

Union of Australian Women (Qld) submission to IPAN'S People's Inquiry: Exploring the case for an independent and peaceful Australia

Union of Australian Women (Qld) (UAW)

The Union of Australian Women (Queensland) was formed in 1950 in response to the economic, social and political issues confronting women at the time. Since then this organisation has worked actively towards:

- the rights of women;
- the rights of children to life, happiness and education, and
- safeguarding peace.

Peace has always been at the forefront of the UAW agenda. The UAW views peace as a precursor to gender justice as it is women and children who are disproportionately impacted by war. This commitment has involved UAW in many campaigns, with activities ranging from letter writing, and petitions to peaceful demonstrations.

Introduction

The UAW holds concerns across all the IPAN inquiry focus areas but wishes to make brief comments that relate to the following themes: social and community; political (and democratic) rights; and environment and climate, drawing from its long history of struggle and advocacy in these areas.

UAW believes that fundamentally the Australia-US alliance does not serve Australian women and children well. The costs and consequences of Australia's involvement in US-led wars and militarisation have had profound impacts on families directly and indirectly through taxpayers' funds being diverted from those services (health, aged and child care, education and other social and environmental services) that serve the common good and which promote a safe and sustainable economy towards unproductive defence materials and services.

Militarisation

The increasing militarisation of Australia must stop. This militarisation is supported by both state and national levels of government and generally receives bi-partisan support. We view this militarisation as leading to a less peaceful world where fear is encouraged rather than respect for humanity and also to reducing the democratic freedoms of Australian citizens, as well as being detrimental to the health, social welfare and education of those citizens and our environment.

Australia ranked 16th in the 2021 Global Peace Index with the top four rankings being Iceland, New Zealand, Denmark and Portugal. The Index which rates countries on three factors – societal safety and security, ongoing domestic and international conflict, and level of militarism has seen Australia's ranking steadily decline since 2008 when it was ranked equal 7th.

1. Australian Government Level

Operation in wars

Australia's involvement in war operations since World War 2 has not led to a safer world and nor to a safer Australia. Around the world, it has resulted in millions of civilian deaths, disease and famine, destruction of social infrastructure, environmental devastation and millions of refugees. It has resulted in Australia and Australians being at increased risk of terrorist actions.

Overseas bases and intelligence gathering facilities

The increasing number of USA bases on Australian soil (despite often being named 'joint' facilities) allows a foreign government to exert undue influence in shaping Australian foreign and defence policies which incrementally leads to a diminution of Australian sovereignty in addition to a damaged international reputation globally. The USA is using Australia to spy on countries around us while most of these countries are friendly.

UAW considers that these operations do not increase our security. In particular, the intelligence gathering network at Pine Gap and North West Cape presents a target for a power, hostile to the USA, wanting to send it a message. The so-called US Pivot into Asia has led to a permanent stationing of US marines in Darwin and deeper interoperability with and enmeshing of Australia into US military policies and agenda, such as Australian forces being integrated with those of the US; the purchase of costly weaponry; and the upgrading of military facilities on our own territory that are wanted for the use by US forces (e.g. Tindal airbase).

Military exercises

Participation in military exercises (known as, 'war games') not only involves large financial costs, but also long-term environmental damage to what is very often pristine areas, e.g. Shoalwater Bay in Central Queensland. Furthermore it brings a huge risk of damage on a massive scale from accidental events associated with these exercises (fires, oil and chemical spills in the Great Barrier Reef, and nuclear radiation). In view of the existing and rising threats to the Great Barrier Reef from climate change, the UAW considers that all military exercises (such as Talisman Sabre) should immediately cease in this area.

The UAW took a strong stand in the 1950s against atomic bomb testing (Monte Bello Island) and nuclear testing at Maralinga and undertook a long-standing 'Ban the Bomb' campaign. The same concerns are held today with the potential for radioactive fall-out to impact on the land, soil, air - all critical for human health and sustainable life.

