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The evolution of the Australian Defence Force Gap Year program

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Executive summary

- Through the Australian Defence Force (ADF) Gap Year program and the preceding Ready Reserve scheme, Australian school-leavers have had the opportunity to experience full-time military training without the obligations of longer-term initial periods of service.
- Both these initiatives were designed as cost-effective means of increasing the ADF's capability and flexibility in its personnel requirements. The Gap Year program was particularly successful in attracting more female recruits into the ADF.
- However, despite receiving generally positive independent evaluations, both the Gap Year program and Ready Reserve scheme were unable to fully develop and expand as expected, due in part to reduced budgetary circumstances. These initiatives also came to prove too restrictive and often incompatible with broader ADF requirements, which meant that the ADF could not fully support the substantial training burden associated with them.
- Since the cancellation of the Gap Year program in 2012, the ADF has continued to support the concept of reducing initial periods of service for new recruits, offering a selection of roles within the Army and Air Force with an initial full-time commitment of either one or two years. The current Government has also announced the re-establishment of the Gap Year Program, to commence in early 2015.

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Introduction

During the 2013 federal election campaign, the Coalition's *Policy for Stronger Defence* contained a pledge to re-build the ADF Gap Year program. In advocating this initiative, the Coalition argued that the ADF Gap Year 'has been an effective community engagement and recruitment tool' and has 'proven successful in attracting more women to join the ADF and in bolstering the Army Reserve generally'.¹ Subsequently on 28 April 2014, Assistant Minister for Defence, Stuart Robert, officially launched a reinstated version of the ADF Gap Year program to commence in early 2015.² Although the ADF Gap Year was a Howard (Coalition) Government initiative, the concept of giving Australian school-leavers the opportunity for 12 months full-time training in the ADF dates back to the early 1990s, when the Australian Labor Party (ALP) enacted the Ready Reserve scheme. This Research Paper will analyse both the Ready Reserve scheme and subsequent Gap Year program; assessing their respective characteristics, identifying both supporters and detractors, and highlighting various challenges.

The ADF Ready Reserve scheme

Parliamentary inquiry into the ADF Reserves (1989–1991)

Although part-time Australian military service programs have been enacted at various times throughout the 20th century, the Ready Reserve scheme was the first major post-Cold War reform of ADF Reserve forces.³ The term 'Ready Reserve' was first coined in July 1989 by Dr Ross Babbage (Deputy Head of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University) in his submission to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's (the Committee's) inquiry into the ADF Reserves.

Dr Babbage contended that Australia's 'capability to deploy adequate forces in a timely fashion [in response to even low level contingencies] is extremely doubtful'.⁴ However, he also recognised that 'while Australia may need substantially larger numbers of trained military personnel in future crises, there is unlikely to be any substantial growth in defence spending through at least the first half of the 1990s to pay for it'.⁵ In response to these circumstances, Dr Babbage claimed that 'the only way of obtaining substantially larger numbers of trained defence personnel with a stable or reducing defence budget is to examine a range of part-time or latent force options'.⁶ Having assessed various initiatives in the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States of America, Dr Babbage suggested that the three ADF Services could gain expanded capability by establishing new 'Ready Reserve' elements.

His proposed concept for the Army involved recruiting mostly 17–24 year olds to a fixed contract of six years, with an initial full-time component of six to 14 months, depending on the recruit's specific role. Following completion of this initial engagement, Ready Reservists would participate in five-week training exercises every 18 months to maintain their skill base and be obliged for operational call-out as required. Ready Reservists would also be offered 'attractive re-enlistment packages' at the end of their six-year engagement. In terms of cost, Dr Babbage cited international experience in determining that 'fully equipped and trained Ready Reserve units of this kind should be about 25 per cent of those of a comparable regular unit'.⁷

The Committee provided little support for the Ready Reserve concept in its final report into the ADF Reserves, released in November 1991. The Committee's concerns included inherent division between Ready Reserve and regular Reserve personnel—including competition for resources—where the Ready Reserve concept would 'abort the singularly most successful integration of [permanent Army and Army Reserve] units' achieved since the Millar review in March 1974.⁸ The Committee also questioned the operational readiness of proposed Ready Reservists, found the initial 12-month training program to be excessive, and cited cost projections that varied

1. Liberal Party of Australia and the Nationals, *The Coalition's policy for stronger defence*, Coalition policy document, Election 2013, pp. 8–9, accessed 6 May 2014.
2. S Robert (Assistant Minister for Defence), *ADF Gap Year program for 2015*, media release, 28 April 2014, accessed 7 May 2014.
3. H Smith and N Jans, 'Use them or lose them? Australia's defence force reserves', *Armed Forces & Society*, 37(2), 2011, pp. 301–20, accessed 6 May 2014. This article also provides a concise history of the role of Reserves within Australia's military history.
4. R Babbage, Submission to Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *Inquiry into the Australian Defence Force Reserves*, 17 July 1989, p. 5.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–16.
8. Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *The Australian Defence Force Reserves*, Canberra, November 1991, pp. 134, 136.

substantially. In conclusion, the Committee surmised that ‘no persuasive argument has been mounted to support the need for such a form of Reserve service’.⁹

The Government response to the Committee report challenged many of the Committee’s concerns and disagreed with nine of the 14 recommendations made. In addressing specific points of contention, the Government response declared that ‘the report’s criticism of the Ready Reserve appears at odds with its desire to see greater readiness and service flexibility on the part of the Reservists’, and suggested that the Ready Reserve scheme would in no way diminish either the resources or recruiting capacity of the regular Army Reserve.¹⁰

The Government announces the Ready Reserve program (1991)

The Committee inquiry was one of several reviews into the ADF Reserves published in the early 1990s. Other concurrent reviews included:

- N Jans and J Frazer-Jans, *Facing up to the Future: proposals for career/personnel initiatives to assist in staffing the ADF in the 1990s and beyond* (1990)
- *The Defence Force and the Community* (The Wrigley Review) (June 1990)
- Australian National Audit Office, Audit Report No. 3, *Australia’s Army Reserve* (August 1990)
- Interdepartmental Committee report on the Wrigley Review (May 1991) and
- Department of Defence, *Force Structure Review* (May 1991).

