



ACF submission to IPAN's People's Inquiry - 2022

The Australian Conservation Foundation Inc (ACF) is Australia's oldest national environment organization and a leading national advocate for the environment.

ACF is strictly non-partisan and we are proud of our political independence. We work to protect, restore, celebrate and sustain Australia's environment through research, consultation, education, partnerships and advocacy.

ACF welcomes this opportunity to comment as we maintain that there are no ultimate winners in war - not people, nations, nor the planet's ecosystem. War brings harm and destruction and damaging national and global ecosystems also damages the people living within them, as well as all other species.

Advances in military technology mean the widespread and long-lasting destruction of the natural environment has become a too common reality. Nuclear and chemical weapons have left a legacy of mass destruction and contamination.

The destruction of the natural environment has itself become a tactic of war. Forests in Vietnam were chemically defoliated and the burning of the oil wells in Kuwait during the Gulf War was both a political and war tactic.

In the current Russian invasion of Ukraine, we are witnessing the weaponization of nuclear facilities and the threat of an uncontrolled radiation release being used as a leverage point.

Global military forces are also major contributors to adverse climate impacts especially through their massive and largely unaccounted fossil fuel consumption.

The environment should not be used as a weapon. Destruction of large areas of natural habitat or the poisoning of waterways should be prohibited and weapons that destroy the environment or make it uninhabitable banned.



While most weapons have some damaging effect on the environment, some weapons including nuclear, chemical and biological weapons have far greater impacts and should be outlawed.

Attacks on infrastructure or installations that result in pollution, the release of poisonous substances or radioactivity have no place on a shared planet. Such infrastructure should be clearly marked and its integrity respected in accordance with international law.

National parks and areas of special ecological significance should be declared demilitarised zones and protected by international law. States which are not parties to an armed conflict should also be protected from any consequential environmental damage.

There should be elevated international efforts to help ensure protection of the environment in times of armed conflict and international law concerning armed conflict and the environment should also extend to military exercises.

From ancient times to the present, many wars have been fought wholly or partially for control over natural resources. With the increase in global population and the decrease in supplies of fossil fuels, minerals, arable land, water and other resources, tensions between nations are likely to rise.

Peace is more likely in a global context where sustainability, fair trade, social justice and non-violent conflict resolution principles are the norm. Such ideal conditions for peace and environmental protection do not yet exist but we all have a role in working towards achieving a cultural shift where violence is not seen as a legitimate means of resolving conflict and the environment is not considered as an expendable commodity.

Along with a cultural transformation it is important to support effective steps to outlaw the military use of any practice or device that would have long lasting deleterious effects on people or the natural environment, such as nuclear weapons, anti-personnel land mines, poisonous and nerve gases, germ warfare, defoliants and any other hostile use of environmental modification techniques.



ACF strongly urges Australia and all nations to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). ACF notes and welcomes the efforts by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) the recipient of the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize in launching and driving this initiative. This is a clear example of the power of community action and civil society mobilisation.

Australian military forces should refrain from adopting nuclear military propulsion technology including the planned AUKUS submarines, using nuclear weapons or taking part in manoeuvres, exchanges or visits with other forces that have a nuclear capability if that nation is not in full compliance with international non-proliferation and wider legal obligations.

The federal government should review the sale of arms to international markets by government or private contractors and Australia should take no part in arms exhibitions and fairs.

Australian military research facilities, equipment and personnel should be made available for international co-operative efforts to sustain the planet's biological diversity and our land, sea and air military forces should be comprised of non-conscripted personnel who are trained and used only for defence of Australia against external threats to our sovereignty, international peace keeping purposes and active protection of the natural environment.

Australian military forces should primarily be involved in the non-combatant peace keeping endeavours of the United Nations and should never be used to suppress human rights. Australian military forces should not utilise any instrument of war that would have long lasting deleterious effects on people and the environment.

Areas that suffer environmental damage through their use for such military purposes as artillery ranges, former nuclear test sites, armoured vehicle practice, sea and aerial bombardment, conventional weapons testing, etc, should be subject to environmental audit and environmental impact assessment and remediation.

All sites of heritage, cultural and environmental significance should be identified and protected from the impacts of military activities and these



should not take place on land held or claimed by First Nation's people without prior consultation and full and informed consent.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People's (UNDRIP) states this clearly: *Military activities shall not take place in the lands or territories of indigenous peoples, unless justified by a relevant public interest or otherwise freely agreed with or requested by the indigenous peoples concerned.*

Australia can further set an example to other nations through our ethical and minimal use of military forces solely for defence or peace keeping purposes, and in times of natural disasters for the peaceful protection of communities and the natural environment.

Australian Defence Force personnel should adopt international and national best environmental practice and work to maintain the highest standards of environmental protection within military bases and training areas and work co-operatively with civilian agencies and take integrated action in times of emergencies.

They should develop the expertise to: a) understand, monitor and report damage to natural ecosystems; b) repair, restore and regenerate natural land and aquatic ecosystems; c) study and operate accredited best practices in native bush regeneration and fire ecology; d) clean up contaminated sites within military bases and training areas, including PFAS contamination; e) carry out waste and energy audits and develop programs to achieve savings; f) manage the repair, re-use, recycling or composting of materials including office paper, oil, sewage, metals, etc; g) reduce carbon emissions, including through improved fuel and engine use; h) use military satellite and information-gathering systems to monitor and share local and global environmental data; i) co-operate with other environment protection agencies to achieve and maintain the highest standard of air, land and water quality and biodiversity protection.

ACF views the protection of the natural environment as one of our fundamental security needs. We recognise that all species have a right to exist, that humans should only take what the natural environment can sustainably



provide, and that nations should not assume that warfare and training for warfare justify environmental destruction.

There is a pressing need to work at an international level for acceptance of the concept of peaceful resolution of conflict through: (a) encouraging international negotiations, mediation and other forms of alternate dispute resolution; (b) promoting the benefits and means of non-violent conflict resolution; (c) supporting the United Nations and other international agencies in their efforts on developing fair and just international relations; (d) supporting the efforts of the United Nations to discourage aggression: (e) encouraging all nations to reduce their armaments and numbers of armed personnel.

We live on a shared and fragile planet and depend on a healthy environment to both survive and thrive.

Humans have the capacity for renewal and repair and the ability to work collaboratively to secure a living future for all. We also hold the capacity to end life on Earth.

ACF urges all nations to show respect and restraint and supports non-violent efforts from civil society groups, individuals and state actors to build a more peaceful future for all the species that share planet Earth.

Further comment/clarification:

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