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SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
MEMBER FOR CORIO**

**ADDRESS TO THE INAUGURAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN INDO-PACIFIC
DEFENCE CONFERENCE**

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**PERTH USASIA CENTRE,
PERTH**

***** CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY *****

[Acknowledgements omitted]

In February of last year, the Federal Government, in the lead up to the state election, announced a commitment to Western Australia in terms of Defence of \$100 million – a nice, round figure. Exactly what it was for was not articulated. Indeed, I still don't think it's completely clear. Exactly how that money fitted in terms of a national strategy, a national agenda, was not made out, but there was \$100 million in the lead up to an election. It's point, in that sense, was absolutely clear.

There's a certain contempt, to be honest, in an announcement of that kind. It says that the value of this state and of this city is not about a place in our national story but is simply about a round number there in order to attract votes. And it represents an attitude by the Federal Government in defence terms towards this state which absolutely must change.

It is critical that we actually develop a strategy which is about where Western Australia fits in the national story, a narrative about the Australian defence perspective which sees WA in its rightful place. It is, in a sense, what Kim Beazley did back in 1987 when he first talked about the importance of having a two-oceans navy. That is an idea about national interest. That was an idea which gave rise to a tectonic shift in our force posture and in the process brought Western Australia, Henderson, Fleet Base West, into the centre of our nation's affairs.

It is a thoughtful, Labor defence tradition that given the opportunity we would aspire to in government, a tradition which has its origins in Andrew Fisher's government in the creation of the Navy itself; in the favoured son of this state in John Curtin and his deep understand of the threat that was at that time posed in East Asia and the need to build up our defence force as a result, and he said that from opposition to a government at time which paid little interest, and then when he took the reins of government during the Second World War itself understood that our defence force needed to be here, in East Asia defending Australia, and not in Europe. It's a thoughtfulness that was exhibited by Gough Whitlam, who actually brought to an end to the separate service departments and gave rise to the Department of Defence itself.

That's the tradition that, if given the opportunity, we see ourselves being a part of as a Labor government when it comes to defence, and in that context thinking about Western Australia not on terms of a round number that's going to be thrown at this state in order to keep people quiet or in order to attract people at the ballot box, but actually thinking about the strategic value of this state in the nation's story. Because when you do that, it is immediately apparent how critically strategic and important Western Australia is.

Of all the state capitals, it is here in Perth that we are closest, for example, to Indonesia: a trillion dollar economy growing five per cent a year; a population of more than 270 million expected by the end of this decade; and at the heart of it, the most densely populated island, Java, in the world.

It is here in Perth we're closest to the capitals of ASEAN as a region, which, taken as a region, will be by the middle of this century the fourth-largest economy in the world, surpassing Europe and Japan, being behind only China, India and the United States.

Indeed, the significance of Western Australia in the context of our trading routes, of our relationship to the world, is that if you take three of our five largest trading partners – Korea, Japan, China – which together represent most of Australia's trade, more than a quarter of that has its origins here in Western Australia.

Here in Perth we are the gateway to the Indian Ocean and to India itself, a country which I think, actually, over our national journey we've under-done in terms of our bilateral relationship until the last decade or so. This is a \$2.6 trillion economy growing at eight per cent a year, 1.4 billion people that within our lifetime may well be the most populous nation on earth. We have not paid it enough attention until the last decade or so, but it says something about the sensibility that comes by being an Australian who sees the sun set over the ocean that a couple of Australian defence ministers from Western Australia, a couple of Australian foreign ministers from Western Australia, I think in the last 10 years - we've got a couple of them here today - have played a really important role in opening our eyes to the opportunities that India represents for us. We really do have an opportunity to be as good a friend as that nation has: shared democratic values, shared history in terms of traditions of public service, the rule of law, the English legal system, cricket. These are all great opportunities for us, but not just in terms of building an economic relationship but being partners in providing for the security of the Indian Ocean itself.

