



Stephen Loosley

Voters in tune with defence

A French philosopher observed that scepticism is an elegant form of anxiety. Although healthy scepticism is always welcome in politics, the public's overwhelming response to the work of the Peacock Consultation Team on the Defence Strategy Review 2000 suggests that in this case, at least, much scepticism has been misplaced.

Halfway through the team's deliberations, more than 330 written submissions have been received, the website has had 140,000 hits — including many from the US — and the Defence Discussion (Green) Paper itself is something of a best-seller, with 17,000 copies in circulation.

The public hearings continue to be well attended, and the mainstream, in this dialogue with the Australian people on defence issues, is both broad and deep.

It's clear that Australians overwhelmingly approve of the team's bipartisan approach, and enjoy being asked their views before the Government decides policy.

Although it's still too early to draw conclusions, consistent themes have emerged.

First, there's an overwhelming sense of pride in the men and women of the Australian Defence Force and in their achievements in dangerous situations.

Second, Australians recognise that our immediate region has changed and that there is now a crescent of uncertainty stretching from Aceh to Fiji.

Third, the defence industry's needs are constantly argued, in both cities and regional centres.

Fourth, questions of resources for the ADF are being addressed realistically and honestly. Budget considerations are not being ignored.

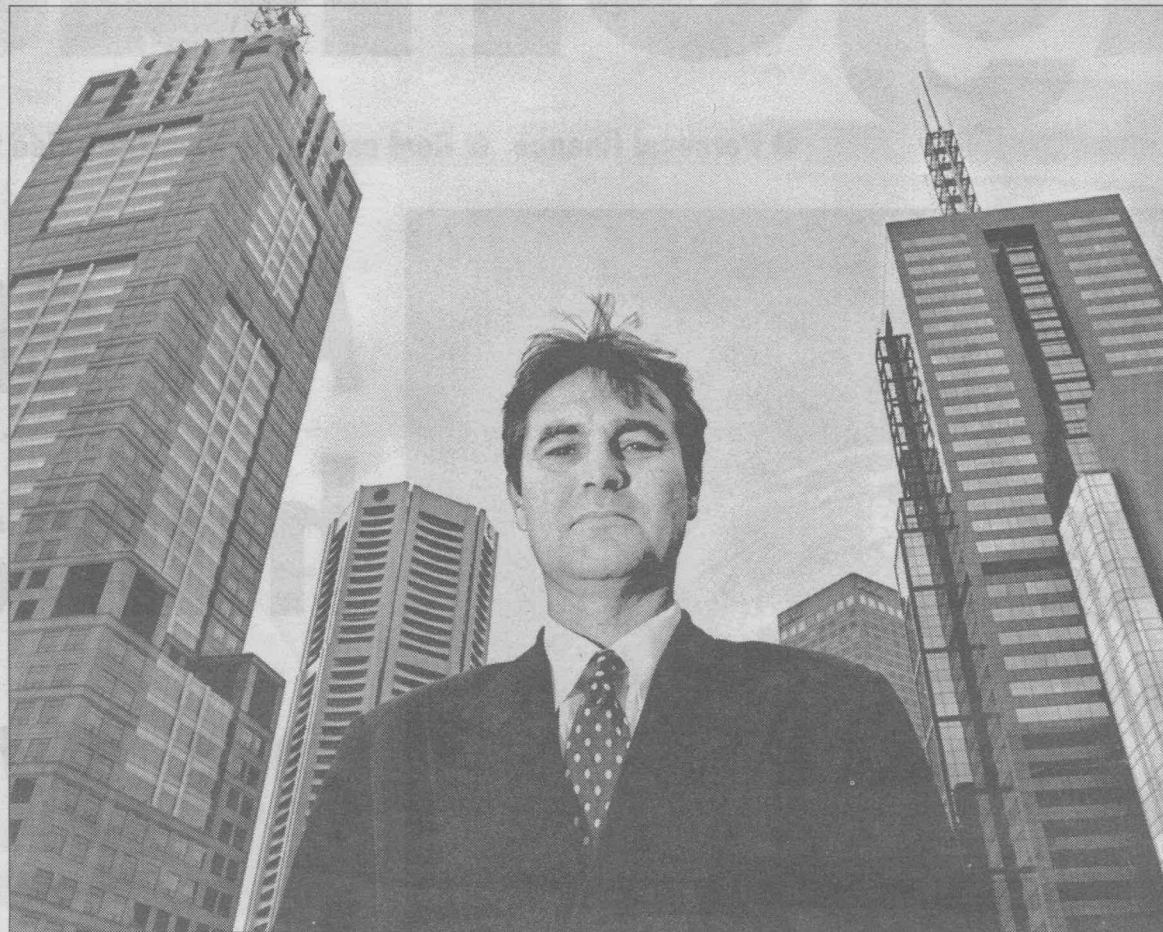
Finally, the Defence Reserves have made their presence felt in submissions.

