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**REPORT ON THE VISIT OF
THE DEFENCE SUB-COMMITTEE**
of the
**JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
DEFENCE AND TRADE**
to
**NURRUNGAR-WOOMERA AND NORTHERN TERRITORY
OCTOBER 1991**

APRIL 1992



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA, ACT, 2600

MEDIA RELEASE

TABLING OF REPORT

**VISIT OF THE DEFENCE SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE
ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE
TO
NURRUNGAR-WOOMERA AND NORTHERN TERRITORY**

A report on the visit of the Defence Sub-Committee of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade will be tabled in both Houses of Parliament today.

During October the Defence Sub-Committee inspected the Joint Defence Facilities at Nurrungar and Pine Gap and defence facilities in the Darwin area. The Sub-Committee also visited Melville and Bathurst Islands.

The decision by the Defence Sub-Committee to visit northern Australia reflects the recent focus of defence planners on the north. The visit also coincided with the final stages of the Sub-Committee's inquiry into the Australian Defence Force Reserves - the report of which was tabled in the Parliament last November. The inquiry therefore benefited from the opportunity for the Sub-Committee to inspect the Reserve force, NORFORCE, soldiers at that time.

The visit to the Northern Territory provided opportunities for the Sub-Committee to inspect the RAAF Bases Darwin and Tindal and the Darwin Naval Base.

Mr Ted Lindsay, RFD, MP said in Canberra today:

"The Sub-Committee is particularly interested to see at first hand the impact of major developments such as the Force Structure Review and the Defence Regional Support Review. Visits such as this one provide tremendous opportunities for Members to keep in touch with the concerns which inevitably emerge from significant change."

Further information may be obtained from:

Mr Ted Lindsay, RFD, MP (06) 277 4072
Chairman, Defence Sub-Committee

Gillian Gould (06) 277 2098
Secretary, Defence Sub-Committee

30 April 1992

The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

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THE DEFENCE SUB-COMMITTEE
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JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
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OCTOBER 1991

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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>MEMBERSHIP</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>PARTICIPANTS</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>PROGRAM</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Monday 28 October 1991</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Tuesday 29 October 1991</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>INSPECTIONS</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>WOOMERA</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>JOINT DEFENCE FACILITY - NURRUNGAR</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>PINE GAP</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>RAAF BASE TINDAL</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>HQ NORCOM</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>NORFORCE</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>NAVAL HEADQUARTERS DARWIN</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>DARWIN NAVAL BASE</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>HEADQUARTERS RAAF BASE NORTHERN AREA</i> ..	<i>17</i>
<i>DARWIN SQUADRON - MELVILLE AND BATHURST ISLANDS</i>	<i>18</i>

**JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
DEFENCE AND TRADE**

MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

36th Parliament

Senator C. Schacht, (Chairman)
Hon. M.J.R. MacKellar, MP (Deputy Chairman)

<i>Senator M.E. Beahan</i>	<i>Mr L.D.T. Ferguson, MP</i>
<i>Senator V.W. Bourne (from October 91)</i>	<i>Mr E.J. Fitzgibbon, MP</i>
<i>Senator D.G.C. Brownhill</i>	<i>Mr E.L. Grace, MP (from November 91)</i>
<i>Senator H.G.P. Chapman</i>	<i>Mr R.G. Halverson, OBE, MP</i>
<i>Senator B.K. Childs</i>	<i>Mr N.J. Hicks, MP</i>
<i>Senator N.A. Crichton-Browne</i>	<i>Mr C. Hollis, MP</i>
<i>Senator G.N. Jones</i>	<i>Mr J.V. Langmore, MP</i>
<i>Senator D.J. MacGibbon</i>	<i>Mr M.J. Lee, MP</i>
<i>Senator P.A. McLean*</i>	<i>Mr E.J. Lindsay, RFD, MP</i>
<i>Senator G.R. Maguire</i>	<i>Hon. J.C. Moore, MP</i>
<i>Senator J. Valentine</i>	<i>Hon. G.F. Punch, MP (to November 91)</i>
<i>Mr A.R. Bevis, MP</i>	<i>Mr J.L. Scott, MP</i>
<i>Mr D.M. Connolly, MP</i>	<i>Rt Hon. I. McC. Sinclair, MP</i>
<i>Mr S.C. Dubois, MP</i>	<i>Mr W.L. Taylor, MP</i>
<i>Dr H.R. Edwards, MP</i>	<i>Dr A.C. Theophanous, MP</i>

