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# Submission to the Strategic Fleet Taskforce

November 2022

## Overview

1. The Department of Home Affairs (the Department) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission responding to the Strategic Fleet Taskforce's discussion paper.
2. The Department acknowledges the Australian Government's commitment to establishing a Strategic Fleet for the purposes of strengthening economic sovereignty, and improving national security and resilience.
3. The Department is a stakeholder of the proposed Strategic Fleet, given the intent of this initiative is to make the commercially owned and operated fleet available for requisition by the Australian Government in times of national need, such as during a natural disaster or global shock.
4. Experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic response has changed the nature of emergency coordination, providing us with vital lessons that are relevant beyond emergency management, including the need for effective federal-state cooperation, collaboration with the private sector and economic reform.
5. The Home Affairs Portfolio (Home Affairs) has responsibility for the following areas which are relevant to the Strategic Fleet: national resilience; emergency management and coordination; customs and border protection; civil maritime security; and maritime industry regulation and compliance.

### National Resilience and Emergency Management

6. To support the Government's national resilience agenda, the Department established a National Resilience Taskforce (the Taskforce) on 1 November 2022 to undertake a range of efforts to better enable Australia to anticipate, prevent, absorb, adapt, and evolve from national emergencies.
  - a. This work includes priority policy challenges associated with climate change and national security, emergency management and crisis strategy, resilience against grey-zone threats, and border resilience. The Taskforce is also applying lessons learnt from COVID-19 to evolve Australia's national quarantine frameworks and legislation.
7. On 1 September 2022, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) was established to create a single, enduring, end-to-end agency to better respond to emergencies, help communities recover, and prepare Australia for future disasters.
  - a. NEMA leads Australia's disaster and emergency management efforts by providing informed strategic oversight and guidance to assist communities in responding and recovering, while preparing Australia for future emergencies.

### Maritime Industry Regulation and Compliance

8. Home Affairs also leads aspects of maritime industry regulation and compliance activities.
  - a. The Cyber and Infrastructure Security Centre (CISC), within the Department of Home Affairs, is the Australian Government's security regulator for the maritime industry. CISC leads the Government's regulatory framework for the maritime transport sector and administers the *Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018* (SOCI), *Maritime Transport and Offshore Facilities Security Act 2003*

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(MTOFSA) and *AusCheck Act 2007*. The CISC supports a Strategic Fleet from a critical infrastructure perspective given the criticality of the maritime supply chain and our role in supporting the maritime industry's security and resilience.

- b. The Australian Border Force (ABF) protects Australia's border and enables legitimate travel and trade. The ABF, with partner agencies, leverage operational, regulatory and enforcement capabilities to assure Australia's supply chain integrity by strengthening resilience to criminal infiltration.
9. The Department is the lead agency for implementation of the Australian Government Civil Maritime Security Strategy, across the stakeholder group of more than 25 Australian Government agencies. The Strategic Fleet, now included in the Strategy's Implementation Plan, would contribute to advancing and protecting Australia's interests through strong, integrated and adaptive national civil maritime security.
- a. A Strategic Fleet would contribute to the Strategy's objective to uphold Australia's sovereignty, freedom of navigation and maritime trade. The Strategic Fleet would support Australia's economic prosperity by strengthening the resilience of maritime trade and supply chain security.

### Strategic need

10. Australia faces increasingly complex, competing and cascading crises across the spectrum of natural and human-induced threats, risks and hazards—including more frequent and intense natural disasters, and shocks caused by the impact of escalating geopolitical tensions.
11. As climate change affects many parts of the world, including Australia, disruptions to global and domestic supply chains are likely to increase. As natural disasters and weather events increase in their frequency and severity, so does the risk of damage to Australia's critical infrastructure and the way in which Australia distributes goods and services around the nation.
12. The interconnected nature of our society, economy and infrastructure means that crisis events are placing unprecedented pressure on Australia's systems and institutions, exposing gaps in capacity and impacting our capability to respond—this was evident through impacts on emergency response, national supply chains and delivery of health services during the 2022 floods, 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic.
13. These recent crises highlight that Australia cannot always rely on road and rail for the distribution of goods and supplies to those who need them most. The establishment of a Strategic Fleet could afford Government alternative options for the distribution of essential goods if road and rail infrastructure is disrupted or damaged during a crisis event.

### Benefits

14. A Strategic Fleet could be used to strengthen Australia's national resilience to future shocks and address some of the issues outlined above, particularly supply chain distribution challenges during times of significant disruption or crisis.
15. A Strategic Fleet could be used to ensure Australia has ongoing access to essential imports in the event of a natural disaster or crisis (such as a future pandemic).
16. A Strategic Fleet could provide the Government with an agile capability, which can be readily deployed in times of crisis, to supplement State and Territory-led crisis response efforts. This capability could also provide an additional mechanism for the provision of non-financial Commonwealth assistance to the States and Territories in time of crisis.
17. The Government may give consideration to utilising the Strategic Fleet to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief for our regional partners, through transport of essential supplies.
18. As a business as usual activity, Government could also consider utilising the Strategic Fleet to support the transportation of goods and people to regional and remote communities with port access.

## **Conclusion**

19. The Department is supportive of the Strategic Fleet Taskforce's work to gather information and further establish the rationale and options for progressing the Australian Government's commitment to establishing a Strategic Fleet. The Department acknowledges that Strategic Fleet could provide strategic and economic benefits for Australia.
20. The Department recognises that careful analysis of the strategic need is required to ensure that the scope and composition of a Strategic Fleet is fit for purpose and considers the long-term strategic outlook. The Strategic Fleet Taskforce could consider using scenario-based planning activities to test assumptions and assist with clearly defining the intent, problem statement and policy options for a Strategic Fleet.
21. The Department welcomes future stakeholder engagement opportunities to support the work of the Strategic Fleet Taskforce and looks forward to the delivery of the first phase report on high-level strategic objectives for the fleet.