This is a unique experiment in defence planning, but the process has been so encouraging, it's possible to suggest that where a bipartisan foundation exists on other issues, governments might embark on such an initiative again.

Consideration is being given to releasing the team's report before publication of the White Paper, so broad judgements can be made about community concerns and attitudes.

One point may be made with certainty: Australians have treated this process seriously, and politicians will do well to respond similarly.

Charting Earth's



Lessons of history: Historian and population forecaster Bernard Salt

Picture: Mike Keating

The death of our nation

The historian and the futurist agree. Australia, as an autonomous nation, is fast approaching its use-by date.

The *Sunday Telegraph* asked two experts — one of them schooled in the past, the other looking decades ahead — for their predictions of Australia in the future.

Dr Sohail Inayatullah said: "I really don't think Australia will be here in a generation."

"If you extend the argument of a globalised economy, we begin to create a globalised culture and a globalised movement of ideas, money and, eventually, people as well."

"By then, the set of boundaries called Australia will be far less important."

"If I wanted to be outlandish, I'd say Australia won't exist in 2030 or 2040. And I think there's a real possibility that — as a defined area — it won't exist."

The academic and author believes our identity in the future may be defined by access to technology rather than accent.

"It could be a password — it could be your access to artificial systems, to the Net, to gene technologies. For example, am I genetically modified, or am I traditionally human?"

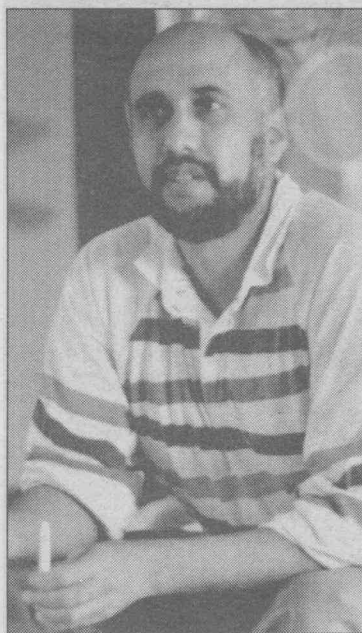
Dr Inayatullah said it was to be hoped that, by putting aside national identity and old hostilities, we would encourage the development of a "multicultural" spiritual identity.

"We don't forget we have ego, culture, religion or nation, but we start to move through them in a much more seamless way and become much more human."

"Some of my friends say, 'That's crazy', but I ask: 'Do you identify with your street?'"

"That would be silly."

Drawing on his background



Futurist: Dr Sohail Inayatullah

as a historian, Bernard Salt, a director of KPMG Consulting and author of *Population Growth 2000*, also believes Australia will be subsumed.

"Geo-political units in world history have a lifetime. The last 2000 years is evidence of that," Mr Salt says.

"To think the Australian people, with 19 million and perhaps — in my view — 35 million at the end of the 21st century, can retain control of an entire continent and its resources for a millennium is fundamentally flawed logic."

"By the year 2051, Australia is likely to have, I think, 26 million or 27 million people."

"Then pretty much the same development in the second half of the century."

"The wild card here is what sort of events elsewhere on the globe could bring about a large-

scale migration to this country.

"It may well be war, it could be an environmental disaster — but, given the paradigm that exists at the moment, that's the order of magnitude."

Mr Salt believes the vast bulk of Australia's population will continue clinging to the coast, with no dramatic greening or consolidation of the inland.

"Just given the social attitudes at the moment, people feel it's better to devote funds to the existing structure rather than to invest it in the taming of the inland," he says.

"We spent the first 100 years evolving an inland culture as we penetrated and settled the inland area, producing icons like the Man from Snowy River, the Swagman and the Squatter."

"Over the next 100 years, we de-emphasised inland rural culture, and we lionised urban culture."