The first mention in Parliament of the ADF Ready Reserve scheme occurred on 24 August 1990, when the Defence Minister, Senator Robert Ray, acknowledged that the ADF was contemplating the creation of a Ready Reserve scheme to increase ‘the readiness and availability of Reserve forces to enhance our ability to counter credible contingencies that may arise in the shorter term’. The Defence Minister further suggested this scheme would involve volunteers proceeding through ‘about 12 months’ of full-time service, after which they would participate in ‘periods of further full-time training ... to maintain their military skills’.¹¹ Later, in his evidence at a Senate Estimates hearing on 18 September 1990, the Defence Deputy Chief of the General Staff, MAJGEN Michael Jeffrey, confirmed that Defence Headquarters had initiated a ‘Ready Reserve force concept’.¹²

The Department of Defence’s report into the proposed Ready Reserve scheme was tabled in the Senate on 30 May 1991. According to the report:

The vision of the Program is to attract to the ADF high calibre young Australians who will undergo intensive full-time training for about one year. Many will then proceed to tertiary and other vocational training under Defence sponsorship. Others will go directly into civilian employment with the assistance of Defence sponsored job search assistance. For four years after their initial full-time training, members will serve part-time for about 50 days each year in Ready Reserve units on short notice to deploy on operations, once called out by declaration under the Defence Act. Part-time service will not be discretionary.¹³

Other significant elements of the scheme included a variety of incentives, such as a tax-free annual ‘commitment bonus’ for recruits and an Employer Support Scheme to subsidise an employee’s annual four-week leave burden on employers. The report further indicated that the Ready Reserve scheme would commence in January 1992 and be reviewed after three years.¹⁴ In endorsing the proposed scheme, Defence Minister Robert Ray claimed:

one of the reasons why the [ADF], and myself, press for the Ready Reserve option, rather than say the Wrigley option, was a far less high risk ... if the Ready reserve option was to fail—and I don’t think it will, but if it was—it is

9. Ibid., pp. 139–46.

10. R Ray (Minister for Defence), Report of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade: The Australian Defence Force Reserves, *Government’s response to the report*, Canberra, April 1992.

11. R Ray (Minister for Defence), ‘[Answer to Question on notice: Defence: Voluntary national service](#)’, [Questioner: J Newman], Senate, *Debates*, 24 August 1990, p. 2215, accessed 6 May 2014.

12. Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee, [Official committee Hansard](#), 18 September 1990, p. B138, accessed 6 May 2014; R Ray (Minister for Defence), ‘[Answer to Question without notice: Defence: Wrigley report](#)’, [Questioner: S Loosley], Senate, *Debates*, 14 November 1990, p. 4135, accessed 6 May 2014.

13. Department of Defence, *Ready Reserve Program*, report prepared for the Minister for Defence, Canberra, May 1991, p. 1.

14. Ibid., pp. 2, 10.

not impossible to go back to another solution...However, if you had gone for the Wrigley solution of cutting the regulars in half, and having 40,000 reservists and some sort of militia, none of that would have been reversible.¹⁵

On 2 October 1991, Prime Minister Bob Hawke launched the national recruiting campaign for the Ready Reserve scheme in Brisbane, declaring it an 'effective and a cost efficient way of providing the defence forces with the highly skilled and highly motivated people that they need'.¹⁶ It was also noted the following week by the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Gordon Bilney, that over 3,000 inquiries regarding the scheme had already been received, giving 'no doubt that the scheme will be an excellent success'.¹⁷ By 8 November, this had reportedly grown to 18,293 inquiries, with 3,117 applications submitted and 114 people already approved to enlist in the Ready Reserves.¹⁸ By 19 December 1991, the Government had spent just over \$2 million on advertising for the Ready Reserve scheme.¹⁹

Critical reception

Even before the Ready Reserve scheme was formally announced, members of the Coalition Opposition were critical of the initiative. The Liberal member for Deakin (and former Army Reservist) Ken Aldred was one of the scheme's earliest opponents, declaring on 7 May 1991 that 'the Ready Reserves are neither fish nor fowl and if implemented will detract from both the existing regular and reserve forces'.²⁰ Other Coalition members also offered views, ranging from apprehension over the scheme's impact to bluntly labelling the concept a 'public relations con job'.²¹

The Tasmanian Senator Jocelyn Newman, as Opposition spokesperson for Defence Personnel, raised a number of objections to the Ready Reserve scheme throughout 1991. For example, on 15 October, Senator Newman indicated her 'fear that this is just the first step in a long term plan to reduce us once again to a cadre defence force', and suspicion that an increasing number of permanent ADF personnel could be replaced.²² The Senator further suggested the scheme could have a significantly detrimental impact on the ADF's ability to function, noting that there was 'no legislation in place to ensure that trained and paid Ready Reservists will be required to render the specified service', and that the Defence Act (which details how the Army Reserve can be called out) was ambiguous in regards to aligning with the Ready Reserve concept.²³ Senator Newman further lamented the inability of the Government to provide an accurate cost for the scheme, with various groups all providing different estimates.²⁴

The Opposition's Defence spokesperson, Alexander Downer, also raised additional doubts that the Government should not be replacing current capability with a program that 'raises more questions ... than are ever answered'.²⁵ Mr Downer continued to raise further objections about cost and preparedness following the scheme's recruitment launch in October.²⁶ The persistent complaint of how the Ready Reserve would integrate with the regular Reserve forces was again raised in early October 1991 by Liberal MP Michael MacKellar. Within Parliament, Mr MacKellar cited anecdotal examples of the contempt some ADF personnel had for the way the

15. Senate Estimates Committee B: Defence, *Official committee Hansard*, 9 September 1991, accessed 6 May 2014.

16. R Hawke (Prime Minister), '[Answer to Question without notice: Defence Force Structure Review](#)', [Questioner E Fitzgibbon], House of Representatives, *Debates*, 9 October 1991, p. 1538, accessed 6 May 2014.

17. G Bilney (Minister for Defence Science and Personnel), '[Answer to Question without notice: Ready Reserve](#)', [Questioner A Bevis], House of Representatives, *Debates*, 9 October 1991, p. 1543, accessed 6 May 2014.

18. G Bilney (Minister for Defence Science and Personnel), '[Answer to Question without notice: Australian Defence Force Ready Reserve](#)', [Questioner A Bevis], House of Representatives, *Debates*, 11 November 1991, p. 2717, accessed 6 May 2014.

19. G Bilney (Minister for Defence Science and Personnel), '[Answer to Question: Ready Reserve](#)', [Questioner W Taylor], House of Representatives, *Debates*, 19 December 1991, p. 3915, accessed 6 May 2014.

20. K Aldred, '[Speech: Appropriation Bill \(No. 4\) 1990-91](#)', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 7 May 1991, p. 3120, accessed 6 May 2014.

21. I Sinclair, '[Speech: Appropriation Bill \(No. 1\) 1991-92](#)', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 9 October 1991, p. 1574, accessed 6 May 2014;

W Taylor, '[Speech: Appropriation Bill \(No. 1\) 1991-92](#)', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 9 October 1991, p. 1578, accessed 6 May 2014.

22. J Newman, '[Second reading speech: Appropriation Bills \(No. 1\) and \(No. 2\) 1991-92](#)', Senate, *Debates*, 15 October 1991, p. 2045, accessed 6 May 2014.

