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Maunsell Australia  
Level 9  
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Melbourne, VIC 3000

November 13, 2006

Dear Sirs and Madams,

Please find below a summary of our comments on the Public Environment Report prepared by Maunsell/AECOM on the environmental impact of the Talisman Sabre joint war games 2007. A more comprehensive submission is attached.

While we appreciate the effort gone to by the department to consider the environmental effects of joint war games in our region, we feel that it is fatally flawed. Any kind of military activities in the Great Barrier Reef marine park should be disallowed, it is not compatible with sustainability or environmental protection.

The Shoalwater Bay and Coral sea regions should be no-go zones for military or any other industrial activities because:

- Shoalwater Bay and Corio Bay are Ramsar listed habitats for waterfowl – meaning they are of vital importance for the world, not just Queensland. It is Australia's duty to protect these areas from any development as signatories to the Ramsar and other conventions;
- Shoalwater seagrass meadows form one of the remaining food habitats for the endangered dugong – the use of sonar, turbulence and potential toxic spills put dugongs at risk;
- Shoalwater Bay is absolutely vital breeding habitat for the endangered Green Turtle *Chelonia mydas*: it has the highest concentration in the world of this declining species, this is their premier breeding habitat;
- The reef and other relatively undisturbed marine habitats are already under pressure from global warming and comprise a piece of natural heritage that should be preserved at any cost;
- Military games present too many and varied risks to both habitat and the animals that depend on it, including the potential for accidents involving toxic chemicals used in munitions or flares;
- The nuclear risk has not been adequately assessed, we feel that the presence of DU munitions – deemed illegal by the UN – also puts the ADF in a perilous moral situation for tolerating it; a larger nuclear-based accident could be catastrophic for humans and wildlife alike – it is our understanding that no nuclear preparedness has been considered by this assessment, nor has it been deemed nuclear by the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. We believe this is a wrong assessment;
- The record of the U.S. military with regards to environmental contamination is abysmal;

- The intentional introduction of toxic materials such as phosphorus marine markers, seawater ballast containing introduced species and the intentional disposal of ship-board waste at sea are likely events that should not be tolerated in a World Heritage listed marine park, nor in the important Shoalwater Bay which rightly should be part of the GBRMP area;
- The region is one of economic importance to tourism in Queensland. The existence of war games does not enhance tourism use. Indeed, military presence brings with it increases in crime, assault, public drunkenness and unreported sexual assaults on women;
- The increasing human population – increased military presence will lead inevitably to increased conflict of land and sea use. Many local inhabitants want to see the Shoalwater region better protected and do not want increased military activities in their region – their opinions should be of great importance in decision-making;
- Increased military activity in our region, in particular with the global nuclear superpower, is interpreted by our neighbours, and claimed by the military itself, in military media, to be “Saber Rattling” in our region. The social and political implications of these activities are long-term, far-reaching, and incompatible with social justice or environmental sustainability and, therefore, unacceptable;
- The region falls within the traditional lands of the Darumbal people. Despite being the recognized as the traditional owners and Native Title Claimants, the Darumbal have not been given Native Title to their land nor do they have equity in the decision-making process about military activity. They are allowed only occasional and temporary access to Shoalwater Bay, and not fairly represented or consulted on its use. We believe that access to traditional land and enabling of practicing of traditional culture is a human right being denied the Darumbal people. Their land should be returned to them to be protected and honoured for the future.

#### Recommendations summary:

The above factors contribute to a recommendation that the TS07 joint war games not go ahead in the Shoalwater Bay region and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The area comprising the Shoalwater Bay Defence Training Area should be handed back to the people of Queensland as a national park. This action would show the good faith of the ADF with regards to their environmental credentials. We also submit that the track record of the U.S. Department of Defence (DoD) calls into question any joint activities anywhere in Australia.

Regards,

Kim Stewart. BA, Bsc hons A  
Friends of the Earth Brisbane

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# **Comments on the Public Environmental Assessment for the Talisman Sabre Joint U.S.-Australian war games 2007.**



picture: Pat O'Brien, Wildlife Protection Association of Australia

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# 1. Introduction

It is Friends of the Earth's view that the Talisman Sabre 2007 joint war games should not go ahead in the Shoalwater Bay region or anywhere.

