

## Community in Regional Centres: a defence perspective

### **[SLIDE 1] -Introduction**

Dear SEGRA Delegates.

Firstly, permit me leave to say thank you for opportunity to speak with you today. I must say that I am feeling somewhat humbled sandwiched between CSIRO and the QLD Department Employment Economic Development and Innovation. Both of their subject areas are indeed important to the Australian Defence Force. The ADF is keen on sustainable environmental management and in particular, of its training areas to ensure that we can continue to use them for the future generations of soldiers, sailors and airmen of this country. I will talk a little later on the relationship that the ADF enjoys with Dr. Fletcher's Department.

**[SLIDE 2]**- For now I must offer my commander, Brig Stuart Smith's apologies. Unfortunately the commander is as we say in the Army, knee deep in spent cartridges and grenade pins on Exercise Hamel. This exercise is currently occurring in the land, skies and adjacent coastal waterways around Townsville. It is a significant exercise that is employing some 6000 troops drawn from all three services of the ADF and includes troops from both New Zealand and the United States. As the joint force commander for this training force, Brig Smith is somewhat otherwise engaged.

The fact that such a large exercise is taking place so close to and centred on Townsville really gives some indication to the importance of this region in the eyes of the Australia Defence Force. This is a point I will drive home further later in my talk.

## Background

Since 1881 Townsville has had a continuing military presence, albeit small in those early days it was initially based on the then independent companies which eventually transitioned into the Kennedy Regiment (now the 31st Battalion of the Royal Queensland Regiment). The size of the military presence in Townsville has varied since that time in concert with the level of Australian military operations. The height of the presence in Townsville was during World War II, where some 50 to 60,000 soldiers and airmen from Australia and United States were stationed. **[SLIDE 3]** A more permanent force establishment did not eventuate until the Vietnam War when then Third task Force, now 3rd Brigade, returned from SVN and took up permanent lodgings at the newly developed Lavarack Barracks in 1968. It is interesting to note at this time that the barracks was constructed the buildings were considered temporary with an expected life of type of approximately 15 years. The replacement and/or refurbishment of those buildings did not start in earnest until the early 2000's and continues to this day, or 42 years later.

The arrival of 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade permanently to Townsville represented a military force of some 3500 personnel. Such a large number of young soldiers and airmen permanently stationed in Townsville were particularly noticeable against the civilian population of 60,000+. This represented about 6%. Since that time the military population of Townsville has slowly but continuously grown. Increases in the military presence have occurred sporadically in the late 80s (5<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment - 1987), the mid-90s (10 Terminal Regiment, AMS – 96/97) and to the future 3 RAR in Dec 11/Jan 12. It is particularly to the future relocation of 3 RAR to which my talk today will address.

## **Townsville Population Review/Defence Population Review**

**[SLIDE 4]** But let us first review the changes in Townsville and defence's population over the last three decades or so. You will see from this slide that both population groups have been increasing. The point I want you to note is the percentage of the military population which is decreasing I would also note that the defence population numbers do not include partners and dependent children, and from a community perspective they should be considered.

As I said earlier the key thing here is the relationship of the military population numbers to that of Townsville. The relationship is one that, I will demonstrate, is of mutual benefit to both groups. And while this relationship is easily measurable in terms of supplier-customer business value, it is often the intangibles factors that by far provide the greatest value to Defence.

**[SLIDE 5]** Today I'll be drawing on economic information that has been based on a 2006/2007 data set used in a JCU study by Ricardo Welters and Aurelie Delisle entitled - 'A holistic analysis of the socio-economic impacts of the ADO and its interaction with the city of Townsville'. This study was published in Sep 09 and the document is readily available on both JCU and 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade websites.

### **Well what is Defence population today?**

**[SLIDE 6]** Within Townsville, there are some 5730 uniformed personnel, 450 defence civilians (public service) and a tad below 8000 defence dependents. So our defence community is a little over 14,000 people. In the community, this represents approximately 9% of the total population and from an economic sense, it is 10.3% of the regional GDP. In broad dollar terms the defence organisation is responsible for about \$490 million direct impacts and \$656 million indirect impacts each year to the regional GDP. Ricardo Welter's during

the presentation of his study at its public release noted that the level of Defence's contribution to the regional GDP at 10% was equivalent proportionately to the downturn suffered by the US economy during the GFC at that point in time. I think it was then his audience, sat a little higher in their seats and with greater attention.