* *Resigned from the Parliament on 23 August 1991*

*Acting Secretary
to the Committee:*

Mrs J. Towner (From October 1991)
Ms M.J. Vincent (From 17 February 1992)

DEFENCE SUB-COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE

36th Parliament

Mr E.J. Lindsay, RFD, MP (Chairman)
Senator D.J. MacGibbon (Deputy Chairman)

Senator D.G.C. Brownhill
*Senator P.A. McLean**
Senator G.R. Maguire
Senator C. Schacht (ex officio)
Mr A.R. Bevis, MP
Mr S.C. Dubois (to October 90)
Mr E.J. Fitzgibbon, MP

Mr R.G. Halverson, OBE, MP
Mr N.J. Hicks, MP
Hon M.J.R. MacKellar, MP (ex officio)
Hon J.C. Moore, MP
Hon G.F. Punch MP (to November 91)
Rt. Hon. I. McC. Sinclair, MP
(from May 91)
Mr W.L. Taylor, MP

* *Resigned from the Parliament on 23 August 1991*

Secretary to the Sub-Committee:

Gillian Gould

PARTICIPANTS IN THE INSPECTIONS

Mr E J Lindsay, RFD, MP

Senator D J MacGibbon

Senator D G C Brownhill

Dr H R Edwards, MP

Mr E J Fitzgibbon, MP

Mr R G Halverson, OBE, MP

Mr N J Hicks, MP

Hon J C Moore, MP

Rt Hon I McC Sinclair, MP

INTRODUCTION

This report of the visit of the Defence Sub-Committee of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade to Woomera-Nurrungar and the Northern Territory is the third of a series of such reports to be tabled in Parliament.

The decision of the Sub-Committee to visit northern Australia reflects the recent focus of defence planners on the north. In August 1991 the Sub-Committee conducted the first phase of its inspections of northern defence establishments when it visited northern Queensland and the Torres Strait.¹ This trip to the Darwin region represents the second phase of inspections in the north.

The first report pointed out that such inspections are an invaluable adjunct to formal inquiries referred to the Committee. At the time of this visit, the Sub-Committee was nearing the completion of its inquiry into the Australian Defence Force Reserves.² Inspections of NORFORCE complemented the Sub-Committee's earlier inspections of 51 Far North Queensland Regiment and contributed considerably to Members gaining a wider appreciation of Reserve operations in the difficult conditions of northern Australia.

A focus of the trip to North Queensland was surveillance of the northern coastline. The Sub-Committee extended its examination of surveillance through briefings by the Naval Officer Commanding Northern Australia Area (NOCNA) and inspections of the Darwin Naval Base.

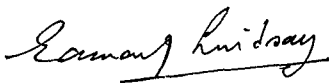
Given the expansion of the defence presence in northern Australia, the Sub-Committee received briefings on recent developments from the Commander Northern Command and the Officers Commanding RAAF Base Tindal and RAAF Base Darwin.

¹ Report on the Visit of the Defence Sub-Committee of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade to North Queensland and the Torres Strait, August 1991.

² Tabled in Parliament on 28 November 1991.

The Sub-Committee included the Joint Facilities at Nurrungar and Pine Gap in its itinerary. While the Members benefited from the opportunity to see the facilities first-hand, it should be noted that the briefings provided to the Sub-Committee were unclassified. The Members of the Sub-Committee are very critical of the anomalous situation in which US Senators receive classified briefings for which Australian Parliamentarians are not granted clearance.