The framework of this Public Environment Report assumes that war games and military activity can be compatible with environmental preservation. Agenda 21, the international covenant on sustainability, says in principle 24 that "Warfare is inherently destructive of sustainable development".

We submit that war games are incompatible with environmental protection too – and that the tendency of the military to less than full disclosure of their activities for security reasons means that we cannot make an informed assessment of what will go on.

We can, however, take into account some known quantities:

- the record of past military performance, both by the ADF and U.S.
- the known chemical toxicity in the environment of commonly used munitions
- the known effects on the environment of commonly used military vehicles and vessels both nuclear and non-nuclear
- recent experiences in the region during and post military exercises
- the existence of treaties for the protection of the environment including the Ramsar convention, the Japanese Australian Migratory Birds Agreement, the China Australia Migratory Birds Agreement
- and legal mechanisms including the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999* (EPBCA 1999)
- flaws in the *EPBCA 1999* that mean that even if the military abide by existing laws, they may still be damaging sensitive habitat due to exclusions and limitations of the so-called 'key' environmental legislation for Australia.
- The increased likelihood of Australian involvement in U.S. led wars as a result of increased "interoperability"

Our submission takes in to account these factors when reviewing the PER and the proposed military exercises. We will focus primarily on Shoalwater Bay as a case study, however, the concerns raised apply to all areas that the US military visits before, during, and after the exercises, in all parts of Australia, the surrounding seas and regions traversed.

"Interoperability" has been the catch-cry of those in the ADF and government who seek to justify more U.S.-Australian joint war games. This begs the question: "Do we expect to be involved in more U.S. wars?" and "Is it in our strategic or national interest?". Do we want to align ourselves with environmental pariahs and equip our defence forces with offensive and polluting weapons?

Most importantly for this environmental assessment, we should ask if we want polluting weapons and military equipment used on Australian territory, and do we accept the risk of the potential use – accidental or intentional, or undisclosed "new" weapons, depleted uranium munitions, and nuclear weapons in our region.

note: SWBTA = Shoalwater Bay Training Area

## 2. Justifications



picture: Steve bishopric, Shoalwater Wilderness Awareness Group

### 2.1 International Treaties

**The Shoalwater Bay/Corio Bay area adjacent to the SWBTA is a Ramsar listed habitat for waterfowl – meaning it is of vital importance for the world, not just Queensland or Australia. It is Australia's duty to protect these areas from any development as signatories to the Ramsar convention.**

The Ramsar convention protects wetland of international significance for their environmental benefits accrued to clean water. In the case of the Shoalwater region, the water catchment for the town of Yeppoon arises from Waterpark Creek, an area adjacent to SWBTA.

Twenty-five bird species protected by the Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA) and listed under the China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA) also visit the area.

It is arguable that the military zone should have been included in the Shoalwater/Corio Bay Ramsar listing. The environmental affects of toxic chemicals in land, sea and air do not respect artificial boundaries.

We are very concerned that the importance of international treaties on the environment that exist are not taken seriously in the Maunsell TS07 Public Environment Report.



### 2.2 Dugong habitat

**Shoalwater seagrass meadows form one of the remaining food habitats for the endangered**

## **dugong – the use of sonar, turbulence and potential toxic spills put dugongs at risk.**

The dugong, *Dugong dugon*, is suffering from population decline in many parts of its range. It is found in greater numbers in Australian waters than anywhere else in the world. Dugong numbers halved in the decade between 1990 and 2000. There are currently about 4000 dugongs in Australian waters, which is where they are concentrated. Shoalwater Bay is one of the most important dugong habitats in Queensland due to its large north facing aspect, making it an ideal site for seagrass to grow.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority cites “Seagrass loss was a major cause of death of dugongs in Hervey Bay in 1992 following a flood. However, in the Shoalwater Bay area where dugong numbers have declined in recent years, studies since 1995 have shown that there has not been a major loss of seagrass since the 1980s.” This raises the serious question that military activity be the differing factor in Shoal water dugong decline – what evidence exists to show that the military is not having a detrimental impact on dugong populations?

The UN 2002 Report on Dugongs recommends that remaining dugong habitats in Australia be protected. Dugongs are already under pressure, hence their endangered status, from habitat loss and accidental death by boating collisions and in fishing nets.

