



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**DEFENCE LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT (AID TO CIVILIAN
AUTHORITIES) BILL 2000**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 28 June 2000

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Fitzgibbon, Joel, MP

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Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (12.15 pm)—Mr Deputy Speaker, I will take the opportunity to make a short contribution to the debate on the Defence Legislation Amendment (Aid to Civilian Authorities) Bill 2000. I am pleased that a number of government members have recognised that, as far as possible, the opposition has taken a bipartisan approach to the defence review. There could be no more important an area of government responsibility in this country than defence and it is always important that, as far as possible, we do take a bipartisan approach, both from the defence perspective and from the perspective that this is a very major area of government expenditure in this country.

I want to briefly touch on a Defence facility in my own electorate of Hunter—that is, of course, the Singleton infantry centre. That centre really underpins the health of both the economy of Singleton and the economy of the wider Upper Hunter community. It is a Defence facility that has had a dark cloud pushed over it on one or two occasions in the past. From my perspective, it is very important that the government move very quickly to reassure the residents of the Singleton and wider Upper Hunter communities, and indeed the Hunter community, that the review currently before the Australian community does not in any way threaten the ongoing viability or existence of that infantry centre. I know that I speak on behalf of all Hunter residents in making that point. It is vital that the facility remain in place. One has to say that once we start to talk about going below the critical 50,000 mass in our Defence personnel, some merger or aggregation is likely and, therefore, it is my great fear that that centre could again come under threat. I call upon the government to reassure the community that that is not the case.