Nonetheless, the Sub-Committee is appreciative of the efforts made by all concerned in the arrangements for the inspections and for the opportunities provided for informal discussions.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "E J Lindsay". The signature is written in dark ink and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Mr E J Lindsay, RFD, MP
Chairman
Defence Sub-Committee

PROGRAM

Monday 28 October 1991

- 0630 hours Depart RAAF Fairbairn
- 0810-1000 hours Inspection and briefing at Woomera
- 1030-1200 hours Inspection and briefing at Nurrungar
- 1305-1600 hours Tour and briefing at Pine Gap
- 1747 hours Briefing, dinner and informal discussions at RAAF Base Tindal

Tuesday 29 October 1991

- 0700-8010 hours Tour RAAF Base Tindal
- 0930-1025 hours Briefing at HQNORCOM by COMNORCOM and CO NORFORCE
- 1030-1100 hours Briefing by NOCNA
- 1100-1130 hours Tour of Darwin Naval Base
- 1145 hours Briefing by CDRRAAFNA
- 1500-1830 hours Inspections of NORFORCE soldiers on Melville and Bathurst Islands

(The Sub-Committee was scheduled to visit South Goulburn and Croker Islands but owing to aircraft failure this was not possible)

INSPECTIONS

Monday 28 October 1991

WOOMERA

The Sub-Committee was met at Woomera airport by Colonel Michael E Hess, Commander, Joint Defence Facility Nurrungar, before transferring to the Woomera township. The Sub-Committee was briefed by the Acting Area Administrator of Woomera, Mr Jo van Homelen on the history, the present role and the future prospects for Woomera.

The briefing addressed the role that Woomera had played in the advancement of world knowledge in defence, rockets, missiles and satellites.

The Woomera Prohibited Area is 127,000 square kilometres - half the size that it was some six years ago when the eastern area was excised to accommodate the Roxby Downs Olympic Dam Developments. The total population outside the Woomera township is between 300 and 350. This includes people located on the 26 properties in the area.

The population of Woomera township is about 1800 of which some 500 are US nationals and dependants. The role of the town has changed from providing residential engineering and operational support to the Woomera Rocket Range. It is now predominantly a Residential and Support Base for the Joint Defence Facility Nurrungar which lies 22 kilometres to the south.

The town of Woomera and the supporting infrastructure are under the control of the Area Administrator Woomera who is attached to the International Policy Division of the Department of Defence. Costs - totalling about \$12 million - are shared between the United States and Australian Governments. These funds are administered by the Defence Support Centre Woomera (DSCW) which employs about 190 personnel. DSCW is responsible for all the functions of a municipal authority such

as power, water, hospital, fire and ambulance services and for the maintenance of the airfield, roads, drains and the sewerage farm.

The briefing stated that the area is administered under Defence Force regulations which declare the area for the testing of war materials. Constant contact is maintained with pastoralists and the Aboriginal people on developments and activities in the area.

The Sub-Committee was briefed on several problems which reduce the functioning of the airport. Although the 2440 metre runway is in excellent condition and can handle any aircraft including the F/A-18, F-111, C5A, C141, 707, 747 and C130 Hercules, the taxiways are unable to support continuous operations. Taxiway lighting also needs replacement. Hangars need refurbishing and water and sewerage and fire alarms need replacing. The fuel farm is in poor condition and only a limited aircraft refuelling capability is maintained. Equipment and wiring dates back to the 1950s.

Funding for the maintenance of the runway is provided equally by USAF, RAAF and Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO). DSTO has extended the operations of its Aircraft Research and Development Unit (ARDU) to Woomera. ARDU is the RAAF's flight test organisation which provides specialist facilities for research development, test and evaluation of Defence Force aircraft, airborne weapons and aircraft systems.

As a result of the implementation of the Commercial Support Program by the Department of Defence, all activities in Woomera that are not 'core defence' activities will be considered for civilianisation or contracting out. At the time of the Sub-Committee's visit, DSCW was reviewing all of Woomera's activities to identify areas where it would be practical to place currently 'in-house' options in competition with the commercial sector.

JOINT DEFENCE FACILITY - NURRUNGAR

The Sub-Committee was welcomed to Nurrungar by Colonel Michael E. Hess. Major Tom Donaldson, Acting Deputy Commander - Nurrungar, briefed Members on the mission, manpower and management of the Joint Defence Facility Nurrungar (JDFN).

The Sub-Committee inspected the Nurrungar site, including the upgraded physical security devices which were put in place following the 1989 demonstrations.

The JDFN is a ground station used for controlling satellites in the Defence Support Program (DSP). The briefing stated that the DSP mission, via a satellite-borne surveillance system, provides early warning of a ballistic missile attack, ballistic missile launch related data and nuclear weapon detonation data. Nurrungar's function is to detect all launches, information on which is processed by the Overseas Ground Station (OGS).