Then there are the Indian Ocean nations, countries like Seychelles, Mauritius, who don't necessarily loom large in our world view but we certainly loom large in theirs. The biggest Seychellois diaspora community in the world is here in Australia. I think the same is true in relation to Mauritius, and they look to us as a nation which actually does have an experience and an understanding of what it is to be a small island state through our work in the Pacific, and we need to be thinking more about how we can bring the lessons learnt in the Pacific to the

way in which we relate to those nations.

Here in Perth we are in the gateway to Africa. This is the second-fastest growing continent in the world. About 1 in 20 ASX-listed companies in Australia today have investments in Africa. There are more than 170 ASX-listed companies involved in more than 400 projects across 35 African nations when it comes to mining. This Australian footprint involves current and future investment in mining projects in the order of \$40 billion. This deepens the Australian impact in Africa through the provision of mining equipment and technology and services, and the companies providing those services and supporting those mining operations make it not unreasonable to suggest that the mining operations capital of Africa is in fact right here in Perth. That is a huge opportunity for Australia.

It's not just in terms of that. This is a continent which trusts us in a security sense. I represented Australia at a couple of African Union meetings and I've seen this first hand. Indeed, our earliest military engagement as a people, before we were a nation, was under Charles Gordon of Khartoum. If you go to Melbourne the most important, prominent statue in that city of Charles Gordon, and it bears testament to the fact that our first engagement as Australians in military affairs was in Sudan. A decade or so later we were in the Boer War. Today we have service men and women in South Sudan, and it's been my privilege to visit the UN mission South Sudan. We have participants in the multinational force observers in Sinai in Egypt. We're providing financial support to the African Union's mission in Somalia. In the past we've had Australian personnel serving with the UN in Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Western Sahara and Namibia. We have a frigate right now engaged in operations in the Gulf of Aden.

All of this is why we maintain today a defence attache to the African Union at Addis Ababa, and it's also why, with all of that and the economic activity, every single African country bar one voted for Australia when we sought election to the UN Security Council.

Our gateway to that is here. The city which provides the greatest connection to

all of that is Perth.

Western Australia is a state of large, empty spaces great for exercising, but not just because of the opportunity that presents, but because in a sense we look to the Indo-Pacific from Western Australia. Our north-west is actually ground on which it is really important that we are familiar in defence terms. It is a place that we should exercise, and this also is a place which is very radio quiet, in some place legislated to be so in order to facilitate the international science of the Square Kilometre Array project. All of that is significant as well.

The resources sector, of course, you know very well, here, provides great strategic significance for Western Australia, and a perfect example of that is that right now effectively WA is, in combination with the Northern Territory, the most important source of energy security for Japan. Indeed, Prime Minister Abe will be visiting Darwin next month.

So, this is a deeply strategic state which warrants a place in our national story, but it's a state with great capability as well. The most significant maritime design and construction capability in Australia is really here in Perth. Austal – David Singleton's here today – does amazing work in the designing of vessels not just for Australia but for the United States - the Littoral Combat ship and troop carrier – and indeed navies around the world. Peter Luerssen is here, and Luerssen, through its partnership with Cimtec, will also be bringing a design capability to WA through its work on the Offshore Patrol Vessel. Together, that brings to this place the most significant naval design capability the country has.

This is a place with significant maritime sustainment capability as well: ASC's work on the submarines, BAE's work on the Anzac frigates, and Austal's work on the Cape Class Patrol Vessels.

The resources industry has developed a whole lot of skills in this state which are highly relevant to defence: engineering, of course, but large project management. The kind of projects that we're involved with in Defence, really, the only analogy you have is in the space of the resources industry. Autonomous vehicles, which are going to play a really important role

in the future of defence and defence capability, are being used throughout the resources industry: autonomous vehicles, autonomous trains, autonomous maritime vessels. All this is high tech, evidenced by the fact that 60 per cent of the world's mining and resource software has been designed here in Perth.

