

'Addressing Maritime Environmental Concerns; The Role and Commitment of the Royal Australian Navy for Last Ten Years'



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Introduction

As an overview to Australia's broad maritime region and to elaborate on a theme from the current Chief of the Australian Defence Force, General Angus Campbell, one should imagine themselves in a geostationary satellite above Australia. If you apply this lens, you would observe the world's most populous nation¹, the largest democratic nation on earth, the largest Muslim majority population. Additionally, eight out of ten of the most populated sovereign states on earth are located in the Indo-Pacific region and comprise 50 per cent of the world's population. The region also contains 12 members of the G20, including three of the world's largest economies and ten of the world's smallest economies². The world's largest navy, seven of the world's largest militaries and five of the world's declared nuclear nations are located in the

Indo-Pacific. Moreover, the Indo-Pacific also has the largest and most powerful fishing fleets with over three million vessels. Eleven out of the nineteen leading global fishing countries are located in this region and collectively these fishing nations account for 73 per cent of the global fish catch. Whilst, China remains the world's largest fish producer, six of the top ten global fish producers are in the Indo – Pacific; this region also consumes two thirds of the global fish supply³. In this populous and diverse and very maritime region, fish matter as do the broader threats to the maritime domain.

The aim of this short essay is to demonstrate that Australia has a keen interest in the maritime domain of the Indo-Pacific and for over a century has invested in ensuring that its resources remain sustainable and that threats to the maritime domain are met with a resolute whole of government approach. To

1. Lieutenant General Angus Campbell, "Preparing for the Indo-Pacific Century: The Australian Army Perspective," (Speech, Royal United Services Institute, White hall, London, December 08, 2017) <https://rusi.org/event/preparing-indo-pacific-century-australian-army-perspective>

2. Campbell, "Preparing for the Indo-Pacific Century: The Australian Army Perspective,"

3. Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 'The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture, 2018 – Meeting the Sustainable Development Goals', Rome, 2018, pp 71, accessed on 25 September 2018 <http://www.fao.org/3/I9540EN/i9540en.pdf>

achieve this I will firstly, review Australia's efforts in maintaining good order at sea with a short operational overview, secondly, present Australia's Pacific Step Up policy, thirdly, examine the recent Indo-Pacific Endeavor and lastly highlight the Australian government's commitment to the maritime domain.

Maintaining Good Order at Sea

The idea that maritime security threats require a multi-agency response is not new. As far back as 1911, four out of the seven Australian government departments became involved when the Commonwealth Naval Forces (CNF) deployed the gunboat HMAS Gayundah on a constabulary operation to the remote northwest coast to enforce Australia's maritime resource zone and to deter illegal fisherman. In 1910 the idea that a Navy might be useful for more than warfighting had evidently taken root among other national agencies. Late that year the Minister for Trade and Customs, F.G Tudor, asked the Defence Minister, Senator G.F Pearce, whether a CNF warship could be found to make a 'special cruise' in northern waters. The novelty of this request needs highlighting. Australia's population, infrastructure and trade routes were all in the south, and few in power had ever needed to consider the security of the inhospitable and largely unknown northern coastline⁴. But it was from the north that all threats must come, and here that foreign intruders already flouted the Federal government's authority⁵.

Gayundah was the largest and appeared the most suitable for this task, in actuality the Gayundah was not much bigger than a modern patrol boat. Departing from Brisbane on 22

April, Gayundah coaled at Thursday Island and Darwin before sailing again on 13 May. The Commanding Officer, Commander Curtis searched several reefs and islands during his passage west, but saw nothing of note until reaching Scott Reef on 25 May. Here, Curtis found two Dutch schooners at anchor. When tide permitted, Gayundah's men boarded the vessels and discovered a quantity of Trepong and trochus shell. Curtis informed the Dutch master that he was illegally fishing in territorial waters and, despite protests that Curtis was violating international law, he towed the vessels to Broome. To prevent escape and reinforce their status as seized vessels Curtis placed on each an officer and two men every night and during the day one signalman. Gayundah brought the two schooners into Broome on 29 May. They were handed over to civil authorities next day, but because her officers had to remain to give evidence at the subsequent court case Gayundah could not leave Broome until mid-July⁶.