Manpower at JDFN is drawn from the USAF, USN, RAN, ARA, RAAF and AWASCO.

Discussions focused on the arrangements to be put in place to develop joint command arrangements following the expiry of the Joint Facility Agreement in 1998.

The Sub-Committee was told that there has been a significant change to the position of the Deputy Commander - who is the Government of Australia Representative. The Deputy Commander is now fully briefed and is therefore in a position to take over fully the JDFN.

The Sub-Committee observed however that the change in the position of the Government of Australia Representative was not reflected in the relationship which exists between the Minister and the media with respect to public disclosure of information. Information publicly available in Australia does not parallel that which is publicly available in the United States.

The Sub-Committee regarded as totally unacceptable the situation in which publicly available printed knowledge of the Joint Defence Facility exceeded the information which was made available to the Sub-Committee during the briefing. The Sub-Committee noted that information appearing on the Congressional Record is not officially made available to Australian Members of Parliament.

Within days of the visit the Minister for Defence, in response to a Question Without Notice in the Senate on 5 November 1991, confirmed the role of the Joint Defence Facility during the Gulf War:

As part of Desert Storm the coalition forces used space based systems to provide weather data, navigational assistance, information on the geographic disposition of forces and other related intelligence.

Nurrungar is . . . an important part of the defence support program - the DSP - which provides early warning of missile launches, surveillance the detonation of nuclear weapons. During the Gulf war the DSP detected the launch of Iraqi scud missiles and provided warning to coalition forces and to civilian populations in Israel and Saudi Arabia.

This information on the role of Nurrungar during the Gulf War was not, however, provided to the Sub-Committee at the time of the visit.

PINE GAP

The Sub-Committee was met by Mr Don Kingsley, Chief of Facility, Joint Defence Facility, Pine Gap and Mr John McCarthy, Deputy Chief of Facility, who escorted Members on an inspection of the basin.

Pine Gap is situated some 15 miles south-west of Alice Springs on a 'radio quiet area' site chosen for the suitability of its weather and geography. The facility is fully self-contained. Surrounded by a double fence, its security barriers are sufficient to provide protection against demonstrators. Few protests however have occurred in recent times.

Personnel of the facility are accommodated in Alice Springs. The facility employs approximately 700 people. The Sub-Committee was told that of these 19.25 per cent are employees of the US Government, 9.5 per cent are Australian Government employees and 71.25 per cent are contract staff. Of the latter 65 per cent are Australian.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the Pine Gap facility contributes about 20 per cent of the value of the input into the Alice Springs area through its salaries totalling \$28.5 million, local contracting estimated at a value of \$1.7 million, local purchasing of supplies in the region of \$7 million, rentals at 42.2 million and donations amounting to about \$250,000.

The briefing stressed that Pine Gap is not a US base. The Australian Government Representative (the Deputy Chief of Facility), who is empowered through Section 10 of the *Defence (Special Undertakings) Act*, controls the entire facility. The Minister for Defence approves access by Australians while the US Secretary of Defense approves access to operations activities for the US. Generally, Australia is responsible for the grounds and the US for the inside sections of the buildings. No uniformed military personnel are stationed at Pine Gap. All US Government personnel are US civilians.

RAAF BASE TINDAL

Upon arrival at RAAF Base Tindal the Sub-Committee was briefed on the history, role and functions of the base by the Officer Commanding RAAF Base Tindal (OCTDL), Group Captain B J S Mouatt, AM. The Officer Commanding RAAF Tindal has the additional responsibility of being the Sector Air Defence Commander for the Northern Sector. Under current arrangements, whenever the Sector is activated, OCTDL has to deploy physically to Darwin to discharge this responsibility.

The Sub-Committee was told that work had begun on the base in 1984 and on 1 October 1988 the base had become operational. RAAF Base Tindal which is located in a 'cyclone-safe' area is the home base for 75 Squadron. Aircraft are to be housed in hangars each containing five

bays. Although the hangars are non-hardened they provide adequate protection for the aircraft against the environment.

No 75 Squadron is equipped with the McDonnell Douglas F/A-18 Hornet aircraft which is an all-weather multi-role aircraft. The Sub-Committee was told that there were 16 aircraft based at Tindal at the time of the visit. The Sub-Committee raised the issue of the attrition rate.

