



Media Release

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Anti-submarine warfare, or ASW, is emerging as a national interest of the highest order. Vulnerability to a submarine threat will concentrate the minds of Canberra's strategic planners as they rethink Force 2030, the force structure forecast in the 2009 Defence White Paper.

A new Kokoda Foundation report, *Under the Sea Air Gap - Australia's Anti-Submarine Warfare Challenge*, outlines the scale of the emerging threat and makes a series of recommendations on how to respond.

According to the report, by 2030 there will be a significant increase in the number of submarines in the Asia-Pacific region capable of stealthy and sustained operations while carrying more accurate and longer-range armaments. These will be operated by a larger number of regional navies. In some cases, these improved underwater capabilities will be deployed by states whose long-term intentions remain, at best, unclear.

The report argues that Australia's strategic geography, while generally beneficial, exposes it disproportionately to this emerging undersea threat. According to the report's author, Brice Pacey, "Australia's extended sea lines of communication and offshore resource industries are particularly vulnerable to any future underwater attack. The consequences of such an attack on Australia could be catastrophic in strategic, economic and environmental terms," he said.

As a first priority, they will need to consider measures ranging from regaining the momentum in developing Australia's Future Submarine, an expanded naval combat helicopter program, an enhanced Offshore Combatant Vessel with an ASW capability, through to an increase in the size of the manned component of the Maritime Patrol Aircraft fleet. These changes will need to take account of the sophistication of the ASW threat, the size of Australia's maritime jurisdiction and the scope of Australia's international obligations.

Such is the scale of the ASW issue the report suggests it will expose the limits of defence self-reliance in a demanding regional security environment. "There will be an increasing need for close cooperation with friends and allies in developing a basic intelligence picture of the underwater environment in the region," Mr Pacey said.

Senator The Hon David Feeney, Parliamentary Secretary for Defence, will launch the report at 1000-1100 on Wednesday the 25th of May in the Mural Hall (Area A Level 2) at Parliament House, Canberra.

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