The delay forced the Chief of Naval staff Rear admiral Creswell to seek an extension to the cruise, but permitted the Department of External Affairs to take an interest in the return passage. Additional tasking given to Curtis included relocating a Federal scientific expedition from the Roper River to Thursday Island and intelligence surveys of some of the lesser-known bays and inlets. In effect, this fledgling navy had begun establishing a system aimed at preventing threats to good order from developing into something more dangerous. It is a task that continues still, evolving into tools such as the Australian Maritime Identification System and broader information sharing arrangements amongst key stakeholders⁷.

4. Frank Broeze, *Island Nation: A History of Australian's at Sea*, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin 1998) 184 - 185

5. Commonwealth Forces, *Navy Orders: Designation of the Naval Forces of the Commonwealth*, No 77 (Melbourne: Government Printer, 5 October 1911) 3 and Commonwealth of

6. Australia, Sea Power Centre - Australia, "The Special Cruise of the Gayundah," Semaphore, (Canberra: SPC-A, 2012) 1-3 Sea Power Centre - Australia, "The Special Cruise of the Gayundah,"

7. Sea Power Centre - Australia, "The Special Cruise of the Gayundah," and Force (ADF), and the development of an Australian Maritime Identification System (AMIS). Under AMIS, it is envisaged that ships proposing to enter Australian ports will be required to provide comprehensive information such as ship identity, crew, cargo, location, course, speed and intended port of arrival at 1000nm from Australia's coast. At 500nm from the coast, information would be sought voluntarily from vessels proposing to transit Australian waters but not enter a port. Within Australia's 200nm exclusive economic zone (EEZ), the aim would be to identify all vessels other than day recreational boats.

Gayundah finally returned to Brisbane on 25 August 1911, and although making no further arrests, all tasks were successfully completed. Today the Royal Australian Navy allocates at least 1800 patrol boat days to the national support task each year. Although just one of the stakeholders involved in maintaining the security of Australia's borders, as Gayundah's cruise demonstrated, the RAN has a longstanding interest in protecting Australia's offshore resources.

Pacific Step Up

Australia is a member of the Quadrilateral Defence Coordinating Group (QDCG) led by the United States Coast Guard. The QDCG, or 'Quads' as it is known colloquially, aims to provide a forum to share information, conduct operational level reviews of countries' defence and related interagency activities in the region, and provide coordinated support to Pacific Ocean island states defence and security agencies. Operation Solania is the Australian Defence Force (ADF) contribution to maritime surveillance within the Pacific Ocean region and supports the policing of the EEZ of the island states including operations under the Niue Treaty, which was established in July 1992 to enable cooperation in fisheries' surveillance and law enforcement amongst Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) member nations⁸. Additionally, Operation Solania also supports Operations Kuru Kuru, Big Eye, Island Chief, Tui Moana and Rai Balang, which are coordinated maritime surveillance and patrol operations run by the Pacific Island FFA, to detect and deter IUU fishing activity⁹.

In November 2018, Prime Minister Morrison spoke to the Army's 3 brigade in Townsville and stated that Australia's national security and the security of the Pacific are intertwined, and that the Pacific region was a foreign policy priority¹⁰. The Prime Minister stated that Australia was the largest aid donor to the region and that our interest is founded on the basis of ensuring that the Pacific region a strategically secure, economically stable with sovereign integrity assured for all states. However, Australia's influence was not guaranteed, and the Pacific 'step-up' policy was designed to reinforce Australia desire to be the principal security partner for the region which would include several initiatives ranging from infrastructure, training, cooperation and capability enhancement¹¹.