The briefing stated that all fighter squadrons have their integral maintenance capacity which enables them to deploy as a complete unit and perform operating level maintenance. The capability of 75 Squadron to maintain its own aircraft has been enhanced because of the distance to Williamtown where all major maintenance is conducted. The Squadron can therefore perform intermediate level maintenance on selected components such as engines and some avionics.

The briefing described the concept of 'passive defence' whereby facilities are dispersed and camouflaged by the aesthetic use of trees and by dust on the roofs of houses and other buildings. The Air Force and the Army are engaged in an integrated effort to provide for the defence of the airfield. With the addition of Army personnel or a RAAF Airfield Defence Squadron, the base can be made relatively safe from ground attack in a low-level contingency.

The briefing stated that because Tindal is a secure point of entry, it is also a strategic airhead for the logistic support of deployed forces. During exercises or real contingencies, Tindal will act as a supply and support base for aircraft and forces throughout the region. Casualties will be medevaced to Tindal where their condition will be stabilised before being flown to southern centres.

The Sub-Committee appreciated the opportunity that was provided to continue discussions on an informal basis over dinner at the Officers Mess at RAAF Base Tindal.

Tuesday 29 October 1991

The Sub-Committee inspected the Base and accommodation at Tindal before departing for Darwin.

HQ NORCOM

The Sub-Committee was briefed by the Commander Northern Command, Brigadier F J Hickling, ADC on the roles of NORCOM and on aspects of maintaining a defence presence in northern Australia.

The role of NORCOM is to plan for and conduct the defence of Australia and other defence tasks within the assigned area of responsibility, other than those tasks which are the specific responsibility of another Joint Commander or Joint Force Commander.

Members were told that NORCOM has an overall responsibility for surveillance, interdiction and interception. The areas of responsibility of each Service are not described in terms of distance or area but agreed through negotiation between the Service commanders.

The role of COMNORCOM is largely a coordination role. Part of COMNORCOM's responsibilities involve planning operations which rely to some extent on civil authorities such as the system of civil/military communications.

COMNORCOM reports direct to HQADF. Component Commanders (Maritime, Land and Air) report to Joint Headquarters and COMNORCOM. Component Commanders have operational authority over assets assigned to NORCOM.

The briefing described the extremes of the climate of northern Australia and the impact of the weather in which the Services routinely have to operate. The forthcoming Exercise Kangaroo 92 is designed to test the ability of the ADF to operate in such conditions.

The briefing referred to the impact of the Force Structure Review on the northern area with respect to the continuing build-up of defence strength especially at RAAF Base Tindal and the development of the bare base RAAF Scherger. The briefing also referred to the relocation of 2 Cavalry Regiment to Darwin in the latter half of 1992.

COMNORCOM stated that he foresees the establishment of a Joint Force Headquarters building with facilities for the Commander and component Service commanders. This view is supported by the recommendation of the DRSR in May 1991 for a single administrative centre with one supporting staff.

NORFORCE

The Commanding Officer NORFORCE, Lieutenant Colonel Keith Jobson, briefed the Sub-Committee on the history, role and organisation of the Army Reserve Unit, NORFORCE.

The briefing stated that NORFORCE was raised on 1 July 1981 to provide a tactical ground surveillance capability in the Top End of Australia. It was the first of the three Regional Force Surveillance Units (RFSU) to be created, ahead of 51 Far North Queensland Regiment and the Pilbara Regiment. NORFORCE is unique among Army Reserve units because it is on 28 days notice to move for operations. It is classified as a Priority 2 unit in terms of resource allocation which is the same priority as the Operational Deployment Force based in Townsville. 35 patrols can be deployed in the field with one month's supplies.

The role of the unit is to conduct reconnaissance and surveillance in the Northern Territory and the part of Western Australia which lies to the north of the local Government boundary for the Kimberley region. According to the briefing, 'NORFORCE is in the business of locating and reporting on enemy activity within Northern and North-Western Australia'.

In carrying out this role, NORFORCE has been given the following tasks.

In War:

- a. conduct surveillance and reconnaissance operations including route reconnaissance;
- b. acquire and maintain military geographic information of the area of operations;
- c. provide information for, and assistance to, other units deployed in the area of operations;

- d. act in a stay behind capacity.