23. J Newman, '[Second reading speech: Appropriation Bills \(No. 1\) and \(No. 2\) 1991-92](#)', Senate, *Debates*, 16 October 1991, p. 2124, accessed 6 May 2014.

24. J Newman, '[Reply to Ministerial statement: Defence policy](#)', Senate, *Debates*, 30 May 1991, p. 3967, accessed 6 May 2014.

25. A Downer, '[Reply to Ministerial statement: Defence into the twenty-first century](#)', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 6 June 1991, p. 5030, accessed 6 May 2014.

26. A Downer, '[Speech: Appropriation Bill \(No. 1\) 1991-92](#)', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 9 October 1991, p. 1564, accessed 6 May 2014.

scheme was to be implemented, particularly as it did nothing to address the enduring neglect he considered current reservists faced.²⁷

Some Government members were similarly cautious about the new scheme, such as the Brisbane MP Arch Bevis. On 21 August 1991, Mr Bevis stated in Parliament his understanding that training Ready Reserve personnel in two or three day blocks was not ideal for the ADF, and further questioned whether the program's new recruits would have sufficient accommodation to commence their first year training.²⁸ Mr Bevis also declared his regret that battalions incorporating permanent and reserve ADF members had been reduced to facilitate the Ready Reserve scheme but that he hoped that these could be reinstated in the future when additional resources allowed.²⁹ However, later in 1994 when promoted to Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence, Mr Bevis affirmed his belief in the benefits the Ready Reserve scheme provided, indicating that its establishment had transformed the 6th Brigade from being understaffed and under-resourced to now being a far better equipped force.³⁰

Implementation (1992)

At the beginning of 1992, the Army Ready Reserve scheme was established at the Enoggera Barracks in Brisbane, within the 6th Infantry Brigade (commanded by Brigadier Peter Cosgrove).³¹ The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Ready Reserve program began in late January 1992, with 30 recruits commencing training at RAAF Base Edinburgh in South Australia. After undergoing ten weeks of basic training, the Ready Reservists would then transfer to RAAF Base Amberley (Queensland) for three months training as Airfield Defence Guards before spending the remainder of the year at RAAF Base Tindal.³²

Also in January 1992, the Government finally reached an agreement with Australia's university sector to ensure that Ready Reservists could defer their place at university without disadvantage, under a common policy. This was an important achievement, as approximately two thirds of those within the Ready Reserve program intended to attend university following their initial 12 months training. However, state and territory government 'Technical and Further Education' (TAFE) vocational colleges were only obliged to 'consider' Ready Reservists' requests for deferral.³³

On 14 September 1992, the Shadow Defence Minister, Alexander Downer, claimed the Ready Reserve program was suffering from a 'massive cost blow-out', citing figures that Ready Reserve personnel were costing 71 per cent of regular ADF members, compared to initial estimates of approximately 40 per cent.³⁴ On 7 October 1992, National Party MP Ian Sinclair noted that Ready Reserves would be 'unlikely' to resupply ADF personnel serving in peacekeeping operations, given the competing priorities of full-time study or employment.³⁵ Amid persistent criticism of the Ready Reserve scheme from the Opposition, the Defence Minister, Robert Ray, declared during a Senate Estimates hearing 'I regard having three fully-manned, fully-equipped Ready Reserve battalions as better than having two under-equipped, under-manned regular battalions'.³⁶ In further emphasising his support of the scheme, less than a month later the Minister issued a media release proclaiming:

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27. M MacKellar, '[Speech: Appropriation Bill \(No. 1\) 1991-92](#)', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 9 October 1991, p. 1580, accessed 6 May 2014.
 28. A Bevis, '[Reply to Ministerial statement: Defence into the twenty-first century](#)', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 21 August 1991, p. 239, accessed 6 May 2014.
 29. A Bevis, '[Speech: Appropriation Bill \(No. 1\) 1992-93](#)', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 7 October 1992, p. 1523, accessed 6 May 2014.
 30. A Bevis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence), '[Reply to Ministerial statement: Defending Australia: Defence White Paper 1994](#)', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 8 December 1994, p. 4491, accessed 6 May 2014.
 31. A Bevis, 'Speech: Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 1992-93', op. cit., p. 1523.
 32. G Bilney (Minister for Defence Science and Personnel), '[RAAF Ready Reserves Induction](#)', media release, 28 January 1992, accessed 6 May 2014.
 33. G Bilney (Minister for Defence Science and Personnel), '[Universities OK Ready Reserve deferrals](#)', media release, 31 January 1992, accessed 6 May 2014.
 34. A Downer, '[Second reading speech: Appropriation Bill \(No. 1\) 1992-93](#)', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 14 September 1992, p. 956, accessed 6 May 2014.
 35. I Sinclair, '[Speech: Appropriation Bill \(No. 1\) 1992-93](#)', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 7 October 1992, p. 1528, accessed 6 May 2014.
 36. Senate Estimates Committee B: Defence, '[Official committee Hansard](#)', 23 September 1992, p. 266, accessed 6 May 2014.

To disband the Ready Reserve would not only be irresponsible but would go against the wishes of the Defence Forces. The Ready Reserve concept was put forward in the Force Structure Review. It was adopted on the recommendations of the Chiefs of Staff and there is a commitment to review the program in two years' time.³⁷

Following the 1993 federal election, responsibility for the Ready Reserve scheme transitioned from the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel (Gordon Bilney) to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence (Gary Punch).³⁸

Challenges

As part of the Government's 'job creation plan' as outlined in the 1992–93 Federal Budget, 300 additional places were added to the Ready Reserve scheme, making a total of 1,300 places for 1993. However, in December 1992, Minister Bilney acknowledged that—despite high level unemployment and an expensive advertising campaign—there remained 700 vacancies, with new recruits due to commence in less than a month. The Minister cited a variety of reasons for the decline in interest, such as:

- the Coalition's election campaign commitment to end the scheme if elected
- the scheme's reduced media profile since its inception
- potential applicants instead seeking permanent employment and
- the lack of a guarantee that Ready Reservists could transition into the permanent ADF.³⁹

In later recalling this situation, the Defence Minister, Robert Ray, acknowledged:

there was a mistake made by Minister Bilney and myself with regard to Ready Reserve recruiting last year; that is, we put enormous effort into the first year, were absolutely flooded with recruits and had to knock back an enormous number of people, so it was our assumption that people would flood in for the second intake. As we got closer to the close-off date of the second intake we found out that we did not have enough people. Minister Bilney belled the cat on that with a degree of controversy at the time, but it certainly had the effect of reaching if not the target audience of potential recruits then certainly reaching parents, who then encouraged them to go ahead and join. As it was, as I understand it, we made the target with some comfort, finally.⁴⁰