Militarisation and intelligence activities

Bipartisanship with regard to militarisation means that military spending, direction and involvement in overseas military operations invariably occurs with very little scrutiny by Parliament. Australia can go to war on the agreement of cabinet, not on the advice of the whole of Parliament, let alone an informed Australian community. Tens of thousands of women, men and children marched in an effort to prevent the Iraq war. Australia's commitment of resources and troops led to shame and disillusionment. Bipartisanship with respect to our intelligence agencies means that there is no arms length scrutiny of their operations or their effectiveness, thus leading to a diminished Australian democracy.

The Australian Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security has few powers to scrutinise legislation. They are limited to:

- reviewing administration and expenditure on intelligence and security,
- building bipartisan support for national security legislation, and
- ensuring that national security legislation remains necessary, proportionate and effective by conducting statutory reviews.

It specifically cannot include:

- reviewing the intelligence gathering and assessment priorities of Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS), Australian Geospatial-Intelligence Organisation (AGO), Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO),

Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) or Office of National Intelligence (ONI),

- reviewing the sources of information, other operational assistance or operational methods available to ASIO, ASIS, AGO, DIO, ASD or ONI,
- reviewing particular operations that have been, are being or are proposed to be undertaken by ASIO, ASIS, AGO, DIO or ASD,
- reviewing information provided by, or by an agency of a foreign government where that government does not consent to the disclosure of the information,
- reviewing an aspect of the activities of ASIO, ASIS, AGO, DIO ASD or ONI that does not affect Australians,
- reviewing the rules made under section 15 of the Intelligence Services Act 2001 (to protect privacy of Australians),
- conducting inquiries into individual complaints about the activities of ASIO, ASIS, AGO, DIO, ASD or ONI,
- reviewing the content of, or conclusions reached in, assessments or reports made by DIO or ONI, or reviewing the sources of information on which such assessments or reports are based,
- reviewing the coordination and evaluation activities undertaken by ONI,
- reviewing sensitive operational information or operational methods available to the Australian Federal Police (AFP), or
- reviewing particular operations or investigations that have been, are being or are proposed to be undertaken by the AFP.

The joint committee's bipartisan approach means that there is little will to prevent legislation that impinges on civil freedoms and our right to know. After an inquiry into The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Amendment Bill 2020 where it called for submissions, it concluded that it fully supported the aims of the Bill and made recommendations for few changes.

This committee does not seem to have the will or ability to recommend halting surveillance and tracking legislation where the primary target will be:

- investigative journalists doing their jobs,
- whistle-blowers seeking to expose wrongdoing and corruption (made worse by a failure to establish a federal Independent Commission Against Corruption) or who might otherwise embarrass governments and officials, and
- commercial espionage that Australian security agencies apparently are prepared to conduct to benefit private companies such as those from the petroleum industry.

The committee by its actions seemingly therefore does not view such legislation that led to the prosecution of Witness K and Bernard Collaery for bringing to light the illegal bugging of the cabinet office of the Timor Leste government as untoward.

The UAW considers there needs to be far stronger public and parliamentary scrutiny and reporting of Australia's intelligence and security operations if we are to have a robust democracy.

Armaments

The current Australian Government has a target of Australia becoming one of the top ten defence armaments exporter nations in the world. Many Australians view the gambling industry as amoral and there is regulation of it and regular media exposure about the adverse consequences of their operations, yet Australia's goal to be a top armaments exporter goes unchecked. The mantra of "Jobs, Jobs, Jobs" is used to justify the development of an

armaments exporting industry but at the same time does not indicate the same zeal for maintaining existing manufacturing jobs or promoting those that will assist with the transition to a zero carbon emission economy of the future. Australian workers need a sustainable manufacturing industry. The destination for these armament products is often not transparent and certainly not explained to the Australian community as to how they might further world peace. This results in the insidious ‘normalising’ of war and conflict rather than the pursuit of diplomacy and negotiation to resolve disagreements.