In 2003 the U.S. DoD were taken to court by environmentalists in Okinawa, Japan for the expansion plans for the U.S. base there onto a nearby reef which would threaten the Okinawan dugong population. The U.S. DoD wanted to landfill coral reef and build a military base with 2,600m runway, aircraft hangers, large fuel storage tanks and many other facilities. Only court action and the adverse publicity it occasioned forced them to withdraw. The action and attitude of the US military in this case indicate a lack of commitment to sustainability or respect for the local and ecological community – exposing the poor track record of an organization now attempting represent itself as a responsible environmentally sensitive organization.

### **Sonar**

Importantly for the SWBTA and TS07 is the use of active sonar in the oceans near the bay. Sonar is known to effect cetaceans, and dugongs also respond to sonar. Sonar was thought responsible for the deaths of whales and dolphins worldwide, the loud noises frightening the animals, causing brain hemorrhages and 'the bends'.

The American Cetacean Society (ACS) says, “The U.S. Navy, in developing and testing its SURTASS-LFA (Surveillance Towed-Array Sensor System -- Low-Frequency Active, called "LFA" for short) sonar system, was caught bypassing domestic environmental laws and taken to court by environmental groups”.

ACS says the U.S. navy have the capacity to ensonify 80% of the world's oceans. Dr Marsha Green, for the Ocean Mammal Institute says that, “low -frequency (LFAS) and mid -frequency can have a source level of 240 db, which is one trillion times louder than the sounds whales have been shown to avoid.”

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority cite, “detonations of explosives, the use of live munitions and the use of active sonar and other acoustic devices” as threats to marine life in the area.

Sonar and ocean noise has also been found to affect fish, injuring or killing them by vibrating their

swim bladders, reducing catches and affecting the viability of eggs.

The Maunsell TS07 Public Environment Report says that naval sonar will be used “well off coast outside of migratory paths of cetaceans” (p34). We contend that LFA sonar can travel hundred of kilometres underwater and is affected by water depth. We, therefore, do not see that the above proposition as credible.

We are very concerned that the importance of protecting this declining species has not been taken seriously, despite the admirable things said about dugongs by the Maunsell TS07 Public Environment Report.



## **2.3 Green turtle habitat**

**Shoal water Bay is absolutely vital breeding habitat for the endangered Green Turtle *Chelonia mydas*: it has the highest concentration in the world of this declining species, this is their premier breeding habitat. The population of Green Turtles is thought to be declining worldwide.**

Turtles are sensitive to sonar emissions undersea and could be susceptible to naval use of sonar in the same way as cetaceans and dugong.

A former U.S. DoD military dump sites in the Pacific are listed as a threat to green sea turtles there by the *Recovery Plan for U.S. Pacific Populations of the Green Turtle*.

We are very concerned that the importance of protecting the Shoalwater population of Green Turtles is not being taken seriously, despite the admirable things said about Green turtles by the Maunsell TS07 Public Environment Report.

## **2.4 Fish refugia & other species**

**In November 2006 the British Journal of Science published a report on the state of the world's fisheries that indicates if we do not protect fish habitats and restrain fishing, fish stocks will collapse by 2048.**

Shoalwater Bay is home to many species of fish and its protected situation and extensive mangrove ecosystem makes it an excellent fish refugia and breeding habitat. The seagrass meadows, on which dugongs totally depend, are also the breeding place for environmentally and economically important species such as rock lobsters *Panulirus cygnus*, blue swimmer crab *Portunus pelagicus* and 20 species of prawns. Other endangered species such as the logger head turtle also visit Shoalwater Bay. In fact the Maunsell TS07 Public Environment Report lists 38 endangered and vulnerable species in Shoalwater Bay alone, and over 100 endangered and vulnerable species in the combined training areas proposed for use in TS07.

We are very concerned that the protection of declining fish stocks and the fate of other species that use Shoalwater Bay and other locations for TS07 are not being taken seriously, despite the admirable things said about them by the Maunsell TS07 Public Environment Report.

## **2.5 Other environmental pressures on the region**

The reef and other relatively undisturbed marine habitats are already under pressure from global warming and comprise a piece of natural heritage that should be preserved at any cost.

U.S. Military vehicles and operations are known to be a source of significant greenhouse gas emissions. One of their most commonly used vehicles, the Humvee, is notorious for its fuel consumption and emissions. The U.S. DoD have sought blanket exemption from the U.S. Clean Air Act and the U.S. Solid Waste Disposal Act amongst others mentioned below. These are not the actions of responsible environmental stewardship.