In Peace:

- a. mount patrols in the area of operations;
- b. develop and maintain military skills relevant to operating in the area of operations to achieve wartime tasks;
- c. acquire infrastructure and military geographic information;
- d. employ the special skills and knowledge of the local population;
- e. provide guides and information required by visiting units;
- f. maintain an ARA capability to provide assistance to state, territory and federal authorities as directed in accordance with extant defence policies.

The briefing noted that the peacetime tasks carried out by NORFORCE are essentially the same as they would be in time of war. The RFSU concept provides that peacetime patrols are conducted, insofar as possible, under operational conditions, so that the transition to patrolling in a state of war will be relatively easy.

The unit's Area of Operations (AO) covers some 1.8 million square kilometres. It is responsible for a coastline (including adjacent offshore islands) which is 4,200 kilometres in length. This stretches to 11,000 kilometres if the riverine areas are included. The briefing stated that, to date, the unit has depots at 13 outstations. A presence has been established in 27 locations within this area.

The unit is organised around a Regimental Headquarters which includes a Signals Troop, four Regional Surveillance Squadrons (Darwin, Arnhem, Kimberley and Centre Squadrons) and a Base Squadron. Base Squadron, located in Darwin, provides support through

a Quartermaster Troop, a Transport Troop, a Medical Troop and a Technical Support Troop.

At the time of the Sub-Committee's visit NORFORCE consisted of 530 soldiers including 35 ARA, 50 women (10 per cent of strength) and 110 Aboriginal men (22 per cent of strength). The briefing pointed out that the unit has experienced little difficulty in recruiting new members and neither is retention a major problem as it is in many other units. Wastage in 1987 was 16.7 per cent which was nearly half the national average for Reserves. In 1990 it was down to 10 per cent.

The Sub-Committee was told that NORFORCE conducts most of its own training courses. They include the RFSU Induction and Patrol courses, the Patrol 2IC and Patrol Commander courses, Patrol Medic, Signaller, Drivers and Small Craft Handler courses. Each course is conducted over a 2 week period, usually in the Darwin area. Soldiers from outlying areas are transported to Darwin for training courses by the two Caribous stationed at RAAF Base Darwin. The Squadrons, assisted by unit training teams, also conduct their own training in remote localities.

The unit is equipped with a variety of craft including 14 inflatable and six aluminium boats and a seven metre Shark Cat which often operate in conjunction with patrol boats. At the time of the Sub-Committee's visit the unit was awaiting delivery of new roving radios. The unit is also to be issued with new weapons. Weapons are currently stored in Broome, Derby, Kununurra, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs, Darwin, Gove and Groote Eylandt. Three rifle ranges have been established by NORFORCE.

The briefing provided information on South Goulburn, Croker, Melville and Bathurst Islands in preparation for the Sub-Committee's visits.

NAVAL HEADQUARTERS DARWIN

The Sub-Committee was briefed by the Naval Officer Commanding Northern Australia Area (NOCNA), Captain Tim Lewis, ADC, RAN at Naval Headquarters.

The Sub-Committee was told that a fleet of six Fremantle Class Patrol Boats (FCPB) operates from Darwin, covering an area from the Gulf of Carpentaria to Port Hedland and seaward to 200 nautical miles or meridian line of Australian Fishing Zone. There are about 650 Naval personnel stationed in the region, including staff at Shoal Bay, the Naval Communication Station at Humpty Doo, the 60 people involved in Fleet Intermediate Maintenance Activity at the Darwin Naval Base and the crews of the patrol boats.

The briefing stated that the role of NOCNA is:

- a. overseeing all general Naval matters and representing Navy's interests;
- b. command of Navy establishments in the Northern Australia Area (NAA);
- c. administration of all Navy assets and functions in the NAA;
- d. Naval control of shipping;
- e. training of the Naval Reserves in Darwin;
- f. operational control and local administrative control of the six FCPBs and Landing Craft Heavy (LCH) HMAS *Balikpapan*;
- g. oversight of Program Management and Budgeting for the NAA;
- h. Maritime Component Commander Northern Command.