The UAW considers peace begins at home. For many years the UAW ran a ‘Ban war toys’ campaign as it had found that there was an increase in the promotion and availability of war-related toys with a USA bias when the USA was engaged in wars such as the one they pursued in Vietnam. One long running UAW campaign resulted in the Royal National Association banning war toys in show bags in 1997. The UAW considers war toys should be permanently banned as they play no productive role in play or developing creative or social skills in children.

2. Queensland Government level

Similar to the federal level, there seems to be bipartisan support for promoting the military industry in Queensland. The Queensland Government has been seduced by this industry with the rhetoric that it spurs spin-offs for other advanced manufacturing industries and creates jobs. The evidence for this is far from assured. It has established the government body, Defence Industries Queensland, to support this industry and has provided generous financial assistance (inducements) to companies in this sector to establish themselves in Queensland. In 2018 the government began a 10 year plan to:

- grow Queensland defence industry capability,
- significantly increase Queensland’s defence industry contribution to the national and global market, and
- promote Queensland’s defence industry capabilities.

Defence Industries Queensland supports Queensland-based companies and facilitates opportunities and investment in:

- land, sea and air related defence activities
- border protection (e.g. patrol boats, planes and unmanned aircraft systems)
- national and international security (e.g. communications, protective armour, vehicles).

These defences industries include:

- Airbus Group Australia Pacific - offering maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) of small-to-medium gas turbine engines at its production and assembly facility
- Boeing Defence Australia - headquartered in Queensland and with key capability in tactical and airlift aircraft, strike fighter sustainment services, integrated logistics support, and surveillance programs
- Boeing Research and Technology Australia - headquartered in Queensland
- Combat Clothing Australia - a privately owned company specialising in the design and manufacture of a wide range of military and paramilitary equipment and accessories
- Craig International Ballistics - a Queensland-based manufacturer and leading supplier of body armour to the ADF and police forces. The company also produces a range of ballistic protection products including armour panels, vehicle spall liners, armoured vehicles, body armour training inserts and transparent armour frames
- Elbit Systems Australia - a subsidiary of Elbit Systems Ltd that serves the ADF and has capability in battlefield management systems, network management systems and interfaces

with airborne and naval platforms, unmanned systems, electronic warfare systems, cyber security and electro-optical targeting systems

- EPE - specialising in the provision of equipment, training and maintenance for counter improvised explosive devices and explosive ordnance disposal, electronic counter measures, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear response technology, and also supporting broader Force Protection, security and threat mitigation requirements
- GE Aviation Systems Australia headquartered in Brisbane and the largest GE Aviation Systems facility in the Asia-Pacific region. The company provides commercial and military jet engines, overhaul services, avionics, flight management and performance-based navigation
- Haulmark Trailers Australia - specialists in the design and manufacture of quality military trailers used for a variety of applications. The company was awarded a LAND 121 contract to supply 3,000 new trailers to the ADF
- Hawker Pacific - a leading independent organisation providing aviation sales and product support
- L3-Microe - a world leader in the design and manufacture of radio frequency and photonic components for electronic warfare and radar systems
- NIOA - Australia's leading, privately-owned small arms supplier that services the commercial, law enforcement and military markets
- Northrop Grumman Australia - a leading provider and integrator of autonomous, C4ISR, cyber, logistics and strike systems and solutions, and is one of Australia's largest defence services companies providing support to a range of major ADF capability systems
- Raytheon Australia - providing state-of-the-art electronics, mission systems integration and other capabilities in the areas of sensing; effects; and command, control, communications and intelligence systems; as well as a broad range of mission support services; and operates an avionics maintenance and logistics centre in Queensland
- RGM Maintenance - servicing defence and other vehicles with repair and maintenance, bulk liquid and fuel handling, equipment repair and certification, drive train component rebuild and balancing, paint and panel repair, and sand blasting
- Rheinmetall Defence Australia - part of the Rheinmetall Group, an international prime contractor based in Germany that specialises in defence and automotive technology. Rheinmetall is the largest supplier of military vehicles to the ADF and is establishing its Australia-New Zealand Headquarters and Military Vehicle Centre of Excellence in Ipswich in South East Queensland,
- Sikorsky Australia (a Lockheed Martin company) - provides MRO, spares and support for Sikorsky and Bell civil and ADF helicopters in the Asia-Pacific region
- TAE Aerospace - Asia-Pacific's premier gas turbine MRO and gas turbine test cell provider. The company supports regional, general and defence aviation with engine, avionics, and wheel and brakes maintenance
- Teledyne Defence Australia - a niche radar research and develop branch of Teledyne Technologies US that specialises in multiple input multiple out imaging radars and phased array radar for defence and homeland security applications, as well as unmanned aerial systems
- Tote Systems Australia - a Queensland-based manufacturer and supplier of police and security equipment whose customers include the United Nations, security services, corrective services, medical services and the Australian Department of Defence
- Vector Aerospace - providing MRO services for fixed wing and rotary wing aircraft
- Volvo Group Australia - Volvo Group Governmental Sales Oceania specialising in vehicle sales to customers in defence, internal security and emergency services, offering mobility

