



**Australian Government**  
**Australian Customs and  
Border Protection Service**

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Secretary  
Port of Darwin Select Committee  
Parliament House  
GPO Box 3721  
Darwin NT 0801

Dear Sir / Madam

**Submission: Port of Darwin Select Committee**

The Australian Customs and Border Protection Service (ACBPS) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Port of Darwin Select Committee inquiry into the Port of Darwin lease model proposed in the Port of Darwin Bill 2014 (serial 111).

The ACBPS operates a fleet of eleven patrol boats; the majority of operational activity is focused on the north of Australia. Darwin is currently the main port at which crew changeovers, bunkering and provisioning occur, placing a heavy reliance on berthing facilities and port services at the various port locations ACBPS utilises.

The fleet of vessels includes:

- Eight *Bay/Cape* class vessels (the *Bay* class are currently being replaced with the larger and more capable *Cape* Class);
- ACV *Triton*, a large leased vessel;
- ACV *Thaiyak*; and
- ACV *Ocean Shield*, a large vessel owned by ACBPS.

The vessels operate on a 21 or 28 day roster cycle, enabling continuous operations against the eight maritime threats.

In order to undertake an efficient and effective handover in Darwin, the Service leases a permanent berth for *Bay* Class vessels, a purpose built structure located in the inner area of Stokes Hill Wharf.

## Capability gaps

The introduction into service of the *Cape Class* vessels has highlighted the lack of berthing options in Darwin. The original plan for the *Cape Class* was to berth at commercial wharves as the *Bay Class* berth is unsuitable for this class of vessel. The following table demonstrates the suitability of each of the facilities to ACBPS operations.

	Gangway access Or landing	Shore power	Potable water	Waste disposal	Vehicle access & parking	Garbage receptacles	Phone lines	Crane access	Security – limited public access
Darwin Naval Base (DNB)					Limited		Nil	Limited	
Stokes Hill Wharf (SHW) – Outer	Limited	NIL	NIL				Nil		NIL
Fort Hill Wharf (FHW)	NIL								
East Arm Wharf (EAW)*									
Anchor	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL

\* East Arm Wharf has the necessary facilities; however, it cannot be used by ACBPS vessels as it is only suitable to slab sided merchant ships.

### *Darwin Naval Base*

Access to Darwin Naval Base is limited to wharves that are not in use by naval vessels and can therefore only be arranged at short notice, making this option unsuitable in the long term.

### *Stokes Hill Wharf*

While they are still in service, the smaller *Bay Class* vessels can utilise the inner Stokes Hill Wharf facility under the current lease with Darwin Ports; however, this berth is not suitable for the *Cape Class* or ACV *Thaiyak* due to their larger size, weight and the navigation constraints of this constricted area of Darwin Harbour.

An outer berth at Stokes Hill Wharf has been used by *Cape Class* patrol boats; however, there are many restrictions regarding its use, it provides no security to the vessel and access to the vessels is limited. Additionally, this is not a permanent arrangement and doesn't have the capacity to meet the introduction of a minimum of two port visits per week once all eight *Cape Class* patrol boats have been introduced into service.

### *Fort Hill Wharf*

The removal of the Iron Ore Wharf in recent years, the restrictions and access problems of Stokes Hill Wharf and the unsuitability of the East Arm wharves for other than slab sided merchant ships leaves only Fort Hill Wharf available to service a range of other vessels. Fort Hill Wharf is the only berth currently available for large warships and the proposal to base a US Marine Task Force in Darwin in the near future will probably see an increased requirement to access this facility. Darwin is also becoming increasingly popular as a cruise ship destination. As such, vessels currently accessing Fort Hill include large

warships, the larger ACBPS ships (*ACV Ocean Shield* and *ACV Triton*) and an increasing number of cruise ships.

Currently *ACV Triton* and *ACV Ocean Shield* access the existing commercial berths on an as available basis. The lease for *ACV Triton* will terminate in June 2015, but *ACV Ocean Shield* is owned by ACBPS so this arrangement will continue for the foreseeable future.

While suitable for larger vessels, Fort Hill Wharf is not ideal for smaller aluminium hulled ships. The eight metre tides experienced in Darwin Harbour, pile and fendering arrangements at the wharf plus the prevalence of westerly/north westerly winds throughout the year, but particularly in the dry season, make the extended use of this wharf for the *Cape Class* patrol boats problematic.

The limited access to both commercial and Defence facilities while facing an increase in the number of *Cape Class* patrol boats operating out of Darwin requires a dedicated berthing facility for the ACBPS patrol vessel fleet.

### Capability requirement

The minimum capability required is a suitable and adequate permanent berthing facility in Darwin for a minimum of two *Cape Class* patrol boats per week to facilitate maintenance and crew changeovers.

To accommodate unplanned requirements and to cater for the one week every two months *ACV Thaiyak* is alongside for contractor planned maintenance, a new facility should ideally be capable of berthing four *Cape Class* sized ships simultaneously.

The following capabilities are the minimum required to enable operation outcomes to be achieved.

No.	Capabilities
1	The berth has capacity for minimum of two <i>Cape Class</i> patrol boats at a time using a pontoon or walkway arrangement
2	The berth is suitable for <i>ACV Thaiyak</i>
3	The berth allows unrestricted access for crew and contractors
4	The berth allows unrestricted access for bunkers
5	The berth allows unrestricted access for the movement of goods and removal of waste, including sewerage and oily water
6	The berth does not restrict movement of a shore crane if required for access to the vessel's mast or other locations on the vessel

No.	Capabilities
7	The berth is for the exclusive use of ACBPS but is also suitable for use by Armidale Class patrol boats if required
8	Access to the berth is not restricted by the berthing of other vessels
9	The berth and access arrangements is suitable in all tides
10	Dual shore power, potable water, data and phone ports available

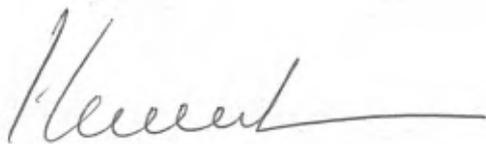
All eight *Cape* Class patrol boats will be in service by July 2015. Expected berthage requirements are for up to 450 days alongside per year.

### Risks

The reliability of access to berths at Darwin Naval Base for the *Cape* Class and ACV *Thaiyak* is a known risk for ACBPS platforms. The berth at Fort Hill Wharf may not be available due to ACV *Thaiyak* and *Cape* Class patrol boats due to workplace health and safety risks associated with access through the large tidal range, which also apply to the outer berth at Stokes Hill Wharf (outer). The only other viable berthing option available at the moment is to conduct crew changes at anchor. This carries significant cost as well as risks to safe handover, schedule and the in-service support work programme.

The enduring availability of berthing facilities to ACBPS ships in Darwin is a high priority for the Service and I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission should you wish to do so.

Yours sincerely



**Ian Laverock**  
Acting National Director  
Border Force

6 March 2015