First, the Pacific Maritime Security Programme will include new patrol boats with increased capability, aerial surveillance and greater information sharing. Secondly, Australia is contributing to the infrastructure redevelopment of the Blackrock Peacekeeping Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster relief Camp in Fiji which will support the training of police, peacekeepers and deploying troops¹². Thirdly, Australia and the Solomon Island have signed a bilateral security agreement and Australia and Vanuatu are negotiating a similar security arrangement. Lastly, Australia will cooperate with the government of Papua New Guinea and develop the Lombrum naval base on Manus Island which will increase the interoperability between both defence forces. Maritime interoperability will be enhanced by more Australian naval developments to

8. "Operation Solania" contributes to a wider multi-national program to provide maritime surveillance support in the Pacific, coordinated by the Quadrilateral Defence Coordinating Group. Members of the Quadrilateral Defence Coordinating Group are Australia, New Zealand, France and the US. ADF assets, including AP-3C Orion's and Royal Australian Naval Ships are dedicated to Operation Solania tasking periodically. Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Defence, accessed on 30 July 2017 <http://www.defence.gov.au/Operations/SouthWestPacific/default.asp>

9. "Operation Solania" and Patrick M. Shanahan, Indo-Pacific Strategic Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region, (United States: Department of Defence, June 1, 2019), 40-42

10. Julie Bishop, 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017), 99 – 104 and S. Morrison, "Prime Minister's Australia and the Pacific: A New Chapters," (Speech: Townsville: November 18, 2018).

11. Bishop, Foreign Policy White Paper, 100

12. Morrison, A New Chapter.

undertake maritime training exercises to take advantage of the new Guardian Class patrol boats gifted to Papua New Guinea¹³.

Indo-Pacific Endeavour

On March 1 this year, the Minister for Defence Industry, Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC launched Indo-Pacific Endeavour 19 (IPE 19), the third iteration of this activity, as it commenced with the departure of HMA Ships Canberra, Success, Newcastle, and Parramatta from Fremantle in Western Australia. Minister Reynolds said she was pleased with the level of engagement planned with Australia's Indian Ocean partners over the next three months. Minister Reynolds stated "The Australian Defence Force (ADF) enjoys a long-standing relationship with security forces throughout South and Southeast Asia," further, "These relationships are strengthened by annual exercises and engagements, such as the Indo-Pacific Endeavour series."¹⁴ The Minister of Defence, Minister Pyne said building interoperability with key partners and improving coordination of humanitarian and security responses is a priority for Defence. The Minister stated that "IPE 19 is a major regional engagement activity for the ADF, which delivers on the promise of the 2016 Defence White Paper to strengthen Australia's engagement and partnerships with regional security forces," and "Our strong and enduring relationships with regional militaries, governments and local communities are critical to this"¹⁵.

This year 1000 embarked ADF personnel carried out a series of engagement activities and military training exercises during port visits in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore,

Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. Notably, IPE 19 incorporated Australia's defence industry into the port visits. This activity provided an opportunity to demonstrate Australian Defence capacity across the spectrum of ADF activities during IPE19. The Joint Task Force showcased state-of-the-art capabilities to the host nations, including the Canberra-class landing helicopter dock Ship, HMAS Canberra¹⁶. But IPE 19 also afforded greater opportunity for maritime forces in the Indo-Pacific to discuss the challenges each nation faces within their maritime domain and share constructive opportunities for interoperability in maintaining good order at sea.

Australia's Leadership in the Maritime Domain

A little over a month ago on September 25, the Prime Minister of Australia Scott Morrison addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations and stated 'much has changed since the United Nations was established, Australia was there in the beginning' and that Australia is 'here today because we continue to believe that differences can be resolved through dialogue and mutual respect'¹⁷. The Prime Minister reinforced Australia's preference for a rules-based order in which the UN is the prime custodian which is essential not only for a middle power but for global stability, security and prosperity. Additionally, the Prime Minister stated that the world today is complex and contested and that Australia will continue to seek to honestly maintain our alliances and partnerships ranging from Australia's great and powerful friends to Australia's smallest Pacific Island neighbours¹⁸.