solutions up to 42 tonnes to support tactical, logistical and armoured missions. Group brands include ACMAT, Mack Defense, Panhard and Renault Trucks Defence.

One such example of specific Queensland Government support is a \$9 million investment to upgrade energy supply and connection for a munitions plant to be built in Maryborough by a consortium of Rheinmetall Defence Australia and Brisbane-based NIOA.

Land Forces Expo Qld 2021

Land Forces expo was an arms fair and military conference. When, in 2019, Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk announced that Queensland had secured this Expo, she viewed it as securing Queensland's position as the new home of Australian defence industries.

It was convened and organised by the AMDA FOUNDATION LIMITED, an organisation that has managed to obtain registration with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission whilst many peace loving organisations are excluded because their activities are considered 'political'.

Militarisation of the curriculum

The defence industry is influencing the school curriculum from primary through to secondary school by providing teacher and student support for the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) curriculum.

For example, the Northern Brisbane P-TECH partnership involving Airbus has teamed up with Aviation High School in Brisbane to enable students to engage in discovery and project based learning using a range of technologies.

Some of these industries provide STEM competitions and camp experiences for students. Some provide in-service for teachers.

While the UAW considers STEM subjects are critical for the education of this and future generations, it is critical also that these skills are used for peace-promoting activities. Any incentives given to STEM students by the defence industry should be disallowed.

Political rights

The UAW has always sought to ensure equal rights for women in political, civic and social spheres. The impact of legislation and administrative decisions that limit dissent, the right to protest or any challenge to the rhetoric for the need for the US-alliance and its associated militarism has a detrimental impact on women's right to participate fully in civil society.

Erosion of democratic rights and promotion of conservative social values and policy are not in women's interests. With the Murdoch-controlled press dumbing down the national conversation in the USA, UK and Australia to three word headlines and promoting opinion pieces based on fear and hatred, women need to be particularly vigilant to ensure the maintenance of their hard-won social, political and economic gains.

We should also heed the voices of those who questioned involvement in war; for in a democracy, surely the citizen enters into a contract with society to evaluate thoughtfully its collective destiny (Courier-Mail (Brisbane) 25 April 1997, Kay Saunders, Professor of History, University of Queensland reproduced from Daring to take a stand¹).

The UAW considers that a plebiscite of Australian citizens should be conducted by an independent authority for any proposal for Australia to participate in armed international conflict (go to war) and the outcome then fully considered by the Australian Government.

Conclusion

Regard for 'the public good' should be at the heart of Australia's foreign policy together with an assessment of the implications for Australian citizens.

It is hoped that the Report from this Inquiry will be widely distributed throughout the political, media, union and community sectors and that further alliances of peace-loving people and organisations will result. It is hoped that it will lead to a more independent and peaceful foreign policy with less dependency on preparation for endless wars of aggression. As a matter of urgency, every effort must be made to have the Australian Government commit to signing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Resource:

1 Young, Pam, Daring to take a stand – The story of the Union of Australian Women in Queensland, Sue Pechey, 1998.