## **2.6 Record of military contamination of environment**

### **2.6.1 Australian Defence Force**

**The ADF have a fairly innocuous environmental record, however, the ADF have practised sea-dumping of war related pollutants including mustard gas and the radioactive hulls of ships used in the British nuclear tests.**

As they have been practicing in the Shoalwater Bay region for some time, it is likely that contaminants and unexploded ordnance are already in the soil, especially in the Dismal sector where live bombing occurs.

The ADF have been less than responsive to the needs of the local people living near the SWBTA. These people are exposed to low flying aircraft, military convoys passing through their towns and vibrations and noise associated with live firing and bombing contributing to a stressful environment to live in. In one instance they have been told the military have “no sympathy” for them.

A eyewitness account by a local fisherman who has worked in the Shoalwater Bay area of over 20 years indicates that he has seen extensive damage to mangroves as a result of the use of white phosphorus, used for signaling, screening, and incendiary purposes. He was told, upon inquiry, by Senator Robert Hill that it was due to drought. This he judged to be a very inadequate assessment not based on the evidence, in his experience.

In addition, local residents are concerned about potential groundwater pollution from explosives in the water catchment for Waterpark Creek, part of the water source for the town of Yeppoon. Perchlorate commonly used in rocket fuel has been detected in many groundwater sites where the U.S. forces have practiced bombing in both the U.S. and worldwide.

It is true that the land around Shoalwater Bay would have been more severely degraded had the military not repossessed in 1965 it from the cattle farmers that have degraded the surrounding area. However, other factors are now coming into play, not the least is the importance of the area as a wildlife refugia in a world increasingly under pressure from global warming, and the growth of human habitation in the area.

## 2.6.2 United States Department of Defence

**The record of the U.S. military with regards to environmental contamination is abysmal, and yet we propose to let them use one of our most environmentally sensitive areas.**

The U.S. DoD has been described as the world's biggest industrial polluters, given the toxic legacy that their bases and facilities have created worldwide. Project Censored estimates that “the U.S. military generates 750,000 tons of toxic waste material annually, more than the five largest chemical companies in the U.S. combined. This pollution occurs globally as the U.S. maintains bases in dozens countries.” The U.S. DOD has sought exemptions from many important environmental laws in the U.S. including the *Migratory Bird Treaties Act*, the *Wildlife Act*, the *Endangered Species Act*, the *Clean Air Act* and the *National Environmental Policy Act*. Hardly the actions of good environmental stewards.

Perhaps the worst cases of U.S. Military pollution offshore would be the cases of Vieques, Puerto Rico and Clarkson Air Base in the Philippines. In Vieques, Depleted Uranium was used extensively, leading to birth defects and high rates of leukemia. Perchlorate contaminated the water table and ghost nets set adrift by massive naval vessels continue to devastate the fisheries. At Clarkson Air Base, the Philippines government used the land to house victims of the Pinatabu eruptions because they did not know the extent of the contamination, resulting in illness and birth defect affecting hundreds of people.

The Military Toxics Project says of Vieques:

Since 1940, the U.S. Navy has used three-quarters of the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico for bombardment, munitions disposal, and other activities. There is strong evidence that heavy metals and other munitions toxins move in the air from the bombing range to the civilian areas. The toxic explosive compound RDX was found in drinking water supplies in civilian areas in the late 1970s. In 2000, excessive levels of mercury were found in the hair and fingernails of 45% of Vieques residents tested. Vegetables and plants growing in civilian areas are highly contaminated with lead, cadmium, and other heavy metals. From 1985-1989, Vieques children aged 0-9 were 117% more likely to contract cancer than children of the same age on the main island of Puerto Rico. Children aged 10-19 were 256% more likely to contract cancer. A 2001 study found that Vieques residents are 73% more likely to suffer from heart disease than residents of the main island, 64% more likely to develop hypertension, 58% more likely to have diabetes, and 18% more likely to be diagnosed with asthma.

Both Vieques and Clarkson Air Base are now closed down and the full effects of their contamination can only be assessed after the military have vacated the premises.

No compensation has been offered to these communities devastated by U.S. DoD toxins.

Moreover, the U.S. DoD is reluctant to compensate even U.S. citizens for environmental pollution. One study has found that the U.S. DoD is even polluting the national food supply.