In response to the scheme's lack of recruiting success, Senator Newman gave notice of a motion in December 1992 in which she criticised the 'gung-ho' nature of the Ready Reserve scheme and condemned the Government for 'misleading the public' and 'failing to heed' warnings from the Coalition and other groups.⁴¹ Adding to Senator Newman's criticism, the Shadow Minister for Defence, Alexander Downer, issued a media release on 3 February the following year, stating the Opposition's clear intention to terminate the Ready Reserve scheme and re-establish two permanent ADF battalions based in Brisbane.⁴² In justifying this decision, Mr Downer later claimed that 'the costs of the Ready Reserves have already blown out from around 30 per cent the cost of a regular soldier to over 70 per cent of that cost—for only 50 days service a year'.⁴³ In response, the Defence Minister issued a media release the following month labelling the Opposition's proposal to end the Ready Reserve scheme as 'scandalous' and instead declaring the scheme to be 'an outstanding success'.⁴⁴

During Senate Estimates hearings in September 1993, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, LTGEN Baker, acknowledged that plans to recruit ex-serving ADF members into the Ready Reserve scheme were 'not as successful as was hoped', but suggested a potential solution in reducing the terms of service for these personnel

37. R Ray (Minister for Defence), [Opposition Defence review: twenty one wasted months](#), media release, 18 October 1992, accessed 6 May 2014.

38. G Punch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence), [Speech to the MTIA Luncheon](#), media release, 28 May 1993, accessed 6 May 2014.

39. G Bilney (Minister for Defence Science and Personnel), [700 young men reported missing](#), media release, 7 December 1992, accessed 6 May 2014.

40. Senate Estimates Committee B: Defence, [Official committee Hansard](#), 10 May 1993, p. 33, accessed 6 May 2014.

41. J Newman, [Notice of motion: Defence Force Ready Reserve scheme](#), Senate, *Debates*, 8 December 1992, p. 4236, accessed 6 May 2014. This motion has not formally moved.

42. A Downer (Shadow Minister for Defence), [Coalition to boost Defence peacekeeping role](#), media release, 3 February 1993, accessed 6 May 2014.

43. A Downer (Shadow Minister for Defence), [Labor's dozen defence disasters of the decade](#), media release, 16 February 1993, accessed 6 May 2014.

44. R Ray (Minister for Defence), [Ready Reserves to hit the scrap heap under the Coalition](#), media release, 4 March 1993, accessed 6 May 2014.

to only a two-year term.⁴⁵ This lack of recruited ex-service members was significant, as it had been noted by the Defence Deputy Chief of the General Staff, MAJGEN Carter, that ‘the [Ready Reserve] scheme was developed around the notion that we would be able to attract ... ex-regulars and ex-reservists to a quantity of 800 ... in order to provide the junior leadership in some of the trade training’.⁴⁶

In May 1994, the new Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Gary Punch, further advised that the latest cost calculations for Ready Reservists were 54 per cent of regular ADF personnel and that, although this was higher than earlier assessments, it remained well below the 75 per cent figure claimed by the media.⁴⁷ Arch Bevis, as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence, was also restrained in his assessment of the program at the end of 1994, stating that ‘the Ready Reserve is a relatively new scheme ... meeting the nation’s defence needs on a cost-effective basis’. In seeking to reserve judgement, Mr Bevis noted that the scheme ‘will reach full maturity in December 1996’, with a progress review to be completed by mid-1995.⁴⁸

Review of the Ready Reserve scheme (1995)

In December 1994, Mr Bevis invited LTGEN John Coates and Dr Hugh Smith to deliver the previously announced review of the Ready Reserve scheme.⁴⁹ The terms of reference for the review were broad, and incorporated:

- an assessment of the scheme’s current progress
- identification of the scheme’s qualitative benefits
- an appraisal of current recruiting levels and possibility of the scheme’s expansion
- an attitudinal survey of all appropriate stakeholders
- analysis of initial and follow-up training arrangements and
- recommendations for modifications where the scheme has performed below expectations.⁵⁰

The authors conducted 45 interviews, received 20 written submissions and conducted eight site visits to Defence establishments, in addition to receiving large amounts of data from the Department of Defence. The resulting report contained 28 recommendations.⁵¹

In the report’s introduction, LTGEN Coates and Dr Smith stated that ‘after considering the many aspects of the [Ready Reserve] scheme our conclusion is that the scheme is viable and should be retained’.⁵² The authors cited the scheme’s central purpose was to develop necessary strategic capabilities which could be performed by non-permanent ADF members. This made ‘economic and manpower sense’ as Ready Reservists would be sufficiently trained and cheaper than maintaining the same number of permanent ADF members.⁵³ In addressing the contentious issue of cost, the authors assessed that the cost of a Ready Reserve Army private over the five-year span of the scheme was 43 per cent of a permanent ADF private. However, the comparable cost of a Brigade unit was 63 per cent. In explaining the discrepancy, the authors noted the enduring overhead costs in establishing a Brigade.⁵⁴ This cost analysis undermined many of the Coalition’s previous criticisms of the scheme’s perceived cost-overruns.

Although LTGEN Coates and Dr Smith offered general support for the scheme, the pair identified some key areas for improvement. In particular, the authors identified the need to consider new legislation ‘that would enable the Ready Reserves to be called out during their part-time service for a wider variety of contingencies’ as well as establishing ‘explicit agreement’ between the ADF, the Ready Reservist and their employer or university.⁵⁵ The

45. Senate Estimates Committee B: Defence, [Official committee Hansard](#), 3 September 1993, p. 73, accessed 6 May 2014.

46. Senate Estimate Committee B: Defence, [Official committee Hansard](#), 24 May 1994, p. 33, accessed 6 May 2014.

47. G Punch (Minister for Defence Science and Personnel), ‘[Answer to Question without notice: Ready Reserve scheme](#)’, [Questioner J Bradford], House of Representatives, *Debates*, 10 May 1994, p. 552, accessed 6 May 2014.

48. A Bevis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence), ‘[Reply to Ministerial statement: Defending Australia: Defence White Paper 1994](#)’, House of Representatives, *Debates*, 8 December 1994, p. 4289, accessed 6 May 2014.

49. J Coates and H Smith, [Review of the Ready Reserve scheme](#), report prepared for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence, Canberra, 30 June 1995, p. v, accessed 6 May 2014.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 103–4.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. vi, 98–101.

