

The Defence Strategic Review and the importance of the Australian Defence Force Reserve

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An overview of the submission provided by the Defence Reserves Association (DRA) to the Defence team conducting the Defence Strategic Review (DSR) into Australian Defence Force (ADF) is described in this paper. The DRA has long advocated for a better resourced and more integrated Reserve component to boost ADF capacity, both in current and contingency operational tasks. The effectiveness of the Reserve in recent regional deployments and in domestic disaster relief operations has often been acknowledged and praised, but no one would contend that resourcing of the Reserve or integrated planning for their optimisation has been a priority at the strategic centre in Canberra.

Key words: Defence Reserves Association (DRA); Defence Strategic Review (DSR); Reserve; Reservists; Australian Defence Force (ADF); regular army; permanent members.

Introduction

This article provides an overview of the submission provided by the Defence Reserves Association (DRA) to the Defence team conducting the Defence Strategic Review (DSR) into Australian Defence Force (ADF) Reserve Service. The undertaking of this Review was a specific recommendation of the 2023 DSR.

The DRA is the only veteran led and member-based advocacy and support body whose sole focus is on the ADF Reserves, or part time, component of the ADF. This focus is two-fold: first, on ensuring there are appropriate supports and services from the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) for those who have served in the ADF Reserves; and second, optimising the utility of the Reserves and the capabilities that can be generated from it.

The ADF Reserves (herein referred to the Reserve) have undertaken significant roles to enable ADF operations, tasks and activities, both onshore and offshore over the last two decades - often at short notice and within settings that are not conducive to optimising their capability potential. To be clear, Reservists are all those serving in the ADF who are not permanent members. They may be women and men who have previously served in the permanent force or those who have only ever served in a part-time mode. Reserve members have a range of capabilities that could be further optimised and have the potential to harness new and emerging skills and technologies identified in the DSR as central to Australia's future security and prosperity.

Realising the potential of the Reserve component will require improvements and change in the areas of legislation and policy covering Reserve usage, their conditions of service, resourcing, and most crucially a paradigm shift in the attitudes of the Canberra defence bureaucracy towards the Reserve of the future. The DSR confirms that the Reserve is a fully integrated component of the ADF and this requires a flexible approach to how elements of the Reserve are recruited, resourced and used.

The single greatest contribution to national security this Review can make is to enable an outcome where Govern-

ment and Defence approach future planning with a common understanding that the nation requires a fully integrated and aligned ADF, with permanent and Reserve components that complement and sustain each other.

What the ADF Reserve is for

The Reserve consists of a range of inter-related and critical capabilities in the context of a capable ADF with depth and resilience. The Reserve provides:

- An opportunity for service in the ADF other than in the permanent force and connects the ADF to communities across Australia.
- Elements to round out, reinforce and supplement the permanent ADF as required;
- A capability to mount and sustain regional operations.
- The mechanism to retain personnel and their skills and experience post transition from the permanent force within the ADF structure.
- Specialist skills and capabilities, both emerging and existing, required by the ADF such as cyber, space, medical and logistics.
- Domestic security support and homeland defence capability, principally from the Army's Reserve 2nd Australian Division.
- A natural disaster response through current and future Defence Aid to the Civil Community arrangements.
- An important contribution to ADF scaling and national mobilisation contingency planning in the event of a national security emergency.

Factors impeding Reserve optimisation have been identified in successive Defence Reviews and Reports into Reserve matters (a total of 46 since 1972) and at many annual DRA National Conferences. The most significant and recurring factors have been:

- The need for a stable resourcing model that delivers discrete and predictable budget allocations to the Reserve as a percentage of overall ADF funding year on year to generate and sustain capability;

