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Australian Government

Defence

Public Accounts Committee
Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory
Inquiry into the Darwin Ship Lift Project

Department of Defence
Submission

June 2025

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OFFICIAL**Defence Response**

The Department of Defence (Defence) thanks the Public Accounts Committee of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory for its invitation to make a submission to its inquiry into the Darwin Ship Lift Project.

This submission is focused on the following specific Terms of Reference relevant to Defence:

- Updated demand (defence, offshore energy, coastal shipping, super yachts, fishing).
- Interface with naval, port and land use planning.

Defence has no financial equities in the development of the Darwin Ship Lift and Marine Industries Project.

Darwin is a vitally important port for Defence. HMAS *Coonawarra* in Darwin is the main support base for patrol boats, homeport to a number of Army landing craft, and supports frequent visits of ships conducting operations and training activities to the north of Australia. This Defence facility is also being upgraded to support the future operations of the Arafura class offshore patrol vessel. Improving the Australian Defence Force's ability to operate from Australia's northern bases is one of six immediate priorities for Defence being advanced through the Integrated Investment Program.

The 2024 Naval Shipbuilding and Sustainment Plan recognised that the Darwin Ship Lift and Marine Industries Project, when delivered, will enable the maintenance and servicing of Defence and Australian Border Force vessels. Defence engaged with the NT Government in the design of the Darwin Ship Lift.

The development of the Darwin Ship Lift may provide capability outcomes for Defence once delivered. Defence requires facilities that will provide cost-effective ship lift, transfer, sustainment hardstand, engineering facilities and support system capabilities to service Armidale class patrol boats, evolved Cape class patrol boats and Landing Craft Medium vessels. Defence understands that the Darwin Ship Lift, when delivered, will provide a ship lift facility in Darwin capable of lifting the Arafura class Offshore Patrol Vessel and Landing Craft Heavy.

To facilitate any Defence use of the Ship Lift, Defence would require assured access to sustainment infrastructure, including maintenance hardstands. Security requirements will also be an important condition for any Defence use of the Darwin Ship Lift.