52. *Ibid.*, p. v.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. vii–viii.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 51–2.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

review also noted that while the Army and RAAF were using Ready Reservists to expand infantry and airfield defence capabilities respectively, the Navy had not been employing Ready Reservists for patrol boat operations and mine countermeasures, and should do so.⁵⁶ Other recommendations included offering more flexibility in training options and finding ways to increase the opportunities for female participation in the scheme.⁵⁷

Despite the review's support for the Ready Reserve scheme, the Coalition continued its criticism unabated. In early October 1995, Opposition Leader John Howard declared 'the Coalition continues to have serious doubts about the viability of the Ready Reserves', citing the difficulty in using Ready Reservists overseas and the scheme's perceived poor value for money in terms of capability provided.⁵⁸

Ready Reserve scheme abolished (1996)

In the months following the Coalition's victory in the 2 March 1996 federal election, the new Minister for Defence, Ian McLachlan, set about implementing the Government's pre-election commitment to end the Ready Reserve scheme. In justifying this decision the Minister stated that the 'Ready Reserve is an expensive force structure option which cannot be afforded at a time when our Regulars are very seriously undermanned, and many of the General Reserves are deemed "non-effective"'. He further elaborated that Ready Reservists would have the opportunity to transfer into either the permanent ADF or ADF Reserves.⁵⁹

The option for Ready Reservists to transition to other ADF employment proved largely popular, as the Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Vice Admiral Walls, indicated at a September 1996 Senate Estimates hearing that 'from memory, I think there is only 11 per cent [of former Ready Reservists] who have chosen to take a discharge'.⁶⁰ This was later confirmed the following month by Defence Deputy Chief of the General Staff, MAJGEN Hartley, who noted that of the current Ready Reservists, 431 would transfer to the regular ADF, 758 would transfer to the ADF Reserves in their home states, 1,100 would remain in their current units (which would transition to general Reserve units), and 331 would discharge, while 263 remained undecided.⁶¹

Despite the Ready Reserve scheme's abolition after the 1996 election, ALP members pressed for its reinstatement. Accordingly, during the 1998 federal election campaign, Arch Bevis, as Shadow Minister for Defence, indicated the ALP's plan to restore the Ready Reserve scheme.⁶² In September 1999, the Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley, further lamented the Coalition's decision to end the scheme, claiming that Ready Reservists could have offered much needed capability in supporting the ADF's deployment to East Timor.⁶³

In September 2000, the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (the Committee) published a broad inquiry into the Australian Army, which referenced some elements of the former Ready Reserve scheme. For example, the report suggested the creation of an 'alternate personnel model for the Army', including a 'Category B' that was almost identical to the Ready Reserve scheme.⁶⁴ Additionally, in highlighting options for personnel costs savings, the inquiry report suggested converting 20 per cent of the permanent ADF into 'Ready Reserve-type conditions of service'. However, the Committee stopped short of actually recommending such an action, and instead cited this as an illustrative 'cost option'.⁶⁵

The Government's response to the Committee report noted that ADF Reservists could complete a full-time training period of six months under the 'Common Induction Training' program, which essentially had the same outcome as 'Category B'. In addition, it was also indicated that the Government had recently passed legislation

56. Ibid., p vii.

57. Ibid., pp. 88–89.

58. J Howard (Leader of the Opposition), [Australia's defence policy: lessons from the past, principles for the future – address to the Victorian branch of the Australian Defence Association](#), media release, 5 October 1995, accessed 6 May 2014.

59. I McLachlan (Minister for Defence), [Defence Ready Reservists to have option to transfer to General Reserve/Regular Force](#), media release, 3 May 1996, accessed 6 May 2014.

60. Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, [Official committee Hansard](#), 17 September 1996, p. 25, accessed 6 May 2014.

61. Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, [Official committee Hansard](#), 22 October 1996, p. 702, accessed 6 May 2014.

62. A Bevis (Shadow Minister for Defence), [Labor's better plan for Defence](#), media release, 14 September 1998, accessed 6 May 2014.

63. K Beazley (Leader of the Opposition), [Transcript of doorstep, Opposition Leader's Courtyard](#), media release, 23 September 1999, accessed 6 May 2014.

64. Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, [From phantom to force: Towards a more efficient and effective Army](#), House of Representatives, Canberra, September 2000, p. 148, accessed 6 May 2014.

65. Ibid., pp. 97–98.

that now allowed for ADF Reserves to be more easily deployed and provided them with enhanced employment, financial and education protections.⁶⁶

The ADF Gap Year program

Concept

In somewhat of a coincidence, Dr Ross Babbage—who had earlier coined the ‘Ready Reserve’ concept—was also the first to specifically suggest the ADF recruit school-leavers to a ‘gap year’, in a newspaper article published on 10 December 2005.⁶⁷ Within this article, Dr Babbage alluded to the paper *Preparing Australia’s Defence for 2020*, published by the Kokoda Foundation, which Dr Babbage founded and for which he served as chairman. Within this paper Dr Babbage reasserted the cost-saving need for a ‘National Security Education Initiative’, which was essentially the Ready Reserves by another name. Dr Babbage claimed that this initiative would provide the ADF with new members equipped with strong educational backgrounds and a far wider range of skills.⁶⁸ This theme was later continued by Defence Minister, Brendan Nelson, during an address to the National Press Club on 31 May 2006. During his speech the Minister suggested that the ADF could facilitate more flexible ways to attract young people, such as Defence training ‘as a kind of gap two to three year period’.⁶⁹ However, Dr Nelson also stated his opposition to compulsory national service—which he reasserted again in August—following former ADF Chief Chris Barrie’s proposal for young people to ‘substitute a year of universal national service for the gap year’.⁷⁰

In October 2006, the Defence Minister addressed Parliament in Question Time to announce that the Government would offer up to 1,000 places for young Australians to spend a ‘gap year’ of training and service experience in the ADF. In addition, the scheme would also provide ‘financial and other incentives to those young Australians to continue their service or, alternatively, to come back to Defence within a five-year period’.⁷¹ Although there would be no obligation to continue service after the Gap Year was completed, the scheme would provide an incentive payment of \$10,000 to those who returned to the ADF full-time after completing a recognised tertiary or vocational qualification.⁷² The Government proposed \$306 million over 10 years in funding for the ADF Gap Year program, as part of a broader \$1 billion package targeting increased recruitment and retention in the ADF.⁷³ The proposed funding for the Gap Year program was to grow annually from \$8.2 million in 2008–09 to \$46 million in 2016–17.⁷⁴

In extolling the virtues of the Gap Year program, Senator David Fawcett, who had previously served in the ADF for over 22 years, indicated that participants would benefit ‘in terms of their confidence, the discipline instilled in them, their life experience and the sorts of leadership qualities that the rest of Australian society values so much’.⁷⁵ Furthermore, during a parliamentary committee hearing in May 2007, the Department of Defence’s Head of Recruiting and Retention Implementation, Brigadier Michael Kruse, suggested that, through the Gap Year program, the ADF were ‘trying not to preach to the converted, those who would normally join a standard military career. We are looking for those who perhaps have an interest in the military but may not necessarily commit to a full-time career’.⁷⁶

66. Department of Defence, [Government response to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Report – From phantom to force: towards a more efficient and effective Army, and subsequent report, A model for a new Army: Community comments on ‘From phantom to force’ parliamentary report into the Army](#), May 2003, p. 11, accessed 6 May 2014.