There are about 140 superfund listed U.S. military sites. The Military Toxics Project estimates contaminated sites number in the several thousands in the U.S.. The U.S. Navy has estimated it would cost them U.S. \$33b just to clean up the contaminated navy sites.

Contaminants on those sites include buried munitions, unexploded ordnances, spilled oil, fuel and solvents, toxic explosives compounds including TNT and perchlorate and heavy metals including lead and tungsten. In a stunning double standard, depleted uranium is not permitted to be used on U.S. testing ranges.

These kinds of actions call into question the role of defence, who exists to protect citizens, not harm

them. ADF collusion with them, including increased use of the same kind of weapons that the U.S. Forces have used to poison their own people, does not reflect well on the reputation of Australia's Defence Forces.

Much of the pollution is the result of day to day maintenance and training like that which will occur during the TS07 war games.

We are very concerned that the importance of the environmental record of the U.S. DoD is not being considered. We feel that they are irresponsible global citizens and put the Shoalwater region at risk. There is no mention of the U.S. DoD's poor environmental record in the Maunsell TS07 Public Environment Report.

## **2.7 Nuclear risks**

**A larger nuclear-based accident could be catastrophic for humans and wildlife alike – it is our understanding that no nuclear preparedness has been considered by this assessment, nor has it been deemed nuclear by the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* – we believe this is a wrong assessment.**

Nuclear powered vessels, potentially carrying nuclear weapons and almost certainly carrying depleted uranium munitions, were used in the TS05 joint war games. It is likely that the same will happen for TS07, yet this does not trigger the EPBCA according to the Department of the Environment.

If this is the case, then the EPBCA is flawed because the presence of nuclear vessels carrying nuclear weapons does pose a nuclear risk. In Tokyo, Japan 2006 radiation was detected in the waters around a nuclear powered submarine, the U.S. Honolulu, although the U.S. navy denies this and maintains they have a good record.

Some Japanese ports see the risk of nuclear accident from visiting U.S. warships so great that they hold nuclear leak drills to test their preparedness.

Indeed, the 1989 Senate Standing committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade Inquiry into Nuclear Powered Ships Visiting Australia found that risk assessment based on past record of accidents could not be used as a predictor of future accidents. In other words, it was a clear case of using the precautionary principle because of the clear risk associated with an accident.

In any case, if the military choose to go by their record on accidents we can only say it is inadequate and probably understated due to military security. There have been at least 10 serious peacetime accidents involving U.S. nuclear submarines on the public record. As recently as March 2005 a U.S. nuclear sub was involved in an undersea crash that killed crew members.

A witness to the 1989 Senate inquiry found that the paucity of reported accidents involving nuclear submarines was probably due to, “tight secrecy surrounding sensitive military information” and “it would take blind faith to believe that disaster and near disasters as yet undisclosed, had not occurred in NPW reactors” (p 135). In fact, media outlets site incidents in the many hundreds.

The Brisbane Port Authority does not disclose its state of preparedness for a nuclear based accident and there seems to be no such plan for the Shoalwater region. Despite having management plans, other ports do not detail what kind of training or protection will be available for emergency service workers. It is our understanding that SES workers in the Stannage Bay region, who are some of the

first people to be called to a nuclear, or any other type of emergency at Shoalwater Bay, have not been trained in nuclear response and are in fact all volunteers.

We are very concerned that the importance of emergency planning in case of nuclear or other large incident or accident has not been taken seriously by the Maunsell TS07 Public Environment Report.

## **2.8 Other military pollution**

**We contend that contrary to the Maunsell TS07 Public Environment Report, all military action and munitions involve chemicals.**

Some of the chemicals or hazardous materials that have been released into the Shoalwater Bay area in the past by military activities include: intentional introduction of toxic materials such as red phosphorus marine markers, seawater ballast potentially containing introduced species and the intentional disposal of ship-board waste at sea. These events that should not be tolerated in a World Heritage listed marine park, nor in the important Shoalwater Bay.

The proposal for TS07 includes the possible use of “new” weapons (PER p 75). There is no way that an environmental assessment can be complete without knowing what effect these undisclosed, untested weapons may have.