13. Morrison, A New Chapter.

14. Linda Reynolds and Christopher Pyne, "Indo-Pacific Endeavour 2019 launches in Western Australia," (Speech, Joint Media Release, Fremantle, Western Australia, March 11, 2019) <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/cpyne/media-releases/indo-pacific-endeavour-2019-launches-western-australia>

15. Reynolds and Pyne, Indo-Pacific Endeavour 2019.

16. Reynolds and Pyne, Indo-Pacific Endeavour 2019.

17. Scott Morrison, "National Statement to the United Nations General Assembly," (Speech: United Nations General Assembly, New York, September 25, 2019). <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/national-statement-united-nations-general-assembly>

18. Morrison, National Statement to the United Nations General Assembly.

However a key element of the Prime Ministers address was Australia's approach to protecting our oceans. Firstly, Australia is an island continent, secondly, Australia has the world's third largest maritime jurisdiction, and thirdly, over 85 per cent of Australia's population lives within 50 kilometres of the ocean. Lastly, Australia's Indigenous peoples have been linked to the land and sea for more than 65,000 years¹⁹.

Moreover, oceans connect Australia with the world, ninety nine per cent of Australia's trade by volume is carried by sea and by 2025, and marine industries will contribute around \$100 billion each year to Australia's economy. Additionally, Australia's prosperity and security rely on the established laws that govern freedom of navigation, from the Straits of Hormuz to the South Pacific.²⁰

Further, the Prime Minister stated that protecting the oceans is also one of the world's more demanding environmental challenges and Australia is committed to being part of the global solution. This includes, leading urgent action to combat plastic pollution choking the oceans; tackle over-exploitation of our fisheries; scientists estimate that in just 30 years' time the weight of plastics in our oceans will exceed the weight of the fish in the world's oceans²¹.

With a focus on fisheries, the Prime Minister stated that Australia would act to safeguard the sustainability of our fisheries. As a nation that has demonstrated resolve in tackling illegal fishing in our maritime zones Australia is committed to a renewed effort to stop illegal fishing. The Prime Minister considered that there are too many nations standing by while their 'nationals are thieving the livelihoods of their neighbours'.²² Australia will work with our neighbours in the Pacific

Islands to reduce illegal fishing which depletes the fish stocks Pacific Islanders rely on for jobs, revenue and their food security²³. Australia will work with Indonesia, whose regional leadership in combating illegal fishing is a policy priority.

Conclusion

Australia has refined its mindset to address transnational threats, not just over the last decade, but over the last century. Australia is determined to work with our Indo-Pacific partners to develop and maintain a strong, rules-based culture in the region and address maritime security challenges. It is vital we work together to ensure that the Indo-Pacific Ocean states have the capacity to deal with challenging security developments affecting our region. Into the future Australia will increase its investments in maritime security capacity building and enhance regional training on maritime domain awareness, protection of the marine environment and adherence to international law. Australia will seek to work with our Indo-Pacific partners to deliver practical initiatives which enhance stability and prosperity through collaborative activities and seek to deepen joint exercises and build maritime domain awareness across the region and collaborate on maritime safety and security in the Indo-Pacific.

Australia will promote confidence-building measures and cooperation among regional coastguards and maritime enforcement bodies, assist in efforts which include fisheries surveillance and offer to support regional states to develop comprehensive national maritime strategies. Through our diplomatic and operational engagement, Australia will strive to ensure international law and uphold the sovereign rights of coastal states in their exclusive economic zones. Additionally,

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19. Morrison, National Statement to the United Nations General Assembly.
 20. Morrison, National Statement to the United Nations General Assembly.
 21. Morrison, National Statement to the United Nations General Assembly.
 22. Morrison, National Statement to the United Nations General Assembly.
 23. Morrison, National Statement to the United Nations General Assembly.

Australia, will seek to deepen our engagement with regional partners to build shared capacity to resist disruptions that threaten maritime stability and the rule-based order. For Australia, challenges in the maritime domain are best thwarted by a whole-of-government approach, it has been this way in the past and it will be this way in the future.