



Photo: Department of Defence

# Army review marches on

A parliamentary committee report on the Australian Army continues to attract public comment a year after it was released.

The report, *From Phantom to Force* by the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, provided one of the most detailed studies of the Army in recent times. Released in September 2000, the report came at a time when Australian forces were engaged in military commitments not seen for a generation.

A key recommendation of the report was the doubling of the Army's capability to respond to short-warning contingencies. The Committee also proposed an increase in the Army's ability to respond to more significant threats through a force expansion capability.

In a departure from usual practice, the Committee decided to seek public comment on the report following its release. "In this report, we present a model for a future Army," said Defence Sub-Committee Chairman, David Hawker (Member for Wannan, Vic). "If this model is to be successful in increasing the capability and efficiency of the Army, it will need to be refined through consultation and discussion, and it will need to be broadly owned and supported by the community and by the Army."

In response, the Committee received 39 submissions. It also discussed the report's findings at a public hearing in Canberra and at several meetings with serving soldiers. All of the people who put in submissions to the original inquiry were

canvassed for their views on the report, and many provided additional submissions to the Committee.

Among the submissions received, there was general support for the report and its recommendations. Of particular interest were the Committee's proposals on the Army's structure and funding, including the number of major units. The future role of the Army Reserve also attracted comment.

Many of the follow-up submissions agreed that the Army needed a funding increase, with some arguing that the increase needed to be greater than was recommended by the Committee. One submission argued for more than 3% of gross domestic product to be used for defence.

Some of those who supported increased funding also argued for an increase in the size of the Army. One suggestion was for a type of National Service scheme to be reintroduced.

But the Committee's report did not get universal support. A few submissions argued that a funding increase was not warranted, as previous funding had not been wisely spent. As one submission stated: "I have difficulty accepting that the Army has been the poor relation at all."

A small proportion of the submissions disagreed with the force structure recommendations and argued that the Army had undergone a debilitating series of reviews and changes over the last 10 years. It was claimed that the Army did not need any more changes, and that the pace of change was causing confusion, degrading morale and destroying tradition.

A number of submissions were critical of the report's treatment of the Army Reserve. Principally from members of the Reserve, those submissions argued for a greater recognition of, and role for, the Reserve.

The follow-up to the Committee's original report took place during a period of significant change in the Defence environment. This included the release of the Government's *Defence 2000* White Paper in December 2000, which went down some of the paths recommended in the *From Phantom to Force* report.

The comments received on the Committee's original report, as well as the subsequent developments in defence policy, will be taken into consideration by the Committee as it prepares its follow-up report, due for release later in the year.

**For more information**  
Call: (02) 6277 2313  
Email: [jscfadt@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscfadt@aph.gov.au)