### **Perchlorate**

Perchlorate, the primary ingredient in rocket fuel, is the chemical causing the most concern worldwide with regards to the U.S. DoD's operations. It has been found contaminating groundwater in 20 U.S. states as a result of its use at rocket test sites, military bases, and perchlorate-production plants. It has been linked to thyroid problems, birth defects and inhibited newborn development. A recent study has found perchlorate is even contaminating the U.S. food supply and that 'safe' level standards are inadequate.

The people of Byfield and Yeppoon are concerned that perchlorate may be leaking into their water supply because the live firing area in the Dismal sector at SWBTA is part of the catchment for the Yeppoon water supply through Waterpark Creek. They have not been successful in getting local authorities to test the water. It is incumbent on the military to take action on their concerns.

### **White Phosphorus**

White Phosphorus was found responsible for the contamination of the estuarine environment at Eagle River Flats near Fort Richardson base, Alaska, U.S.A. The fishing grounds of local Alaskans were destroyed and thousands of water birds killed, “every year for almost two decades” according to the Military Toxic Project. They also say unexploded ordnance “may exist in, on, and/or under up to 2 million acres of lands and waters outside the current boundaries of the base.”

An eyewitness account by a local fisherman indicates that white phosphorus has been used at SWBTA, which is adjacent to the Ramsar listed Shoalwater/Corio Bay wetlands.

### **Phosphorus markers**

Marine markers are reputed to have washed ashore in Yeppoon near the SWBTA on two occasions in the months after the TS05 games. The marine markers were reported in the media to be red phosphorus, MK58 type.

Eyewitnesses say the ADF was slow to respond to the presence of the unexploded marker in a populated area. However, there was a fast response from the PR department, which led to misinformation being told the media, who reported the marker disposed of prematurely.

The presence of potentially explosive and dangerous military equipment on a populated beach is intolerable to the local population and presents a clear risk, especially to vehicles that drive on that beach. The marker also increases the mental stress to people living in the area.

### **Ballast**

The Maunsell PER says it is likely that ballast water will be expelled at non-defence ports. Ballast water is a known mechanism for the transfer of exotic species into Australian waters.

This risk is not peculiar to military vessels however, but it compounds the number of risks being introduced by the presence of U.S. vessels in environmentally sensitive areas.

### **Marine debris**

After TS05 games, shipboard generated domestic waste was found washed ashore on the Sunshine coast at Mudjimba and on the Sunshine Coast.

Apparently it is the policy of the U.S. navy to dispose of their waste in this manner, and the bag was accompanied by a letter that said as much. The waste included plastic debris and paper.

Entanglement in marine debris can restrict an animal's movement, causing starvation, bodily infections, amputation of limbs and drowning of marine creatures. The Australian Department of Environment and Heritage lists the Green Turtle as one species particularly vulnerable to the dangers of marine debris.

“Harmful marine debris” has been listed as a key threatening process under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Disposing of plastics at sea is totally prohibited by the International Convention. Despite this, the EPBCA excludes “marine debris resulting from the legal disposal of garbage at sea”, which we presume includes the U.S Navy.

Friends of the Earth fails to see how legally disposed of garbage could be any less threatening to sea creatures than non-legally disposed of garbage and condemns yet another flaw in the legislation.

Due to the failure of legislation, it is incumbent on the military to end this threatening process.

The Maunsell PER states that it is almost certain that there will be, “Inadvertent release of solid materials (non-waste) such as equipment into the sea during anchoring within ports. (p 82) and that military personnel will inappropriately dispose of wastes. These practices are unacceptable.

### **Plane crash**

On their return journey from participation in maneuvers in Australian waters in January 2006 a U.S. FA-18 Hornet strike fighter plane crashed in the ocean 200km SE of Brisbane. No attempt was made to retrieve the \$37m aircraft, nor were the public made aware of the potential environmental contaminants contained within the sunken aircraft or its mother ship.

We are very concerned that the dangers of chemical pollutants used in everyday military activities have not been taken seriously by the Maunsell TS07 Public Environment Report.

## **2.9 Needs of growing human population in region**

**The increasing human population in the Capricorn region will lead inevitably to increased conflict of land and sea use with the military. Many local inhabitants want to see the Shoalwater region better protected and do not want increased military activities in their region – their opinions should be of great importance in decision-making.**

Instances of conflict in recent months include: the washing ashore of phosphorus marine markers (Bangalee Beach, 2006) and naval garbage, an incident where helicopter gunships menaced a family yachting in Shoalwater Bay (July 2006) and incidents of stress caused by increased military activity in the adjacent towns of Byfield and Yeppoon. Byfield residents have long been forced to tolerate the seismic events associated with bombing runs in the nearby Dismal sector of the SWBTA.