67. R Babbage, ‘Cost-based plan will avert crisis’, *The Australian* (Defence supplement), 10 December 2005, p. 4, accessed 6 May 2014.

68. R Babbage, [Preparing Australia’s Defence for 2020 – Transformation or reform?](#), Kokoda paper No. 1, Kokoda Foundation, Braddon (ACT), October 2005, pp. 37, 68, accessed 6 May 2014.

69. B Nelson (Minister for Defence), [Address to the National Press Club](#), media release, 31 May 2006, accessed 6 May 2014.

70. P Charlton, ‘We won’t conscript’, *Courier Mail*, 4 August 2006, p. 13, accessed 6 May 2014.

71. B Nelson (Minister for Defence), ‘Answer to Question without notice: Australian Defence Force recruitment’, [Questioner: P Lindsay], House of Representatives, *Debates*, 16 October 2006, p. 31, accessed 6 May 2014.

72. J Howard (Prime Minister), [Reforms to boost ADF recruitment and retention](#), media release, 15 December 2006, accessed 6 May 2014.

73. Ibid.

74. B Nelson (Minister for Defence), [Budget 2007: \\$2.1 billion boost to recruitment and retention](#), media release, 8 May 2007, accessed 6 May 2014.

75. D Fawcett, ‘Second reading speech: Defence Force (Home Loans Assistance) Amendment Bill 2007: second reading speech’ [Second reading speech: Defence Force \(Home Loans Assistance\) Amendment Bill 2007](#), House of Representatives, *Debates*, 23 May 2007, p. 112, accessed 6 May 2014.

76. Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, [Official committee Hansard](#), 31 May 2007, p. 45, accessed 6 May 2014.

Critical reception

The Government's Gap Year proposal appeared to receive at least tacit support from the ALP. For example, the day before the Defence Minister's formal announcement of the scheme in Parliament, the Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley, stated in a speech to the South Australian Labor Conference that he believed both 'my plan for A-PACT, an Australian Peace and Community Team, and the Government's Gap Year military training plan, both give kids a chance to serve'.⁷⁷ The Shadow Defence Minister, Joel Fitzgibbon, also encouraged the Government to provide further incentives for Gap Year participants to maintain a connection to the ADF.⁷⁸

During the campaign preceding the 2007 federal election, held on 24 November, the Coalition Government pledged to establish two technical colleges specialising in defence studies. The 800 prospective students who enrolled in these colleges would subsequently be given preference if they decided to apply for either the ADF Gap Year or a full-time position in the ADF.⁷⁹ However, following the ALP's victory in the election, the new Minister for Defence, Joel Fitzgibbon, remained less than committed to the Gap Year concept. For example, in early 2008 the Minister mused that even a 12 month commitment to join the ADF could potentially be 'an eternity to an Australian teenager'. Accordingly, he suggested that 'we may also need to find ways of giving [Generation Y] short-term exposure to the ADF'.⁸⁰ The following day these comments were reported on the front page of the *Canberra Times* as the new Minister casting 'doubt' on the program.⁸¹ However, less than a fortnight after the Defence Minister's speech, the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Warren Snowdon, was far more enthusiastic, describing the ADF Gap Year as 'an incredible opportunity for young Australians to experience life in the ADF'.⁸²

Implementation (2007)

The ADF Gap Year program was launched on 9 August 2007, with places available from late 2007 onwards.⁸³ These included 500 places in the Army to commence from November 2007, and 100 places each in the Navy and RAAF beginning in January–February 2008.⁸⁴ In less than a fortnight after the August recruitment launch, the Department of Defence had fielded more than 12,000 enquiries and over 500 applications for the program.⁸⁵ The Department further noted in November 2007 that there was strong interest from young women in the Gap Year program, with more than 30 per cent of letters of offer having been sent to female candidates.⁸⁶ The Department of Defence later reported that 53 per cent of Navy Gap Year recruits were female, while the Air Force and Army had 33 and 25 per cent female recruits respectively for their Gap Year programs.⁸⁷

Although Gap Year recruits would not normally be deployed on operations, the exception being Navy recruits who serve at sea, they could participate in shorter three-month tours if they meet the appropriate training requirements.⁸⁸ There is strong evidence to suggest that in addition to being a positive experience for participants, the Gap Year program was also a fruitful means of recruiting for permanent ADF positions. For example, in August 2008—even before the inaugural ADF Gap Year was completed—more than 500 recruits indicated they would be willing to join the ADF full-time, with over 80 Gap Year recruits already having

77. K Beazley (Leader of the Opposition), [We are the future party: speech to the SA Labor Conference, Adelaide](#), media release, 15 October 2006, accessed 6 May 2014.

78. J Fitzgibbon (Shadow Minister for Defence), [Defence still losing the battle for new talent](#), media release, 15 December 2006, accessed 6 May 2014.

79. M Madigan, 'K-Rudd enlists youth', *Courier Mail*, 25 October 2007, p. 12, accessed 6 May 2014.

80. J Fitzgibbon (Minister for Defence), [Speech by the Minister for Defence to open the 'Pacific 2008 Maritime Congress and Exposition'](#), media release, 29 January 2008, accessed 6 May 2014.

81. R Peake, 'Defence faces "hard decisions"', *The Canberra Times*, 30 January 2008, p. 1, accessed 6 May 2014.

82. W Snowdon (Minister for Defence Science and Personnel), [Gap year recruits at Cerberus visited by Minister for Defence Science and Personnel](#), media release, 8 February 2008, accessed 6 May 2014.

83. B Nelson (Minister for Defence), [Get ready for the ADF gap year](#), media release, 9 August 2007, accessed 6 May 2014.

84. B Nelson (Minister for Defence), [Launch of the ADF gap year program](#), media release, 9 August 2007, accessed 6 May 2014.

