



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BILLS

Defence Legislation Amendment Bill 2011

Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 14 September 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Wednesday, 14 September 2011</p> <p>Page 10171</p> <p>Questioner</p> <p>Speaker Mr ROBERT</p>	<p>Source House</p> <p>Proof No</p> <p>Responder</p> <p>Question No.</p>
---	--

(Fadden) (NaN.NaN pm)

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (10:19): Defence delivers youth development in a military setting for young Australians aged between 12½ and 20 years through the Australian Navy Cadets, the Australian Army Cadets and the Australian Air Force Cadets. The ADF Cadets organisation operates in partnership with Defence and the community. In June 2008 there were approximately 22,000 cadets and 2,287 cadet staff in 455 units across Australia.

The cadets organisation provides a fun, challenging and safe youth development program conducted in a contemporary ADF environment and based on defence customs, traditions and values. Cadets provide leadership, team building and life skills and foster an interest in the wider Australian Defence Force. The coalition supports the Australian Defence Force Cadets as a youth development organisation in a military environment. We believe the most important people in the cadet construct are the cadets themselves. For the ADF, sponsorship of cadets is a superb way of giving young people an opportunity to gain an understanding of the Defence Force, its place within society and service career options available.

Cadets comprise less than one per cent of the general population age cohort but about 17 per cent of ADF enlistments. Unsurprisingly, I was both a cadet and someone who enlisted in the Defence Force. Cadets contribute 35 to 40 per cent of the intake of the Australian Defence Force Academy. Unsurprisingly, I was one of those in the academy. More than half of our one-stars—that is, brigadiers, commodores, air commodore equivalents and above—are previous cadets. Although the ADFC does not exist as a recruiting tool for defence, it is impossible to ignore the significant contribution the cadet program makes to ADF enlistment, both in quantity and quality. An increase in ADFC recruiting would undeniably result in increased ADF enlistment.

The Australian Defence Force Cadets program is run by three separate organisations administered by their respective service chiefs under a range of acts—the Defence Act, the Naval Defence Act and the Air Force Act—and the Cadet Force Regulations 1977. Each organisation has a headquarters structure in Canberra,

regional headquarters around the country and many cadet units and parade locations. Administrative staff include full-time and part-time members of the APS, the ADF and Defence Reserve personnel. Cadet staff are adult members of the community appointed under Cadet Force Regulations as officers or instructors of cadets. They are generally paid an allowance. Recent changes have seen various of these officers employed in newly created APS positions, effectively seeing the emergence of a full-time cadet staff. That is certainly supported.

School based cadet units are generally restricted to drawing their cadet membership from the students of the parent or affiliated schools. There are 46 school based units: 42 in the Army, two in the Navy and two in the Air Force. Unsurprisingly, I came from a school based cadet unit at the Rockhampton Grammar School. In the majority of these units the cadet program is conducted as an integral component of the school's curricular activities. School based units draw most of their adult staff from the school staff. These units generally receive support from the school, as well as logistical support including the provision of some equipment and stores. In my own experience at the Rockhampton Grammar School, we had a school sergeant who was also the lieutenant in the cadet unit—a man called Jim Giedricht, who had fought in every combat operation since World War II, from the Malayan Emergency through to confrontation in Korea with the 3rd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment, and then with the Australian Army training team and then wider combat operations in Vietnam. He was at the time one of the most heavily decorated Australians currently serving, either in the permanent reserve or in the cadet force.

In community based units, cadet membership is open to any eligible member of the local community, and the parade location may be in a range of facilities including defence facilities, community halls or local schools. The adult staff are parents of cadets, interested members of the local community and current or former ADF members. Most of these units receive some type of support or sponsorship from their local community, from parent support groups or committees or indeed from the ADF.

In recognising the benefits of youth development in partnership with the community and pathways to ADF recruitment, the coalition remains absolutely and utterly 100 per cent committed to maintaining vibrant cadet organisations. Cadet programs will continue to be strongly aligned with their sponsoring service, and the coalition will further strengthen and fund this relationship.

