australia, particularly around training and exercising, the Northern Territory Government would strongly support such an expanded presence. The Northern Territory Government would be pleased to integrate its own public diplomacy efforts with those of the Federal Government, in reinforcing to US military seniors the positive community attitudes among Territorians to the growing US Marine Corps presence.

The paradigm which has guided and informed traditional thinking on our national defence and security is shifting perceptibly. The concept of Defence in Australia’s current regional strategic reality involves a deal more than ADF personnel and equipment, as Darwin-based Northern Command fully comprehends. The success achieved by integrating various elements of national power under a unified command structure, as with Operation SOVEREIGN BORDERS, has prompted some fresh thinking on how best to ensure our border security and apprehend those who would seek to enter Australia illegally, whether via people-smuggling operations or to import lethal jihadist experience from distant battlefields. The impending formation of an Australian Border Force is a central plank in Australia’s changing platform for delivering border security. It is probably time for the Defence White Paper to consider the relocation of elements of our whole-of-government defence and security apparatus from Canberra to Darwin; not just ADF commands and units.
At a practical level, the current situation, whereby Customs vessels operating in our northern waters are taken off task for maintenance and repair interstate, needs to be rethought. And we ask that the White Paper writing team recognise the broader, post-SOVEREIGN BORDERS concept of ‘Defence’ and the increased importance this places on developing infrastructure in forward operational bases like Darwin.

The Northern Territory enjoys a strong reputation as a regional training hub, having hosted many successful combined exercises, showcasing Australia’s vast landscape and affording unfettered freedom of movement, on land, sea and in the air. From the KANGAROO series of exercises throughout the 1990s, to the KAKADU manoeuvres at sea and PITCH BLACK in the skies, the Northern Territory has offered ideal training and exercising facilities for decades.

Regional Defence budgets are increasing, and Defence industry in Asia is also developing, possibly in reaction to the anticipated arrival of the F-35 into service with some SE Asian air forces. For example, South Korea and Indonesia are cooperating to produce a comparable, 4.5 generation fighter, while Japan is attempting to produce indigenously a similarly capable aircraft. The advanced systems being increasingly operated by our neighbours and partners in the region will probably make their own exercise areas near dense population centres unviable.

The Northern Territory may find itself increasingly hosting training and exercises by regional partners, given the advantage of space. As discussed earlier, there may be scope to explore a business case for either constructing or expanding a fully-instrumented range facility in the Northern Territory which will attract regional involvement more frequently than just those occasions when the Northern Territory hosts multilateral exercises, such as PITCH BLACK.

In 2020, the Northern Territory will welcome the first of Australia’s F-35 fighters. The guidance, targeting and electronic warfare systems on board these fifth generation aircraft creates considerable electronic noise, making options for training and exercising with these and other platforms near built-up areas very limited. The wide, open expanses of the Northern Territory, including above ground, offer the perfect research, testing, proving, training and exercising space for these kinds of platforms and systems. Fully-instrumented training ranges located close to our partners in the region, testing piloted and unmanned vehicles under all atmospheric conditions, would afford obvious exercising and operational advantages. In this context, existing ranges should be improved and extended, or new tracts of northern Australia might be developed and made fit for purpose. For example, the Northern Territory’s Land Development Corporation is currently working with Army commanders in Robertson Barracks to double the size of the close training area adjacent to the barracks.

The Northern Territory is in the fortunate position of having large areas of land controlled by either the Northern Territory or Australian governments. While the nature of land tenure has presented some challenges in the past, impending changes to the Land Rights Act will reduce the complexity and range of land tenure arrangements through administrative and legislative reform to devolve decision-making and enable fast tracking processes.
A Vision for the Northern Territory and Defence 2030

Given the strategic future focus of the White Paper, it is useful to consider how Defence’s presence in the Northern Territory might look in 2030. The Federal Government has made clear its intention to unlock the untapped potentialities of Northern Australia over the next 15-20 years – naturally, this initiative is welcomed by the Northern Territory Government. It is noted that developing and sustaining a significant Defence presence, along with the infrastructure, industrial base and skilled labour market which support its operational capabilities, is an important part of this policy.