The hugely strategic battery minerals and extraction industry has its Australian heart in WA. It has the potential to be the global centre, here in Western Australia. The highest volume of lithium reserves in the world, in the Pilbara and South West; the largest lithium processing plant being constructed in Kwinana; BHP constructing another plant in Kwinana for the refinement of nickel hydroxide; cobalt and other battery minerals being developed here.

All this is really important for technology which is going to be critical to the future of defence. Indeed, Naval has recently announced, just last week, that they expect that the next generation of Australian submarines will use lithium ion batteries.

Big science is here in WA. The Square Kilometre Array telescope and Pawsey computing centre will see computing in Australia on a scale we haven't ever seen before. Indeed, the sort of mind-blowing stat which comes from that is that in a single day the SKA is up and running we will be processing the same amount of data which is one the entire internet of this day.

There is a military capability here through Fleet Base West which is enjoying its 40th anniversary; the Harold E. Holt communications station at Esperance which is the most powerful transmission station in the southern hemisphere; the SAS home at Campbell Barracks; and the flight training centre at Pearce. Every RAAF pilot gets trained at Pearce, and there is a long-standing relationship now seeing pilots from the Singapore air force being trained there as well.

There are challenges which Western Australia faces based on its isolation, the most isolated city in the world, so it's really important that key national institutions have a strong foothold here in Perth and Western Australia. The Centre for Defence Industry Capability: we need to make sure that it has a strong foothold here in Perth. The Defence Science and Technology group has

a presence at Stirling. It needs to have a strong presence here in WA. And the Naval Shipbuilding College, which is going to be training people around the country, will be training people for the shipbuilding endeavour here in WA: critically important that it has a base here as well.

All of that - WA's strategic value, WA's strategic capability - leads to an assessment of Western Australia's place in the national story. Western Australia and Perth should be the nation's premier place of maritime servicing and sustainment. Every platform that we operate ought to be able to be maintained here - and not just our platforms, as well. There's an opportunity for Perth and Henderson to become a global centre of maritime servicing and sustainment.

Perth should be a place in Australia which is the centre of smaller maritime vessel design and construction. The Pacific Patrol Boat, which is being done by Austal - a fantastic vessel which is projecting Australia through the world and which is helping those countries who use this vessel - we ought to be thinking in an enlarged way about where else that capability might find use.

The Offshore Patrol Vessels are probably the most exportable vessel, platform, we are likely to build in this country and I know Luerssen has really ambitious plans for exporting from WA.

But other smaller vessels, which are contemplated in the Integrated Investment Plan, we ought to be thinking very carefully about WA's place in respect of them - the riverine vessel, for example.

WA needs to be a centre for military exercises because of the space that's here; because of the significance of the ground that is here; and because of the radio-quiet nature of that ground. As electronic warfare continues to become an increasingly significant part of the battle space, being able to train in radio-quiet places is critically important.

Western Australia can absolutely be a centre of autonomous vehicle development and research, particularly in the maritime space, and in a larger

sense, given this is the part of the world from which we project to our north and our west, we need to be making sure that all the infrastructure and bases that our defence forces have enable us to do that.

This has implications, then, for infrastructure here: implications for Henderson; implications for the common-user facility at Henderson; implications for Fleet Base West, making sure that the access to those facilities from the sea side is everything that it needs to be, but that there are the capabilities on the ground as well.

We need to make sure that in an intellectual sense we have infrastructure here as well. The university sector, our research institutes, what they provide in terms of enabling us to be at the top of the technological ladder when it comes to defence industry is fundamentally critical, as well.

So, this is how we think the thought lines should be in terms of developing WA's space in the national story: not a round figure being thrown at this state with a wish list and a begging bowl which will give rise to nothing other than a weary and tiresome process of trying to get WA's place in the sun, but rather an assessment of our national vision and an assessment of where Western Australia fits within it, because that is what will provide a certain and definite future in terms of investment and development in this space. That is what will provide a certain and secure future for Western Australia in the national defence story.

Thank you.

ENDS

Authorised by Noah Carroll, ALP, Canberra.