85. B Nelson (Minister for Defence), [Gap year filling up](#), media release, 22 August 2007, accessed 6 May 2014.

86. Department of Defence, [Girls go for gap](#), media release, 28 November 2007, accessed 6 May 2014.

87. J Kerin, 'Defence filling the gap', *Australian Financial Review*, 8 April 2008, p. 6, accessed 6 May 2014.

88. D McLennan, 'Gap year soldiers may be deployed', *The Canberra Times*, 9 August 2008, p. 3, accessed 6 May 2014.

committed to doing so.⁸⁹ At the conclusion of the Gap Year program, the number of full-time commitments had increased to 101.⁹⁰

Unlike the previous Ready Reserve scheme, the ADF Gap Year program did not suffer any drop-off in applicant numbers after its first year, with applications again exceeding availability.⁹¹ However, despite previous announcements that the Gap Year program would increase the number of Air Force and Navy positions while maintaining its allocation of Army recruits, this was not carried out.⁹² Instead, the number of Army places was reduced by more than a third—and only offset by a slight gain in Air Force places and 167 extra places in the Navy. The Department of Defence reportedly justified this reallocation by citing the ADF's limited resources and training capacity for Gap Year recruits.⁹³ Specifically, the Department of Defence's Deputy Secretary for People Strategies and Policy, Phil Minns, indicated during an April 2009 parliamentary committee hearing that his Department had advised the Defence Minister of both the initial opportunity to expand Gap Year places, as well as the subsequent need to scale back the program following an internal Defence review.⁹⁴

The Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science Greg Combet noted in November 2009 that the Gap Year program would be filled to capacity and that as of the previous month, 231 recruits from the previous year (almost a third of total participants) were now full-time in the ADF.⁹⁵ However in response to a parliamentary 'Question on Notice' regarding Gap Year recruits as of September 2009, the Minister for Defence acknowledged that there were only 550 positions filled across the three ADF services, probably due to the program's reduced scope.⁹⁶

Evaluation of the ADF Gap Year program (2010)

In order to maintain oversight of the ADF's renewed recruitment and retention program, Cabinet had asked that a Departmental Review be conducted by 2010. Within this, it was determined that a separate but parallel review would evaluate the ADF Gap Year program, prepared for the Department of Defence by Noetic Solutions (Noetic). Noetic's final report was submitted to the Department on 21 April 2010 and contained 16 key findings in addition to 16 recommended key performance indicators to be incorporated into the program.⁹⁷

In acknowledging that 'the primary purpose of the Gap Year program is to provide young Australians with experiential service in the ADF', the evaluation report recognised the program's success in achieving this. Specifically, the report cited the program's benefits in improving awareness of ADF career options and providing a 'satisfying experience of military life and training' in tangibly increasing participants' skills and knowledge. Additionally, the opportunity for the ADF to better understand recruitment and retention principles—demonstrated in the program's success in attracting female recruits—was also highlighted in the report's key findings.⁹⁸

The report also indicated there were a number of problems with the program. For example, it was bluntly noted that the program continued to burden existing training programs within the Navy and Air Force, and this was somewhat related to the 'generous' scale of the program, which accounted for 11–13 per cent of the ADF's annual full-time recruiting targets. The 'very high level of governance', where the Prime Minister needed to approve any variation of participant levels, was also questioned. Furthermore, the report was critical of

89. M Kelly (Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support), [Doctor Kelly meets with National Servicemen's Association](#), media release, 5 September 2008, accessed 6 May 2014; J Orreal, ['Gap Year's young guns'](#), *Sunday Mail Brisbane*, 3 August 2008, p. 17, accessed 6 May 2014.

90. W Snowdon (Minister for Defence Science and Personnel), [ADF Gap Year a resounding success](#), media release, 13 November 2008, accessed 6 May 2014.

91. Ibid.

92. W Snowdon (Minister for Defence Science and Personnel), [A bigger and better ADF Gap Year ahead](#), media release, 23 May 2008, accessed 6 May 2014.

93. P Dorling, ['Military changes gap-year strategy'](#), *The Canberra Times*, 19 November 2008, p. 10, accessed 6 May 2014.

94. Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (Defence Subcommittee), [Official committee Hansard](#), 16 April 2009, p. 65, accessed 6 May 2014.

95. G Combet (Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science), [Delivering Defence capability through our service people](#), media release, 26 November 2009, accessed 6 May 2014.

96. J Faulkner (Minister for Defence) ['Question on notice: Defence staffing'](#), [Questioner D Johnston], Senate, *Debates*, 23 February 2010, p. 938, accessed 6 May 2014.

97. Noetic Solutions Pty Limited, ['Evaluation of the Australian Defence Force Gap Year Program'](#), prepared for the People Strategies and Policy Group, Department of Defence, Canberra ACT, 21 April 2010, accessed 6 May 2014.

98. Ibid., pp. 9–10.

unfunded 'additional administrative burdens' and other imposts that meant that the actual cost of the Gap Year program was inherently unknown, and likely to be higher than current estimates.⁹⁹

Ultimately, the evaluation report offered three recommendations: that the program be retained, that Defence consider reducing participants to approximately five per cent of annual enlistment targets, and the adoption of 16 key performance indicators to better determine and tailor the program's effectiveness.¹⁰⁰ Although there was no formal government response to this evaluation report, it is noteworthy that in federal budget estimates released the following month, the total number of proposed Gap Year participants for 2010–11 was reduced to just over 500.¹⁰¹

Challenges

Despite the initial intention for the Gap Year program to offer 1,000 places, this never eventuated. In seeking to redress this, the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, asserted in a speech to the Lowy Institute in April 2010 that 'a Coalition government would re-energise this excellent program and ensure that there are at least 1,000 places made available to school leavers each year'.¹⁰² This proposal became part of the Coalition's Defence platform during the 2010 federal election campaign, and included \$75 million in funding to increase the Gap Year intake.¹⁰³

In supporting the program, the Coalition's Shadow Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Bob Baldwin, described the Gap Year as a 'relatively inexpensive way ... to attract recruits'.¹⁰⁴ However, in response, the Minister for Defence Personnel, Allan Griffin, contended that 'the Gap Year program is not intended to be a direct recruitment program' and instead noted that 'offering a smaller number of high-quality places will do more to promote ADF careers than a large number of positions that cannot be well supported'.¹⁰⁵ The fact that the Gap Year program had not been meant as an explicit source of immediate recruitment had been similarly stated by the Chief of the Defence Force (CDF), Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, in October 2009.¹⁰⁶ Conversely, in July 2008, it had been noted by Defence Deputy Secretary, Phil Minns, that the Gap Year program 'was designed to give people an experience of life in the ADF, perhaps with the idea that they might do the Gap Year, proceed on to study or university, and look to return to the ADF at the end of the process—"gap year" meaning something you do for a year before you commit to your career objective'.¹⁰⁷

Less than six months after the 2010 election, in which the ALP was returned, the Department of Defence again reduced the number of places in the Gap Year program. This included 'suspending' the Air Force's Gap Year intake, while the Navy's allocation was more than halved. According to the Minister for Defence Personnel, these changes were justified by the strong increases in recruiting and retaining permanent ADF members since the Gap Year began.¹⁰⁸ During a parliamentary committee hearing in March 2011, CDF Angus Houston described the Gap Year program as being 'a huge burden on [the ADF]' due to total personnel numbers exceeding the ADF's allocated average funded strength.¹⁰⁹ Twelve months prior, the CDF provided the same committee with a similar analysis, indicating:

One of the realities of our present circumstances when you look at, say, Air Force, with a separation rate of 5.1 per cent and with inquiries and applications through the roof, is that the gap year does not actually help us because we are oversubscribed. I think there needs to be a flexible approach to the gap year. That is where we want to go and

99. Ibid., pp. 9–10.

100. Ibid., pp. 11, 80.

101. Australian Government, *Portfolio budget statements 2010-2011: budget related paper no. 1.5A & 1.5C: Defence Portfolio*, p. 32, accessed 6 May 2014.