### **How does defence directly impact the region?**

Like any large corporation, this is simply through a multitude of supplier - customer relationships. **[SLIDE 7]** The breadth of services and supplies is wide and includes general stores, power, fuel, rations, distribution services, temporary accommodation, Garrison support services, airfield services, stevedoring, repair & maintenance...the list goes on. Obviously, there are a broad mix, in terms of size and type, of businesses and companies including large national entities but also local SMEs, that while not solely dependent on Defence's business for their viability, derive good benefit from this relationship. This is particularly important during times when other sectors to which they supply, may have been impacted by an economic slowdown. So while Defence is not the key industry sector at play in the regional economy, it is a very stable and ultimately reliable one.

**[SLIDE 8]** Another area in which defence is a player and impacts on both commercial entities of Townsville but also 'Mum & Dad' investors is the residential real estate market. The Defence Housing Authority currently manages in excess of 1900 properties in the region and spends approximately \$23 million on rents and leases and \$6 million on general maintenance per annum. By the end of 2011 Defence Housing authority will be managing in the order of 2100 properties. DHA is very mindful of its influence within the local

residential market and accordingly is extremely careful in releasing its older properties for sale and when purchasing homes or securing new leases. The Townsville housing market, particularly around the median price range, has remained reasonably buoyant while other regions and cities were impacted by the effects of the GFC. While Defence Housing authority is solely there to secure housing for Defence families, its activity in the market place would have undoubtedly contributed to some of that local positive effect.

With the movement of our personnel between postings (the average posting length is approximately 2 to 3 years) there is often a large call for removal and ancillary services (such as storage, temporary accommodation, travel, kennelling/cattery and utility connections) to cater for the some 4000 relocations (2000 each inbound/outbound) each year. While this happens throughout the year, I should point out that the bulk of these moves occur in the period December and January.

**[SLIDE 9]** Since approximately mid 07 and through until the end of financial year 11/12 Defence infrastructure projects within North Queensland are in the vicinity of \$700 million, this includes the soon-to-be completed Lavarack Barracks Stage 4 Redevelopment, Enhanced Land Force project Stages 1 & 2 (this is a project that is providing the infrastructure requirements for the relocation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion from Holsworthy). Ongoing maintenance and minor new works on defence infrastructure, consumes approximately \$15-\$20 million per annum locally.

**[SLIDE 10]** In the not too distant future there are a number of major defence capital acquisition projects that are likely to have some impact on the Townsville regional economy and community. In fact some of those shown on

the slide are or have already impacted locally such as the MRH 90 and C 17 strategic airlift. It is however the relocation of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, that is far likely to have the greatest impact from an ongoing economic and community point of view. The move of the Battalion will increase the Defence population by approximately 1500 people of which 750 will be dependents. **[SLIDE 11]** This next slide shows the timeline for the relocation of 3 RAR.

- Announced in August 06
- Construction packages were awarded in July 09, and
- the Battalion and its families will be relocating to Townsville in the major posting period of December 11/January 12.

**[SLIDE 12]** Well what will the defence family will look like by the time that 3 RAR is safely ensconced in the region?

- Our entire Defence community will now be in excess of 15 & ½ thousand; Making up now about 10% of the Townsville population.
- **[SLIDE 13]** Our preparations for the arrival of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion would have generated both directly and indirectly about a \$1.1 billion of additional effect to the Townsville GDP.
- We will have a greater demand for all those community services that all Townsville residents rely on such as health, housing, education, transport, recreation and hospitality etc.
- All other factors being equal, the Australian defence organisation's direct and indirect impacts to the regional GDP on an annual basis would be expected to increase by 1.3% to 11.6%.

Well so far I have contained my talk today to those facts that are largely measurable or that can be modelled.

**What are some of the other factors that are not so easily stated quantitatively?**

**Strategic Location.** Defence derives great benefit from the Townsville region due to its strategic location with regard to Australia's northern and Pacific areas of interest. Townsville is well sited geographically to be able to use it as an air and/or sea point of embarkation in reasonable proximity to Darwin in the northern and west Pacific archipelagic regions. Accordingly, it has been the last port of call for many Australian defence personnel deploying on operations over the last decade.

