

ACTION ALERT AA 20-7: IPAN INQUIRY

As Quakers we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds human rights and builds peace internationally, with particular focus on our region. In our approach to government, we will promote the importance of dialogue, of listening and of seeking that of God in every person. We aim to work for justice and to take away the occasion for war.

December 2020

This Alert outlines an IPAN the Inquiry for organisations and individuals across Australia to contribute to a national conversation about all aspects of the US-Australia Alliance, including the social, political, military and defence, economic and environmental impacts – leading to the review recommending a way to a genuinely independent foreign policy for Australia.

On 26 November 2020 there was an on-line event arranged by the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN) to launch an Inquiry ‘exploring the case for an independent and peaceful Australia’. There were 125 participants in the event. The event highlighted the increasing concern of many Australians at the willingness of Australian political leaders, bureaucrats, media and ‘think tanks’ to follow the lead of the USA in foreign and defence policies, with very little public debate about the implications of this approach and alternative policies. A range of organisations has offered support for the Inquiry.

Kellie Tranter (Lawyer and Human Rights Activist) is the overall Chair of the Inquiry. There are 8 focus areas, each chaired by an experienced person in the field:

- Environment and Climate Change – Ian Lowe AO
- Foreign Policy – Dr Alison Broinowski AM
- Impacts on First Nations Peoples – Terry Mason
- Unions and Workers’ Rights – Assoc. Prof. Jeannie Rea
- Society and Community – Very Rev Dr Peter Catt
- Military and Defence – Dr Vince Scappatura
- Economics – Dr Chad Satterlee
- Political – Greg Barns SC.

Each area has appropriate background information supplied on the website (see extracts below). The intention is that this Inquiry will run for most of 2021 and prepare recommendations after considering submissions. Further details are available at <https://independentpeacefulaustralia.com.au>

Submissions can be made until 31 July 2021. They can be lodged via e-mail – ipan.inquiry@gmail.com or by post to IPAN Inquiry, P.O. Box 573, Coorparoo Qld 4151.

Quakers have the opportunity to take advantage of this Inquiry to present responses, both as individuals and corporately. QPLC expects to prepare a submission, and welcomes ideas about themes that should be covered, and avenues of information and comment to explore.

Relevant Background Information for Focus Areas

Impact on First Nations Peoples: Sovereignty and self-determination are real issues in the discussion. There are people who have negotiated the use of their land for the launch of communication satellites and on terms they find reasonable. In another state, people have had similar but more permanent operations imposed on them without proper consultation or consent. In Queensland land was ‘returned’ under Native Title but access has been restricted and damage to sites continues due to use for international military exercises. The Inquiry presents an opportunity to hear commentary from those involved.

Economic: The central purported economic benefit of the US alliance Australia has joined the US in many military actions. The central argument in favour of joining such actions has been that, were Australia not to demonstrate its commitment to the US alliance in these costly ways, we would be seen as free riders, and the alliance would end. This argument is based on a questionable assumption. It assumes that if Australia adopted a genuinely independent foreign policy, it would face geopolitical threats beyond ‘bread and butter’ border control issues which, given its status as an island nation, could almost certainly be funded with less resources than our current approach, which involves deep military interoperability with the US armed forces.

Social/Community: The US alliance entails significant lost opportunities for the Australian people. The simplest illustration of this is that the US pushes us, and all of its allies, towards committing 2% of GDP to military spending. Military spending should not be such a priority for Australia when it is recognised that we do not have real enemies, apart from those which are a result of our alliance with the US. This is a huge amount in real terms that cannot be justified and cuts into funding for vital fiscal programs which deliver social and community benefits – such as welfare, public housing, childcare and aged care. The current level of military expenditure we see is in fact a consequence of the Alliance with the US.

Environment/Climate Change: In 2006, the US spent more on the war in Iraq than the entire world spent on renewable energy investment. The reporting each country is required to make to the UN on their greenhouse gas emissions excludes any fuels purchased and used overseas by the military. This has been the case since 1997. The military is not just a prolific user of oil, it is one of the central pillars of the global fossil-fuel economy.

Military/Defence: Australia refrains from signing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which prohibits states from developing, possessing, or using nuclear weapons. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade states that the TPNW’s prohibitions are “fundamentally inconsistent and incompatible with Australia’s alliance relationship with the US.” The “joint facilities” at Pine Gap and Northwest Cape host and support “some of the most sensitive critical strategic US capabilities”. These bases make it impractical to restrict US activities in Australia to non-nuclear missions.

Foreign Policy: The U.S.-Australia alliance is often claimed to ensure the security of our country. But is this the case? The US alliance has brought us into many unjust wars against countries which were not our enemies (Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria), and threatens to pull us into the US-planned war against Iran or China, both of which would be illegal, and counter-productive for Australia. If Australia developed a truly independent foreign policy and resisted dictates from the U.S., our nation would gain, not lose, friends.

Political: In 2001-2002 the Howard government, led by the US and Britain, started to introduce many anti-terror, anti-democratic laws. Over the past 20 years ‘wave after wave’ of anti-terror laws have swept through state and federal parliaments. In that short time, 83 anti-terror laws have been legislated with unwavering support by the two major parliamentary parties. Some of these anti-democratic laws go far beyond any other

country's anti-terror laws. Australian Federal and State laws have removed many civil rights and substantially increased the powers of domestic and international intelligence agencies, police and the military.

Unions/Workers Rights: Any profits made from dealing out death and destruction can never cover the costs to workers and their families. Our Defence Force personnel are workers in uniform, and while they bear the brunt, it is working-class communities too that wear the consequences - physical and psychological injuries, broken families and homes. Our public health systems pick up the pieces but still, too often, lives end in tragic circumstances.

Canberra
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