

## Contributors

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# Foreword

In September 2014 I was delighted to receive an invitation from Professor Tom Frame, Director of the Australian Centre for the Study of Armed Conflict and Society (ACSACS) at the University of New South Wales (Canberra), to consider a proposal to be partners in the delivery of a series of conferences and seminars relevant to our respective organisations. The first seminar, 'Maritime Strategy 1914', co-hosted by the Sea Power Centre Australia (SPCA) and ACSACS was held at the Australian Defence Force Academy on 26 November 2014. The seminar proceedings have been edited, augmented by two other papers, and published in quick succession. I congratulate Tom and his staff in providing the editorial review and for bringing the material to a wider audience.

The November 2014 seminar was a test to gauge whether our two organisations could satisfy the rigorous academic demands of our audience, including how we could further refine the partnership in delivering respected, high quality, well researched articles and presentations relevant to the contemporary debate surrounding the complex and often challenging field of maritime history. A brief read of what follows suggests we have made a good start. But our respective organisations are not just about delivering précis of historical events touching on armed conflict. ACSACS seeks to be the pre-eminent Australian venue for assessing the past, present and likely future impact of armed conflict on institutions and individuals. More information about the Centre, its vision and objectives can be obtained from the website ([www.acsacs.unsw.adfa.edu.au](http://www.acsacs.unsw.adfa.edu.au)). Through the Strategy and Historical section of the SPCA, my intention is to assist ACSACS achieve its objectives. I am confident that the seminars and forums planned for 2015 and beyond will go some way in achieving this outcome.

For its part, SPCA has important responsibilities in furthering conversation and enhancing debate about maritime affairs within Australia. The Centre has been in existence for nearly 25 years. It was founded in March 1990 as the Maritime Studies Program under the direction of Commodore Sam Bateman RAN. Through the efforts and dedication of previous Directors and staff the Centre has evolved into a highly respected organisation made up of selected individuals with a keen interest in maritime strategy and history. Known now as the Sea Power Centre Australia, its

role is varied and is accompanied by a global outreach. Let me provide a brief overview of the Centre's current activities. This will help to provide a clearer description of its remit and to explain why a lively discussion of maritime affairs is vital to the continued security and future prosperity of our nation.

First, the Centre is responsible for the development of 'Australian Maritime Doctrine' (AMD). This foundational document explains how the Navy thinks about, prepares for and operates across the spectrum of maritime operations. As well, the Centre is responsible for developing 'Australian Maritime Operations' (AMO). This supporting document describes the current Navy including its capabilities, limitations and organisation. The Centre publishes (AMD) and (AMO) and are available on the SPCA website ([www.navy.gov.au/spc](http://www.navy.gov.au/spc)).

Second, as 'thought-leaders', the Centre influences the development of Australian maritime strategy by producing papers and providing forums for the interchange of ideas. Notwithstanding recent successes in promoting a 'maritime school of strategic thought', public discussion of maritime affairs is frequently marked by ignorance or misunderstanding. Although a number of organisations exist to foster conversations about how this nation might exploit its unique geography and location in the world, the Sea Power Centre remains the best placed organisation to promulgate internally and promote externally the critical importance of the maritime message and its benefits for both the nation and the navy. This is not a minor task that can be done once and forgotten. Considerable and continuing conceptual work is needed in devising a comprehensive Australian maritime strategy that incorporates, among many things, maritime economics; maritime governance and law enforcement; trade and environmental policy; shipbuilding and infrastructure; regional maritime engagement and alliance building; and, the ADF's overall approach to maritime campaigning.

Third, to assist us in improving discussion and debate of maritime affairs the Centre hosts seminars, lectures and workshops to foster a collective understanding of maritime strategic thought from a whole of nation perspective. The focus is facilitating an educative dialogue on strategic issues shaping maritime policies, strategy and doctrine. In part, these initiatives go some way in working towards developing a common dialogue on Australian maritime strategy but this is just a start.

Like other institutions with similar remits, SPCA relies heavily on its relationship with other navies, with think tanks, and with domestic and overseas universities and private institutions. The director and staff travel extensively throughout the Indo–Pacific region and are often invited to speak at international forums on maritime issues where the aim is building regional confidence and security ties. Each year the Centre’s staff is invited to deliver presentations and lead workshops at many of the regional staff colleges including Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines. The Centre also hosts a number of visiting military fellows who are attached to SPCA for six–eight weeks as they work on contemporary maritime issues. For further information including details on upcoming events visit the website or follow us on Twitter #@seapoweraustralia.

Both ACSACS and SPCA look forward to building a strong relationship. Tom Frame and I value your support, suggestions, feedback and encouragement as we strive to foster world class debate and discussion on maritime history and its impact on current thinking.

Captain Mike McArthur RAN  
Director, SPCA  
Canberra  
January 2015

## Editor’s note

This collection of essays was drawn from a public seminar hosted by the Sea Power Centre Australia (SPCA) and the Australian Centre for the Study of Armed Conflict and Society (ACSACS) at the University of NSW (Canberra) in November 2014. The seminar presentations have been revised, enlarged and edited. An additional two papers, those by Dr Peter Overlack and Mr Michael Wynd, have been included to broaden and supplement the collection. I have also added an introduction covering a series of events between 1901 and 1914 that led to the establishment of the Royal Australia Navy and which gives the less informed reader a clearer sense of the considerable challenges facing the new navy.