In terms of policy history, the Australian Defence Force Cadets have a long and proud history in Australia and can trace their origins back to pre-Federation Australia. From its beginnings at St Mark's Collegiate School in 1866, the cadet movement continued to grow and evolve through the years, until hitting its infamous low point in the early 1970s—surprise, surprise—under a Labor government. During this time, the government was under increasing pressure to withdraw Australian troops from Vietnam. There was a growing feeling of hostility towards defence, especially from the Labor government. The newly elected Whitlam government promised to review the defence forces, including the Cadet Corps. The subsequent report prepared by Dr TB Millar on the Australian Cadet Corps recommended the retention of cadets with some modifications, noting that the scheme attracted broad community support. However, in typical Labor Whitlamesque fashion as we continue to see today, the government decided to abolish school cadets. That is the government's historical view of the value of cadet based work in youth development. The government's general scaling back of the Defence Force as a whole included the withdrawal of their support for cadet units. All Army, Navy and Air Force cadet units either were disbanded or continued without support from the Commonwealth. This decision generated a fair degree of angry unrest in large sections of the cadet and wider communities, but the abolition was appealed without success.

In 1976, cadets were re-established under the new coalition government under Fraser after the disaster of the Whitlamesque years, and the Australian Services Cadet Scheme continued on a different basis. Community based rather than school based units were encouraged, together with a downscaling of military-like training. The community based emphasis was crystallised in 1983 when the Hawke Labor government announced that school based units would no longer receive direct support from the Army with many of these units subsequently becoming limited support units—another Labor administration, another disaster for the military.

On its election in 1996, the Howard government initiated the cadets in schools program and, in mid-1998, moved to re-establish full support status to units which had previously suffered neglectful

indifference from multiple Labor administrations. I say simply to the members opposite: may this be the last dreadful Labor administration that cuts funding to school based cadets.

In the 2007-08 budget, the coalition provided an additional \$100 million across 10 years to enhance and expand the cadet program. The government in typical Labor style, not content with over 140 reviews, commissions, inquiries and investigations, instigated an investigation into the cadet scheme, the Hickling report. It was the 27th review, study or project into the ADFC scheme since the early years—another review from a Labor government.

This begs the question: whatever happened to the review by the 1,000 best and brightest that descended upon Canberra? Whatever happened to those recommendations and the outcomes? All that butchers paper across the room, all of those pens, all those great ideas—did we ever see any of those ideas? Did any of them ever come to fruition? I wonder what actually happened to the greatest minds that Labor had assembled as they gave a standing ovation to then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. That is right: you sacked him, didn't you?

Here we have the Hickling review, and that has led of course to the Defence Legislation Amendment Bill 2011. This bill is non-controversial as it relates to administration of the school cadet program, which means this is the first Labor administration since Curtin that has not sought to destroy the cadet units as soon as it came to power. So congratulations, Labor. For the first time in 50 years you have not gone and bugged up something that was particularly good, as this bill only makes administrative changes. You actually listened to advice for once when it came to cadets because your history through previous Labor administrations has been deplorable, moribund and disgraceful, to be polite.

These administrative changes will change a range of acts to provide that the service chiefs' day-to-day administrative responsibility for their respective service cadets is subject to the direction of the minister or the CDF. These will provide the CDF with a delegation making power, ostensibly down to the VCDF, in relation to cadet responsibility and direction.

The bill amends three existing pieces of legislation—the Air Force Act, Defence Act and Naval Defence Act—that currently provide the framework for the administration of the school cadet program. The bill is non-contentious. It has no financial impact in terms of expenditure or direction. Thankfully and wondrously, after 50 years a Labor administration, for the first time ever, has finally decided not to harm the defence

cadets or seek to destroy them, remove their funding, take away community support or take them away from schools. Finally, you have learnt the lesson after 50 years when it comes to the Defence Force cadets: do no harm. May I suggest you take that lesson to the disgraceful series of bills relating to your carbon tax that you put into the parliament yesterday and adopt that process once more of doing no harm, because right now the harm you are seeking to do will exact vengeance at the ballot box, I guarantee you.