**[SLIDE 14] Multi-modal Hub.** The availability of a good airport, an expanding seaport (soon to be developed to take the new LHDs (RAN fat ships) **[SLIDE 15]**, road and rail hubs provide excellent access for both tactical and strategic mobility for defence elements when operating or exercising in Australia. It enables Townsville to be used as a force concentration area prior to a deployment on operations or to an exercise.

**[SLIDE 16] Availability of Training Areas.** The region has excellent training areas available in very close proximity to this hub and these provide robust training in the multiple environments of air, ground and maritime. As I mentioned at the beginning one such exercise is in progress as we speak.

Such a geographical advantage is not necessarily available to other areas or cities within Australia that house a large number of defence units. It is obvious that in cities of high urbanisation, such as Brisbane and Sydney preclude the ready access of their defence personnel to large training areas. While Darwin

maintains many of the benefits that Townsville enjoys with reference to strategic locations and force projection, it's larger close training areas are often impacted by the significant wet season it endures. Consequently, for its heavy mechanised training activities the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade is forced to train well South of Darwin for much of the year. Townsville field training area provides a wide variety of training environments that are less impacted by seasonal vagaries. Additionally, Shoalwater Bay training area sits only, at military convoy speed, 1.5 days travel to our south.

We will now move on to more community based intangibles and from our perspective, probably the most important aspect of defence's relationship with the Townsville regional community.

**[SLIDE 17] Community Relationships.** It would be wrong to say that the relationship that has existed between defence members and the regional community over the longer term has been frictionless. In the late 60s and 70s it would be fairer to say that the relationship between our soldiers and airmen and the regional community had been tolerant. My own personal experience of this relationship starts from the mid-80s. In those earlier years our perception of acceptance by the community was that we were only tolerated, not by choice and we definitely were not embraced. One factor that is likely to have maintained the divide would have been the early housing enclaves such as in Heatley/Vincent for example that were colloquially known as the Married Patch. This style of housing our Defence families, inadvertently, reduced community integration and created the view of a military ghetto. This has changed somewhat with DHA avoiding military clusters of housing where possible and as a rule even in popular military suburbs we don't exceed 10% of the lots by suburb or by street.

Overall, since those earlier decades I would safely say that the relationship has in the main strengthened and always being on a positive incline. However, if I was asked to draw a line in the sand for the most dramatic change in the Townsville Defence-Civilian relationship it would be around 1999 that saw a very large portion of Townsville military forces deploy into East Timor. The success of that operation, I feel clearly marked the occasion when I believe the Townsville community readily identified with their local military forces. Incidentally, it was also around this time that the Strand Redevelopment was completed, and noticeably in Defence satisfaction surveys, Townsville started to achieve mid to high 90s as a posting preference. While the phrase has been around for some time, the term Townsville 'the Garrison City' became common parlance and was worn as a badge of pride by the region's residents.

A large portion of our success in operations overseas, can be directly attributed to the moral support, the sense of community and security provided to the ADF members and our families by the civilian population, the non-government agencies and of course the city council. The comfort our soldiers carry with them while overseas that their family is looked after; secure and supported is a great boost to our morale. A soldier's morale is indeed a very important element of our combat power, and accordingly the security and support our family receives from the community can be likened to a force multiplier. The contribution of the Townsville community to its local Defence Forces likewise should be seen as a contribution to Australia's national effort in periods of crisis across the world. A little dramatic here, although personally, I don't think you can underplay the importance of Townsville community support for the ADF.

Such a regional community sense of identification with and ownership of its local ADF members and units also causes the community morale to mirror that of the local ADF. Like any of the National League sports teams that are represented in Townsville, the local community shares in their successes and likewise, feels their failures and hardships.

**[SLIDE 18]** Some more recent examples of our military successes, which would be recalled by the community in favourable terms, are our operations in Timor Leste, the Indian Ocean tsunami at Banda Aceh, the local Defence response to Cyclone Larry 2006, or the Townsville Air show last year.