Given the Northern Territory’s longstanding relationship with Defence, in peace and in war, and the absolute commitment by successive Territory governments to fostering and growing that relationship, it is the hope of the Northern Territory Government that the White Paper writing team will reflect in the policy paper not only the current reality of the Territory’s role in ensuring Australia’s security but also our growing local industrial capabilities that will underpin our ability to support ADF operations in and through the region into the future.

By 2030, in lockstep with the Federal Government’s vision for developing Northern Australia, we anticipate an infrastructure program that brings the Northern Territory much closer to the rest of Australia, whether by rail links to the eastern coast or via the satellites and high speed wireless of the NBN. This will be augmented and accelerated by the extractive resources boom currently underway and which is set to expand. Importantly, the housing, health and education developments expected to accompany the Northern Territory’s population growth and demographic change will attract a greater ADF presence, including many who choose to settle in Northern Australia.

The Northern Territory Government also hopes that, by 2030, several large naval platforms, such as LHD, will be based in, not merely staging through, Darwin. Likewise, aircraft such as the F-35, P8 and UAV will be exercising and conducting missions into the region from permanent home bases across the Northern Territory. Platforms and equipment such as this will attract a more robust presence by all prime Defence industry contractors operating in Australia today, as well as some joint ventures with several SE Asian partner firms. And Northern Territory SME’s, like those currently represented under the AIDN-NT banner, will be playing their role within a capable and reliable Defence industry support base – not only in supporting ADF operational capability but also in providing skills training and a sustainable employment future for young Territorians.

The Australian Government, through the Defence White Paper process, is urged to:

- Recognise the true realities of the Northern Territory’s industrial expansion, following the growth of resource sector projects, and fully appreciate how this now affords access to the shared infrastructure and skilled labour necessary to develop a strategically desirable Defence industry base in Northern Australia
- Take decisions on the basing and home porting of strategically important Defence platforms in view of Australia’s strategic circumstances and proximity to our region, rather than the location of prime contractor facilities, closer to Antarctica than Asia
- Through closer coordination, collaborate with the Northern Territory Government to harmonise and, if necessary, to sequence predictable resource spending levels by Defence, avoiding the kind of boom-bust cycle that could undermine the sustainable labour market and other industry needed to support ADF operations in and through Northern Australia
• By orchestrating complementary diplomatic outreach with the Northern Territory Government, encourage foreign governments to take advantage of the Territory’s proximity, space, capacity and military training facilities to maximise Northern Australia’s potential as a hub for regional Defence engagement activities

• Factor the Australian Government’s wider policies and plans for investing in Australia’s infrastructure and unlocking the full potential of Northern Australia to boost Australia’s prosperity, when considering aspects of Defence policy like ADF basing, Defence industry development and regional engagement

Conclusion

The Northern Territory has enjoyed a long relationship with Defence and fully understands the importance of a strong Defence presence, which it welcomes and supports. The strategic geography of the Northern Territory is uniquely important to the defence and security of Australia. Its advantages of proximity to the region and vast space have yet to be fully exploited. A relatively small and agile jurisdiction, the Northern Territory continues to rapidly move in a positive direction, with regard to infrastructure, industry, demography and labour; outmoded paradigms regarding the Northern Territory persist in some quarters, constraining both the commercial thinking of prime contractors and the strategic thinking of some Canberra-centric policy makers.

The Northern Territory Government fully understands that the Defence White Paper must address primarily issues of defence and security. But Defence’s role in assisting the development of Northern Australia is part of a broader nation-building exercise that will deliver prosperity and other benefits for all of Australia, thus contributing to the essential economic foundation of our long term national security.

Until now, Darwin has been viewed largely as a jump-off point, or forward operating base for Australia’s military deployments and operations into the region. But trade globalisation and the resulting gravitational pull between Australia and Asia have shifted the dynamics behind this mindset. The Northern Territory is no longer near Asia; it is of Asia. Now is the time for a Defence White Paper that fully recognises this strategic reality and responds accordingly. Australia’s national security future in and with our near neighbourhood depends not only on such fresh thinking – but also on converting strategy and policy into concrete actions.