The Darwin RANR division has attracted some 65 Reserves. The Darwin Port Division is equipped with the LCH HMAS *Balikpapan*.

Members of the Sub-Committee were shown a videotape of HMAS *Gladstone* apprehending Javanese gill netters north of Cape Wessels. The videotape clearly demonstrated the stages involved in apprehending a vessel found operating illegally in Australian waters.

HEADQUARTERS RAAF BASE NORTHERN AREA

The Sub-Committee was briefed by Commander RAAF Northern Area (CDRRAAFNA), Group Captain Bruce Wood, ADC on the role and facilities of RAAF Base Darwin and the impact of DRSR and the development of RAAF Base Tindal on RAAF Base Darwin.

The Sub-Committee was told that RAAF Base Darwin is the forward operating base for an offensive force. Darwin can only be defended from Darwin - this cannot effectively be done from Tindal.

The view was presented that the proposals for Darwin emanating from DRSR will adversely affect operational readiness at Darwin. DOA87 has designated Darwin as a forward operating area which supports a case for Darwin being treated differently from bases in the south. If Darwin is treated purely as an administrative unit, essential support and control will be removed from CDRRAAFNA which will create operating difficulties.

The issue of the impact of civilianisation was raised at the briefing in the context of the particular situation of the northern base in, for example, a cyclone area.

The briefing addressed conditions of service in Darwin. Accommodation for service personnel is basically in good condition. Only 20 married quarters have not yet been refurbished. Although units were smaller than those at Tindal, they were considered to be of a high standard for tropical conditions. About 60 families live away from the base.

A new Airmen's mess has been established. The Officers and Sergeants Messes are undergoing phased refurbishment over two years.

Concern was expressed that some maintenance work had been delayed as a result of the uncertainty about the future of RAAF Base Darwin in light of the role ascribed to Tindal.

Discussion revolved around the issue of there currently being two Group Captain positions in the north. At the time of the visit it was considered that the CO Darwin justified the rank, given its responsibility for bare bases Learmonth, Curtin and Scherger and the representational command role, but that this would need to be reconsidered after the implementation of the recommendations of DRSR.

DARWIN SQUADRON ON MELVILLE AND BATHURST ISLANDS

The Sub-Committee's itinerary included visits to South Goulburn, Croker, Melville and Bathurst Islands. Owing to mechanical problems with the only Caribou stationed at Darwin at the time, the departure of the Sub-Committee the islands was delayed until the second Caribou could be flown to Darwin from Tindal.³ As a result, there was insufficient time available to inspect the patrols at South Goulburn and Croker Islands.

None of these islands is equipped with a Reserve depot. The Sub-Committee was told that plans are under way to establish depots on some of the islands within NORFORCE's AO. This issue has been under consideration for five years. It is proposed to construct depots about the size of a triple garage at a cost of approximately \$10,000.

Telecommunications have recently been established on the islands which are serviced by barge. Each island has a power station and a clinic with one or two nurses. Each island depends on bore water for its supplies.

At Melville Island the Sub-Committee spoke informally with NORFORCE soldiers. Members were briefed by Mr Graeme Whiting, President of the Pirlingimpi Community Government Council, on the Garden Point community. Members were told that the community was very supportive of NORFORCE and young people were encouraged to

³ Two Caribou aircraft are normally stationed at Darwin. As a result of the grounding of the Nomad aircraft, one Caribou had been deployed to RAAF Base Tindal.

join the Reserve. The Sub-Committee was taken on a tour of the community before leaving for Bathurst Island.

At Bathurst Island the Sub-Committee was greeted by the tribal elders who performed a series of traditional dances. One dance depicted the Japanese attack on Darwin on 19 February 1942.

The Chairman of the Defence Sub-Committee conducted a formal inspection of the soldiers of Darwin Squadron at Nguiu. The Sub-Committee was impressed by the high standard of the unit.

Members were able to engage in informal discussions with the soldiers during a tour of the township which included inspecting historical relics of the Second World War.

The briefing by CO NORFORCE confirmed that all Aboriginal communities are extremely supportive of NORFORCE. The tribal elders and community councils take considerable pride in having members of their tribe in the unit. They see military training as being complementary to their own traditional training because the skills and discipline developed in NORFORCE are beneficial to both the individual and the community.



Senator Chris Schacht
Chairman