"It's metropolitan culture that has evolved — even down to popular culture like *Neighbours*."

"We've gone from bush to city and, I think, over the next 50 years particularly, with the value shift to lifestyle with the retirement of baby-boomers from 2010 onwards, we will have the evolution of a third culture — and that's beach culture."

"Retirement lifestyle is another culture that's emerging."

"It's almost like (the ABC television series) *SeaChange* is at the forefront of it."

"The thing I do think will happen over the next 20 years, with the retirement of baby-boomers, is the sudden embrace of spiritualism."

"I think that from 2010 to 2020, there'll be so many people confronting the fact that they're on the last leg of life and begin reflecting on things."

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to think faster communication would represent a quantum development.

"We could communicate much higher concepts, better ideas, more human languages," de Bono said.

Other panellists, including University of California technology and society researcher Dr Gregory Stock, apparently regarded this as a big yawn.

"That's all we get for a thousand years?" Stock retorted.

But then, there's no shortage of arguments about the future. Visions range from apocalyptic to a kind of high-tech Nirvana.

Dr Bart Kosko, a US engineering professor and author of *The Fuzzy Future*, presents a vision of "the chip potato".

Kosko describes the human brain as "an engineering fiasco" that will in time be replaced, allowing people to enter their own kind of heaven.

"The demand for heaven is great. The current method of getting to heaven involves various supernatural systems for which, at this point, there's no scientific evidence," he says.

"So I think we can reduce heaven to an engineering project — which we are doing."

"Our plan is ultimately to transfer human consciousness from the brain to bits of information in a computer chip or some other kind of computational medium, so that just by thinking — the act of volition — we'll be able to create our own personal world."

Octogenarian Canadian futurist Frank Ogden has all but given up. In one recent article, the man known as Dr Tomorrow predicted: "There may not be a future for futurists because of all the rapid change."

"These days, my idea of long-range planning is lunch."

A few weeks ago, the futurist known as FM-2030 underscored those warnings about the best-laid plans of mice and men when he died.

Although FM-2030's hopes of living to be a sprightly 100 in the Year 2030 were dashed by death, in 30 years' time we may have the skill to defrost his body and reverse the cancer that killed him.

As Brisbane-based academic and Humanity 3000 participant Dr Sohail Inayatullah sees it, we cannot predict the future but we should at least — like FM2030 — consider the various possible scenarios and begin to make our own choices.

"You have to get people to write their own scenarios," the International Management Centres' Professor of Future Studies says.

"It's not a concluded story."

"The metaphor I use in some of my work is that, if we imagine the body as evolution, then our pen is technology and culture is our glove."

"The debate has been how can we make sure that culture stays up with technology."

"Now, for the first time, the technology — the pen — goes back and rewrites the arm. It's bypassing culture."

"So the big issue is; how do we make science more participatory, more public, and how do

next 1000 years



Highway to the future: Futurists agree the world in the year 3000 will be vastly different from the world of today

we make sure there are debates on which technologies we really want?

"Genetic and artificial development are going so quickly, they will just define the future."

"What are the points of human intervention?"

Dr Inayatullah argues that the next 1000 years should be more about human "thrival" than mere survival.

"The important thing about this project is that most of our decision-making doesn't include the long term," he says.

"It always gets simplified down to technology."

"But what type of world governance system will we have? What are the spiritual issues? How will people find meaning versus other issues? In what ways will we intervene with human evolution, designer babies, enhancing human intelligence?"

"Do we, for example, find a human IQ gene and make people smarter, or is being smart mostly about making sure that people have enough food and meaning in life?"

"Access is another big time issue. Before, we had a divided world because of income; now we're getting a divided world in terms of technology."

"We're also getting a divided world in terms of access to genetic enhancement."

"Do you have a supply-type theory of genetic research, or do you gene-enhance a few people, then hope they're smart enough to find solutions to other problems?"

"We could easily see the whole project go wrong."

Indeed, even optimists like Dr Inayatullah believe a "dark period" lies ahead.

"We did a vision of 1000 years

Coming to terms with our future

Bytebabies: Children of the technological revolution whose every trait is carefully selected or engineered, and who never know their mother's womb.

Chip potatoes: A term to describe entertainment junkies who will have plastic chips for brains and be able to create their own virtual worlds at will.

Cryonics: The freezing of the life-expired, to later be repaired or their consciousness loaded into a new form.