Equally, as I mentioned the hardships and sorrow are felt by the community as much as they are by the Defence family. **[SLIDE 19]** An example of this was the Blackhawk crash of 12 June 1996 where the lives of 18 servicemen were lost. This accident struck deeply at the heart of the Townsville regional community, and its effects are still felt by some today.

Additionally, I recall a more recent story from the then Brig, now Major-General Caligari , who during his tenure as Commander 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was required to perform notification duties of a casualty to the next of kin of a serviceman. The next of kin lived on Magnetic Island, and Brig Caligari, his RSM and padre had to travel on an evening peak hour ferry trip to the island. The Brig recalled that the ferry was quite full, and had the usual noise of commuters about it. That was until the Brig and his party crossed the gangway onto the ferry. As they arrived in the cabin all the busy commuters realised the purpose of his trip, the noise subdued and the silence of sorrow was deafening, a recognition and solemn respect of the grave message that the Brig was carrying for one of the island residents. According to the Brig, all the

passengers and crew on the ferry that evening shared our collective grief and sorrow without a word being spoken. That is the measure of a community that **'owns'** their Defence Forces. Equally, in remembrance of fallen service personnel one has only to see the turnout of the city along the Strand each Anzac Day. This is the manner in which the Townsville regional community has embraced **their** Defence Forces.

I tend to believe that it is our relative proportion of population that has made the community relationship with Defence such an enduring one. Having served in all capitals on the eastern seaboard, and as well as other regional areas I am confident that our size within the Townsville community is neither too large nor too small. Had we as a proportion of population been much smaller, such as that which exists in Brisbane or Sydney, than the level of local acceptance by the community of their defence forces would tend to be lost in the noise of general city life. I am not saying that these cities are any less patriotic or less supportive of the Australian Defence Force, I'm simply articulating that the size of Defence elements within these cities is such that they often go unnoticed within their local community. Conversely, we have also all read of and/or heard about the negative aspects of a much larger military population positioned with a smaller local community population. I would suggest that this may have added to the prevailing attitude of the Townsville community in the late 60s and early 70s. An attitude that was further complicated by anti Vietnam War movement gathering momentum across the county at the time.

**Combined Planning.** I have spoken little at this stage to the level of service and support provided by non-government agencies, such as the Townsville RSL, Townsville Enterprise, VVCS, James Cook University, the Townsville City

Council, and the State government and its agencies such as DEEDI to name a few. Their ongoing support provides outstanding assistance to the Australian Defence Force. The planning & construction for the relocation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, their eventual reception and embedding within Lavarack Barracks has been greatly assisted by these and many other agencies too numerous to list today and I do apologise for their omission.

I do note for the record, the networking efforts of DEEDI with agencies at both the local and state level that has seen the establishment of a regional relocation working group for 3 RAR. **[SLIDE 20]** This working group will pay dividends for the move of the Battalion and its families. It will enable us to smooth their transition across state boundaries and hopefully provide the new arrivals to Townsville with ready access to education, health, recreation and employment opportunities ie, all those sort of things that traditionally tend to suffer due to relocation. DEEDI has provided the key linkages for us into many government and non-government agencies and for that we are extremely grateful.

I believe also that the Townsville Futures Plan Task Force has just last week indicated the move of the Battalion as one of six development enablers to 'turbo-charge' the city of Townsville. The focus of effort and planning is understandable as the city stands to benefit economically from the arrival of the Battalion, so timely preparations are of course in region's best interests; however I can assure you that it is the Defence Force that will reap far greater benefit from such a coordinated community welcome.

## **Conclusion**

Those of us who are fortunate enough to be posted here in Townsville are extremely honoured and humbled by the level of support the community provides not only to us, but most importantly our families.

We are very appreciative of the joint planning and staff effort being provided to us for the relocation of the 3rd Battalion. The importance that the Townsville region has to the Australian Defence Force both as an enduring base and force projection hub is clearly indicated by the level of direct investment in infrastructure.

The benefit of joint planning and preparation cannot be understated and it will enable the city and its community to take advantage of these development opportunities while in reciprocation providing the ADF with that Townsville community support that is such a force multiplier of our capability, that it underpins it.

Thank you for your time today and enjoy your visit to **our Garrison City of Townsville.**