In one of the latter instances, a local resident who complained of noise from low flying helicopters was told by a ADF spokesperson that he had “no sympathy” for people who live near military facilities. This does not represent good PR to say the least, and demonstrates the increasing tension between military uses and civilian uses of the area.

The incident involving a yachting family is a particularly disturbing one. Children were made hysterical by the menacing nature of the helicopter gunship in question and the family forced to leave safe waters in bad weather. The army, although later apologising to the family, has refused to provide safe harbour for boats caught in bad weather.

In addition, there have been concerns that the drinking water of Yeppoon may be endangered by weapons use in the Dismal sector, as it forms part of the water catchment for the town and runs into Waterpark Creek. Of particular concern is perchlorate which I have discussed above.

### **Sexual assault**

In addition, anecdotal reports indicate to us that there is a significant increase in sexual assaults, drink spiking, crime and public drunkenness in the area where troops participating in war games recreate. It is known that incidents of sexual and interpersonal violence are a problem within the troops. In 2005 there were 2, 374 sexual assaults in the U.S involving military personnel. Punitive action was taken in less than a quarter of these cases. Researchers estimate as many as 67,000 women veterans, 29 percent of those who visited U.S. Veterans Affairs clinics, say they experienced sexual assault in the military. The amount of assaults in the ADF is not made public. The amount of sexual assaults on civilians is unknown.

It is our understanding that rapes and sexual are more often than not, unreported. The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs says only 20% of women report, other studies have found that even fewer report. Thus these figures could easily be ten times larger. Substantially more effort should be made to protect women and to reign in the behaviour of troops. We should not be exposing women to this kind of threat.

We are very concerned that the importance of protecting the needs of the human population have not been addressed in the Maunsell TS07 Public Environment Report.

## **2.10 Indigenous issues**

The SWBTA falls within the traditional lands of the Darumbal people. Despite being the recognized as the traditional owners and Native Title Claimants, the Darumbal have not been given Native Title to their land nor do they have equity in the decision-making process about military activity. They are allowed only occasional and temporary access to Shoalwater Bay, and not fairly represented or consulted on its use.

Despite claims that efforts have been made to consult with indigenous people, we feel that this effort has been inadequate. In preliminary documents for the recent parliamentary submissions regarding the upgrading of Shoalwater Bay Training facilities, the ADF did not even list Traditional Owners as “stakeholders” to be consulted. The ADF then claimed that they had not had consultation with traditional owners because the traditional owners were “not contactable”. Friends of the Earth and other community representatives, however, have had no trouble contacting Traditional Owners, and question the sincerity of the ADF’s attempts. Furthermore, the ADF repeatedly implies that the fact that an environmental consultation committee exists for the region ensures that Traditional Owners are represented. It is our understanding that only one indigenous person is on that committee, that the committee meets infrequently, that there is no guarantee of any indigenous presence when the meeting convenes and that the community elders are rarely directly consulted.

We believe that access to traditional land, ability to speak for country, and the ability to practice traditional culture is a human right being denied the Darumbal people. Their land should be returned to them to be protected and honoured for the future.

## **2.11 Economic importance of region to tourism**

In 2005 Access Economics estimated the total economic contribution of tourism, commercial fishing, and cultural and recreational activity of the Great Barrier Reef at over \$3.5 billion per annum. They did not even attempt to estimate the ecosystem service that the Great Barrier Reef provides (mitigating pollution, providing spawning habitat for fisheries, absorbing carbon, etc) because these costs are incalculable.

The Capricorn region is of much greater economic value as a tourist destination than as a military one. Unlike the military, genuine tourists do not necessarily increase the crime and sexual assault rate like that associated with military everywhere, nor do they blow things up.

Considering the other pressures on the natural environment, non-destructive uses such as scuba diving and photography should be encouraged in preference to war games.

We are very concerned that the importance of the region for tourism has not been taken seriously by the Maunsell TS07 Public Environment Report. It is simply incompatible with war games.