Dystopia: The dyspeptic's Utopia — an imaginary place with

very bad conditions. The novels 1984 and Brave New World describe dystopian futures.

Gaia Hypothesis: This theory says the Earth is itself a living organism or "sentient being" capable of self-regulation.

Microvita: The theoretical missing link between matter, mind and consciousness. These minute particles are common to everything in the cosmos.

Nanotechnology: The science of really, really small things, which will allow us to manipulate the universe from the atom up.

Noosphere: A level above the biosphere which contains the sum of human knowledge — the global brain to which we may all one day plug in.

The Singularity: The future's equivalent of the big bang, where technology propels humanity beyond itself.

Transhumanism: The belief that humans can overcome our biological limits through advances in science and technology. This would ultimately free us from disease, ageing and death.

from now — what it looks like — then we started going backwards to what had to have happened to reach the year 3000," he explains.

"Pretty much everyone agrees there is going to be a kind of dark period where — with genetics, nano-technology, space exploration — things can go wrong, but hopefully humans will learn from those mistakes."

It's for this reason Dr Inayatullah and others argue that scientists cannot be allowed to divorce themselves from ethical questions in the compelling quest for advancement.

"Ethics has to be in everything we do — especially when we're entering technologies that basically transform five million years of evolution in five years," Dr Inayatullah says.

"There are things I thought were far-fetched, but then I met the people actually doing the research and they said: 'No, that's just a few years ahead'."

"That shocked me."

"I'm not a conspiracy theorist, but technologies develop partly because they do good things for humanity and partly because the military forces get benefits from them."

"There's a concerted political agenda that ties into gene research because of the real fear in the US of the Caucasian population proportionally decreasing against the Asian-African."

"Caucasians could go from being 50 per cent of the world's population 120 years ago to being 10 per cent in 2050."

"I think — at an unconscious level — that there is a fear of females, a fear of other cult-

ures, and a real sense of: 'How do we make sure the Western world, which has done so well, can maintain its edge?'."

"One is through artificial intelligence. And the gene stuff, mixed with artificial intelligence, starts to become a much more potent mix."

"Slip on that side, and you get genomics as weapons delivery."

"Genomics, in its positive sense, is about finding out and targeting specific inherited diseases and fixing them."

"But, conversely, genomics as a weapons systems is about finding out how we can send viruses to certain populations to make sure that they don't do so well."

Luckily, Dr Inayatullah says, the science doesn't support that scenario — yet.

And, even more important, we still have a choice.



Chris Puplick

Why hate speech is dangerous

Comments by Piers Akerman (ST, 6/8) attempting to portray the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act as a "vicious tool in the hands of the politically correct" and criticising the Administrative Decisions' Tribunal findings in two recent cases simply fails to address either the rationale or the experience of racial vilification legislation in this State.

The State and Federal Parliaments have both recognised that "hate speech" is dangerous — it is antithetical to social cohesion and harmony. It may be emotionally harmful to victims and may, indeed, lead to physical harm against them.

Hate crimes are always preceded by hate speech.

Our parliaments have tried to balance the real dangers posed to the lives of individuals with the need to ensure maximum free speech.

Mr Akerman is in error in associating vilification provisions with the alleged power of the gay lobby, with whom he has some sort of curious preoccupation.

Racial vilification laws have been in place for a considerable period of time, long before any extension of anti-vilification legislation to other groups (not just gays) in our society. Federal legislation covers racial vilification only.

Both of the cases cited by Mr Akerman relate to claims of racial vilification — hence my curiosity as to why his continued homophobic denigration of the gay community has to be dragged out of the closet yet again.

The remark that the tribunal is "not bound by the rules of evidence" needs to be put in the context that this is the standard procedure for such tribunals.

Similarly, in the case of The Financial Review article, it is untrue to assert as Mr Akerman does that the tribunal "ignored" subsequent letters and articles. The tribunal discussed them at some length. But it also noted, as Mr Akerman does not, the failure of The Financial Review to print in full the complainant's letter in response to the offending article.

As to the case involving Alan Jones, whose support of Aboriginal sporting activities and individual players has never been in doubt, the finding of the tribunal was that his words were, on the basis of the tough tests in place, vilifying.

The fact that the case was brought by a representative body (Western Aboriginal Legal Service) is no basis for criticism.

Chris Puplick is the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board president.