



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Main Committee**

**APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 1999-2000**

**Consideration in Detail**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 22 June 1999**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 22 June 1999  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Cox, David, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr COX** (Kingston)—(9.32 p.m.)—I am pleased to follow the honourable member for Reid. He has made some interesting comments about Defence's obvious difficulty in funding its program this year. I want to go on and talk about some of the problems it is going to face in future years because of block obsolescence.

It was extremely pleasing this week to see the successful firing of the mark 48 torpedo at the decommissioned River class destroyer *Torrens*. It was a fairly graphic demonstration of the effectiveness of our new submarine force as the sort of deterrent that we need in this country for our defence purposes. It was so dramatic that some ignorant sceptics were unkind enough to suggest that the Navy had packed the hulk of the *Torrens* with explosives so that they could get a more spectacular effect.

**Mr Bruce Scott**—You don't believe that.

**Mr COX**—I certainly do not believe that and I was pleased that Navy went to the trouble of releasing some technical information to explain how mark 48 torpedoes work. They explode under the hulls of boats. They are not a contact torpedo like the mark 1 and mark 2 torpedoes that were used during the Second World War. They explode under the ship and a gas bubble breaks the hull in half. The gas bubble contracts, the ship sags, the gas bubble expands, and a water spout breaks the ship in half and smashes the superstructure off. It is that water spout that people mistook for a second explosion caused by Navy pyrotechnics.

Those submarines are the most cost-effective piece of naval capability this country is going to get. I think we should go back to the original contract which contemplated eight of them and not six, and review our naval force and our future naval force options with exactly that in mind, rather than buy a large number of fairly expensive and quite vulnerable larger surface combatants.

As the member for Reid said, he is concerned about the state of budgeting within Defence at the moment. You only have to scan some of the documents to see the effect of block obsolescence that Defence is facing. If the minister were here I would welcome his comments on whether I have missed any items that are going to be obsolete in the next planning horizon. They include the F111s, the FA18s, the P3C Orions, the earlier FFGs, the Leopard tanks, the Sea King helicopters, the C130 Hercules, the M113 armoured personnel carriers, and the Fremantle class patrol boats. That is a pretty enormous capital requirement.

What do we find the defence minister doing? We find him setting up a second brigade at a high rate of readiness—28 days deployment, which is a fairly expensive operation. Anybody who has a modicum of understanding of defence planning knows that readiness is very expensive and that you do it at the expense of making capital provision in the future. And as I have outlined, we have very heavy capital provision requirements in the future. I have scanned Australia's strategic policy and looked for some kind of understanding of the strategic need for a second brigade. All I could find was:

Our approach to determining the preparedness and posture we need in our forces should be based on the following key judgments:

(1). In the current circumstances, preparedness levels will be determined more by the requirement of regional operations and deployments in support of global interests as well as by some non-combat functions such as surveillance than by the needs of defeating attacks on Australia.

If a second brigade is going to be based on those sorts of wider considerations at the expense of our long-term capital needs, that is extremely unfortunate in terms of the government's priorities. I am hoping that the minister, or one of his representatives, might be able to give us some elaboration about what the government's plans are to fund those enormous capital requirements with block obsolescence, because it certainly is not apparent from his portfolio budget statement and it is certainly not apparent from the strategic guidance that has been offered. The \$1 billion that he expects to get from the Defence Reform Program is going to be wholly inadequate. (*Time expired*)