

Blue Shield Australia submission to the Australian Defence Force White Paper Community Consultation on 1 October 2008.

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What role should our armed forces play?

Blue Shield Australia (BSA)* recognizes the fundamental role and unique heritage of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) in providing security for Australia and Australians. BSA also acknowledges that the future operational environment is likely to be more dynamic, posing challenges that have not been regarded as core ADF responsibilities in the past.

We note the ADF's role in the provision of humanitarian and disaster relief, evacuations, diplomacy, peacekeeping and peace enforcement in the 2000 and 2008 Defence White Papers, and welcome the further discussion of these and other civil-military matters in the 2008 White Paper.

Blue Shield Australia supports the concept of a defence force with expanded responsibility, enhanced capability, and awareness of the importance of cultural heritage in the conduct of all types of military operations within Australia's areas of operations and influence. From a legal and psycho-social perspective we believe that enhanced awareness and capability will enable the ADF to play a more effective role in addressing future challenges in the civil-military environment.

Blue Shield Australia is conscious of the significant detrimental effects on people and property that have resulted from the destruction of cultural heritage in recent conflicts including Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. These effects have proven counter-productive to achieving the military mission in each theatre of operations. In each case, we feel that increased awareness of the significance of cultural heritage would enable the ADF and allied forces to plan and conduct operations more effectively. BSA believes that the potential to realize a similar dividend in other ADF operations, including natural disaster response, is evident.

What kinds of armed forces should we develop?

Blue Shield Australia urges the ADF to consider training our armed forces to understand our legal and moral obligations to recognise and protect cultural heritage in the planning and conduct of operations involving armed conflict or natural disaster. Blue Shield Australia would welcome the opportunity to partner with the ADF to develop and deliver appropriate training programmes.

We believe it is important to up-skill the ADF with specialist capabilities for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, including individuals trained in the recognition and management of cultural heritage within affected communities.

Blue Shield Australia suggests that with enhanced cultural heritage insight more effective assistance can be provided by the ADF in responding to natural disasters, such as the damage to local cultural organisations in Queensland in the wake of Cyclone Larry in 2006. We also note that BSA was able to provide actionable input using our international networks to the ADF while conducting operations in East Timor in 2006, where there was a real risk of critical legal records being stolen or destroyed in Dili.

BSA believes that in a partnership with the ADF we will be able to develop a more effective response to the challenges that lie ahead in Australia and our region, particularly in view of climate change induced emergencies.

Can we afford such forces?

It is clear from the 2008 Defence White Paper that the key to achieving expanded outcomes for our armed forces is efficient management of Defence resources. Blue Shield Australia believes that expenditure on cultural heritage awareness training in the ADF will result in more effective future operations, far outweighing the initial outlay.

Blue Shield Australia believes that the up-skilling of Australia's armed forces should be regarded as non-discretionary, and will realise good value for money, if the equation includes such measures as community stabilization and the protection of our limited but increasingly valuable global patrimony.

We also note that a number of recent Australian government reviews indicate that many traditional arrangements and priorities may be revised, in the interests of achieving more efficient and effective results for Australia (e.g. Review of the National Innovation System, Strategic Roadmap for Australian Research Infrastructure (particularly 'Safeguarding Australia'), 2020 Summit). Collaboration across expert areas is regarded as a key to this future.

We believe that the approaches to increasing the skills of our armed forces, outlined above, will enhance the ADF's reputation and ability.

*What is Blue Shield Australia?

The Blue Shield is the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross. It is the symbol specified in the 1954 Hague Convention for marking cultural sites to give them protection from attack in the event of armed conflict. It is also the name of an international committee set up in 1996 to work to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by war and natural disaster. (Please see: http://www.unesco.org/webworld/highlights/radency_290399.html)

The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) covers archives (including audio-visual archives), libraries, monuments and sites, and museums (including art museums and galleries). The ICBS is international, independent and professional. In September 2005, the ICBS approved an application by the expert cultural heritage organisations in Australia to establish an Australian national committee, Blue Shield Australia.

Blue Shield Australia (<http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/blue+shield+australia.aspx>)

brings together in a federated association the knowledge, experience and international networks of the expert organisations dealing with cultural heritage:

- International Council on Archives, represented in Australia by the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities
- International Council of Museums, represented in Australia by ICOM Australia
- International Council on Monuments and Sites, represented in Australia by Australia ICOMOS
- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, represented in Australia by the Australian Library and Information Association

Our vision is to influence disaster preparedness and emergency management response in Australia in respect of natural disasters and armed conflict in order to ensure the preservation of cultural heritage in Australia's areas of responsibility and influence.

Blue Shield Australia is supported by funds contributed as required by its four member bodies, and by in-kind assistance from its Secretariat, the Collections Council of Australia Ltd.