102. T Abbott, *Leader of the Opposition Address to the Lowy Institute – National Security Fundamentals*, media release, 23 April 2010, accessed 6 May 2014.

103. M Dodd, 'Labor's \$60bn for military', *The Australian*, 17 August 2010, p. 8, accessed 6 May 2014.

104. R Baldwin, 'Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2010-2011: consideration in detail speech', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 16 June 2010, p. 5671, accessed 6 May 2014.

105. A Griffin, 'Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2010-2011: consideration in detail speech', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 16 June 2010, p. 5672, accessed 6 May 2014.

106. Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, *Official Committee Hansard*, 21 October 2009, p. 15, accessed 6 May 2014.

107. Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (Defence Subcommittee), *Official committee Hansard*, 10 July 2008, p. 89, accessed 6 May 2014.

108. 'Defence gap-year changes', *The Canberra Times*, 12 February 2011, p. 2, accessed 6 May 2014.

109. Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (Defence Subcommittee), *Official committee Hansard*, 25 March 2011, p. 28, accessed 6 May 2014.

that this where we will be making recommendations to the government, so that we have a program available that is another tool in our toolbox and essentially we can use the gap year in a flexible way to respond to the labour market conditions that prevail at any particular time. Simply put, the Air Force, for example, currently does not need a gap year. We have got huge issues with accommodating a gap year, given the circumstances we have at the moment.¹¹⁰

Subsequently, enlistments in the 2012 Gap Year program were reportedly capped to 100 places.¹¹¹

End of the Gap Year program (2012)

The ADF Gap Year program was formally ended as part of the savings measures announced in the 2012–13 Budget. By ending the program, the Government claimed it would save \$91 million across the forward estimates.¹¹² In further justifying the decision to cease the Gap Year program, ALP Senator Mark Bishop stated in June 2012 that this ‘simply recognises that healthy recruitment levels had made the program redundant’.¹¹³

Noting in an August 2012 press conference some of the problems with the Gap Year program, the Minister for Defence cited the relatively small take-up both in percentage terms, and also in the translation into full-time commitment. The CDF, General David Hurley, similarly remarked at that time on the difficulties in accommodating both full-time and Gap Year recruits into the ADF’s entry-level training ‘pipeline’. However, both the CDF and Defence Minister did support the general concept of reduced time commitment service in the ADF, with the Minister emphasising his ‘open mind about reinstating something comparable ... when financial or fiscal circumstances allowed’.¹¹⁴

During the program’s existence, 2,495 people participated, with 700 of those going on to serve in the ADF full-time (as of May 2012).¹¹⁵ The Gap Year program also had a positive impact on the ADF’s ability to recruit women, with female participation in the program of up to 50 per cent. Such circumstances led Defence officials to consider reducing the initial engagement period of trades within the ADF.¹¹⁶ This was realised soon after the program’s termination, and the ADF has continued to offer certain roles with only a one or two year initial minimum period of service. For example, the Army currently offers 12 types of one-year roles, while the Air Force offers five types of one-year roles and nine types of two-year roles.¹¹⁷

Gap Year program re-established (2014)

On 28 April 2014, Assistant Minister for Defence, Stuart Robert, announced that the Gap Year program would be relaunched in 2015—but only for the Army and Air Force. The announcement noted that ‘the Army has Gap Year opportunities for Infantry soldiers, drivers, administration clerks, and supply coordinators’ while the Air Force would provide airbase security roles.¹¹⁸ However, defence commentator Nicholas Stuart indicated that this announcement essentially ‘re-brands and unifies things that could already be done [enlisting for only a year] ... now there’s an officially recognised way of doing this again’.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

One of the ADF’s fundamental and persistent challenges has been to consistently align its complex personnel structures with its wider strategic requirements. Over the past two decades, this has involved the establishment of the Ready Reserve scheme and the subsequent Gap Year program, two initiatives essentially offering a ‘try-before-you-buy’ experience for young Australians considering the ADF as a career. To a large extent, this has been a win-win scenario for both the ADF and program participants. The ADF had a cost-effective way to fill

110. Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (Defence Subcommittee), *Official committee Hansard*, 30 March 2010, p. 84, accessed 6 May 2014.

111. D Ellery, ‘Cuts make a gap year in the military a long shot’, *The Canberra Times*, 23 May 2011, p. 5, accessed 6 May 2014.

112. S Smith (Minister for Defence), *Minister for Defence – Budget 2012-13 Defence budget overview*, media release, 8 May 2012, accessed 6 May 2014.

113. M Bishop, ‘Adjournment: Defence budget speech’, Senate, *Debates*, 25 June 2012, p. 4437, accessed 6 May 2014.

114. S Smith (Minister for Defence), *Minister for Defence – press conference*, media release, 22 August 2012, accessed 6 May 2014.

115. ‘Gap year axe stirs attack by opposition’, *The Canberra Times*, 22 August 2012, p. 5, accessed 6 May 2014.

116. Parliamentary Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (Defence Subcommittee), *Official committee Hansard*, 16 March 2012, p. 27, accessed 6 May 2014.

117. Australian Army, ‘One year roles jobs’, Department of Defence website, accessed 26 March 2014; Royal Australian Air Force, ‘More experience, less commitment’, Department of Defence website, accessed 26 March 2014.

118. S Robert (Assistant Minister for Defence), *ADF Gap Year program for 2015*, op. cit.

119. N Stuart, ‘Armed services lag behind’, *Canberra Times*, 29 April 2014, p. 4, accessed 7 May 2014.

capability needs, while participants could reap the experiential and financial benefits of service with no long-term obligations.

Despite the advantages of such a concept, the ongoing political debate surrounding both the Ready Reserve scheme and Gap Year program has at times meant they have suffered from unrealistic expectations, unforeseen implications and restrictive policy frameworks. Accordingly, both initiatives were unable to endure; the Ready Reserve scheme being quickly dismantled by political opponents, while the Gap Year program was phased out of existence due to changing circumstances.

However, with the ADF's continuation of offering one and two-year roles—and the current Coalition Government's recent announcement about reviving the Gap Year program—it remains apparent that for the foreseeable future young Australians will continue to have opportunities to serve in the military without long-term obligations.

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