- Sub-optimal location of some Reserve facilities in terms of aligning with demographic trends and ADF recruiting objectives;
- The limited capacity of the ADF to identify, track and utilise Reserve civilian skills, as appropriate, to optimise their utility and contribution to Defence capability;
- The need to fully realise shared and sponsored workforce opportunities with Industry and Academia, particularly in relation to developing new capabilities as recommended and urged in the DSR;
- The lack of equivalency in issued equipment for Reserve elements – especially when designated units are integral to providing a reinforcing/round out effect to specific permanent ADF units;
- The lack of flexibility and speed in *ab-initio* recruiting, and the need for more effective engagement with permanent ADF personnel as they transition to encourage part-time service and maintain an incentivised connection with those who have initially chosen not to actively serve in the Reserve; and
- The need for reform of inequitable and inflexible Reserve personnel conditions of service, including access to and portability of superannuation, remuneration settings, health and wellbeing support for Reservists and their families and appropriate DVA entitlements. Consideration should be given to moving to a unified and flexible set of ADF conditions of service, provided through a continuum of permanent and Reserve service access based on annual levels of tempo and commitment.

Some of the specific recommendations the DRA has made in their submission to the ADF Reserve Service Review team include the need to:

- Establish a policy and decision-making body, co-chaired by the Vice Chief of Defence Force (CDF) and Chief of Personnel, which will meet regularly to review and determine what capabilities are needed from the Reserve component of the ADF and what is required to develop, sustain and deliver them.
- Assist the achievement of permanent ADF recruiting objectives by holding provisional service members in an ADF experience setting that is enabled through the Reserve.
- Empower the Reserve to recruit and enlist *ab-initio* members to meet their requirements and be accountable for these outcomes.
- Establish regional Reserve administrative and training hubs in each State/Territory to support Recommendation 3 outcomes, and provide scalable facilities to deliver initial training and processing in the event of national mobilisation.
- Resource and explore greater shared training and collaboration with Industry and Academia through an appropriate forum that includes all relevant stakeholders and a consequent targeted engagement and capability model.
- Expand and enhance the ADF Gap Year program, and improve its accessibility and utility.
- Reinvigorate university linked regiments and squadrons, or create new joint university based units, to grow the pool of tertiary educated Reserve person-

nel, including consideration of (Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) support incentives.

- Provide greater support and focus to the development of Reserve elements within Navy and Air Force where these are required, enabled by Service facilities that will develop scalable skills without the need for prior permanent Navy or Air Force experience.
- Strengthen the nexus between cadet experience and future ADF service.
- Provide appropriate support to the families of Reservists and address other long-standing issues of inequity and inflexibility that have been identified in the current Reserve conditions of service.
- Ensure that contemporary Reserve nomenclature and practice within a modern, integrated workplace are reflected in the Defence Act revisions and complementary updates to the Reserve Service Protection Act, related Veteran Affairs legislation and enabling policy in both Defence and DVA.
- Fast track the recognition and recording of civilian skills and qualifications, including those relevant to new domains of cyber, space and a nascent nuclear capability through engineering, physics and related disciplines, as well as developing guided weapons and drone skillsets. Consider establishing enclaves within the Reserve to hold these experts/operators.

Conclusion

The DRA has long advocated for a better resourced and more integrated Reserve component to boost ADF capacity, both in current and contingency operational tasks. The effectiveness of the Reserve in recent regional deployments and in domestic disaster relief operations has often been acknowledged and praised, but no one would contend that resourcing of the Reserve or integrated planning for their optimisation has been a priority at the strategic centre in Canberra.

A larger and more flexible part-time component has the potential to mitigate some of the current Permanent force recruiting challenges in Navy, Army and Air Force as well as open up the only viable pathway for Defence to grow and sustain capabilities in cyber and space.

By incentivising more young Australians to serve part-time, especially utilising their civil skills and qualifications, and getting more ex-permanent ADF people to stay engaged, we will go a long way towards creating the essential base on which to build a national mobilisation plan should our security situation require an all-in effort for national defence.

The Author

Michael Annett is a Royal Military College (RMC) Duntroon graduate. He commanded a troop, squadron, and unit in the Australian Army from 1980 to 2006. On leaving the Army, Michael worked in veteran support and services roles, including over a dozen years as CEO Returned Services League (RSL) Victoria. Michael continued to serve in the Reserve, commanding 4 Brigade and returning to full-time service in 2015/16 to deploy to Afghanistan as the Task Group commander. He is currently the National President of the Defence Reserves Association, the Vice President Melbourne Legacy, and Honorary Colonel of the 4th/19th Prince of Wales's Light Horse Regiment.