## **2.12 Increased risks of war-related environmental contamination**

The increased involvement of the ADF in U.S. led wars will be one inevitable outcome of increasing joint war games with the U.S. The devastating environmental impact of wars anywhere should not be overlooked.

The environmental legacy of two Gulf Wars has included air, water and land contamination by depleted uranium, contamination from the oil well fires and oil spills, vehicle emissions, heavy

metal contamination from missiles, dispersal of chemicals and other toxins from bombing of domestic buildings and disturbance of the desert areas by military activities. Not to mention and acts of violence and other traumatic events affecting the human population during invasion and occupation. The effects have included increased cancers in humans, decline in fish and shrimp stocks in the gulf and water contamination hampering recovery efforts. Human beings in the region still suffer post-traumatic stress syndrome from both the environmental contamination and the interpersonal violence they were exposed to. The first Gulf War is estimated to have effected the health of over 20,000 residents of nearby Saudi Arabia. While in Iran "black rain" was said to have resulted from oil fires. Iraq is reputed to have experienced a ten fold increase in birth deformities as a result of the use of Depleted Uranium. U.S. troops claim similar effects from exposures.

Project Censored cites a report on Iraq of the United Nations Environmental Program [UNEP]'s Post-Conflict Assessment Unit noting "that the heavy Pentagon bombing and the movement of large numbers of Pentagon military vehicles and troops in Iraq "further degraded natural and agricultural ecosystems."

The UNEP Post-Conflict Assessment Unit report also observed that the Pentagon's intensive use of Depleted Uranium [DU] weapons. Significant levels of radioactive contamination were found at four sites in Baghdad in May 2003, by Christian Science Monitor reporter Scott Peterson (CSM, 5/15/03). Much of this radioactive contamination was likely produced by the DU bullets fired into the center of Baghdad at the Iraqi Ministry of Planning by the Pentagon's A-10 Warhog aircraft, Abrams tanks or Bradley fighting vehicles. According to the Monitor, Pentagon figures indicate that about 250,000 DU bullets were fired by A-10 Warhog aircraft in March and April 2003, leaving an estimated additional 75 tons of DU in Iraq, as a result of the Pentagon's attack.

Local air pollution and soil contamination in Iraq also increased, as a result of the recent war. The Pentagon's bombing of Baghdad, for instance, ignited fires which toxic, black smoke that contained dangerous chemicals, which caused harm to Iraqi children and to Iraqi adults with respiratory problems, and further polluted Iraqi ecosystems. (Project Censored 2004)

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) says that in the first Gulf War alone an estimated 6-8 million barrels of oil were split and 600 oil wells set on fire. Arguably any involvement in preparation for war is preparation for environmental degradation. Any pretense to environmental sustainability of war and practice for war is spurious in this light.

In addition, DU has been declared illegal by the United Nations and the continued use of it should not be tolerated in any of Australia's allied countries.

We are very concerned that the importance of engaging with countries who defy UN rules on weapons that cause widespread non-target human damage on an ongoing basis has been entirely ignored by the Maunsell TS07 Public Environment Report.

## **2.12 Political and social consequences**

Increased military activity in our region, in particular with the global nuclear superpower, is interpreted by our neighbours, and claimed by the military itself, in military media, to be "Saber Rattling" in our region. The social and political implications of these activities are long-term, far-reaching, and incompatible with social justice or environmental sustainability and, therefore, unacceptable.

It is our belief that peace is a pre-requisite for ecological sustainability and for social justice. Weapons proliferation, military posturing and war games increase regional tension and fuel non-weapons states desire to develop militarily. The only way to increase security in our region and globally is create mutual cultures of respect and understanding. Australia (and the US) should be

investing finances, energy and resources in practicing and promoting peaceful solutions to global conflict and to addressing social and environmental needs and home.

### 3. Recommendations

The Shoalwater Bay region should have been incorporated into the Great Barrier Reef Marine park long ago. The increased threats to endangered species and habitat loss make the region more important than ever. While the area may have been protected from the ravages of cattle farming for the 40 years it has been under military governance, that use of the area is no longer appropriate.

The increasing use of the area for military maneuvers must end now. It behooves the Australian Defence Force to cease training in the area, to hand it back to the people of Australia and the world, and to bow out gracefully from the area.

Peace is an important precursor to environmental sustainability and social justice. We therefore believe that rather than practicing for war, Australia should be investing in peaceful resolutions to conflict at home and overseas.

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