The opinions expressed in each of the essays are those of the individual authors. They do not represent the opinions of the organisations with which they are affiliated nor do they reflect the views of the University of NSW or the Royal Australian Navy.

## INTRODUCTION

# The birth of an Australian navy

Tom Frame

The six Australian colonies formed a Federal Commonwealth on 1 January 1901 after a decade of consultation, disagreement, negotiation and compromise. Australia had become a sovereign nation and was obliged to provide for its national defence – albeit in concert with the Royal Navy (RN). The RN had looked forward to this development for some time. The Admiralty in London hoped that administrative arrangements for its operations around and beyond the continent would be streamlined in dealing with one rather than six governments. But the progression to independent nationhood inevitably produced criticism of continuing Imperial control of Australian naval defence. The return of the Colonial Naval Brigades from the 1900 Boxer Rebellion in China became the subject of political debate and objections were voiced over the actual and proposed future British use of Australian ships and men for causes that did not directly concern Australia. On the other hand, the Admiralty expressed its anxiety with the limitations already placed on the control of the Auxiliary Squadron, a unit provided by the British and paid for by Australians, and began to propound the creed that naval defence should no longer be a matter of local interest. A single undivided navy – the Royal Navy – was imperative to Australia's security at sea and the well being of the Empire. This would be the Admiralty's line of argument for the next ten years. Both perspectives – Imperial and local – sounded the death knell for the 1887 *Australasian Naval Defence Act* (1887) which expired in 1901. By then

neither party was interested in its renewal. The way was now open for a new agreement. But opinion in Australia was sharply divided. There were two schools of thought; those who advocated a separate Australian navy and those who supported the creed of one Empire – one Navy and the efficacy of paying the Admiralty to provide for Australian needs.

The foremost proponent of an Australian navy was William Rooke Creswell, a former Royal Navy officer. By the time of Federation, Creswell had been involved in Australia's naval defence for two decades with a clear vision for a local navy which he was to pursue to realisation. Creswell believed the proclamation of Federation made Australia an independent nation responsible for its own security. As the first responsibility of any national government was to guarantee the safety and protection of its citizens, Creswell argued that Australia should have its own navy. But there was more to his argument than a desire to promote expensive statecraft. Creswell positively believed that Australia needed naval defence to secure its territorial integrity and to protect its overseas interests. As an island nation keenly sensing its remoteness from friends and allies, an adequate navy was paramount to national survival. In 1902 he wrote: 'For a maritime state furnished without a navy, the sea, so far from being a safe frontier is rather a highway for her enemies; but with a navy, it surpasses all other frontiers in strength.'

Following service with the South Australian colonial navy, Creswell became the Naval Commandant of Queensland on 1 May 1900. Shortly afterwards (28 September 1901) he produced a report on 'the best method of employing Australian seamen in the defence of commerce and ports'. Creswell attacked the extant naval agreement as irrelevant and inadequate. He advocated construction of four 3000-ton cruisers for training local personnel; the acquisition of a training ship for boys; the creation of an Australian naval reserve; and, the establishment of specialist naval training schools. The four cruisers would be minimum-manned in peacetime and raised to a full fighting complement in wartime for deployment as a reserve flotilla in the Imperial squadron. Creswell claimed that his proposals would not exceed current expenditure on naval defence with the four cruisers to be delivered over a four-year period.

The nation's leading press appeared to support the development of an Australian navy that was owned, operated and maintained by Australians. In response to Creswell's report, the 20 December 1901 edition of *The Age* praised Creswell's strategic outlook.



The Australian Navy is not mere sentiment. It is a policy, and wise policy too. Captain Creswell has rendered a service in trying to bring it out of the clouds and place it on the basis of a practical scheme ... Clear thinkers have long since been practically unanimous that the sea must always be not alone Australia's first line of defence but her chief line. An invader can reach us only in ships. He can come in sufficient force only if convoyed by strength enough to land forces without danger of serious molestation. No foreign power would be mad enough to transport a large aggressive force over the sea to attack Australia unless it first made provision against serious intervention on the sea ... Moreover, we have to remember the vast risks of landing anything short of a large army in Australia.

*The Age* had already expressed a firm commitment to the development of Australian maritime power.

Australia cannot avoid her destiny as a sea power, and it is equally clear she must be dominant in this part of the world. In the fulfilling of this end she must have a navy. The beginning of the Federation era is the suitable time for the beginning of this navy. The one is the adjunct of the other. The laying of the foundations of a nation like ours must commence on a scheme of national defence for the wealth we are accumulating.

*The Age* also accepted Creswell's assessment that an adequate local navy would cost as much as the present subsidy scheme while giving Australia an asset to show for its expenditure. In any event, *The Age* noted, Australia already had the genesis of a navy.

There are some 1800 men in the naval forces of the various States. The lack of training facilities has told against their efficiency in some states. Under Federal organisation and with proper training afloat in the Federal ship of war, they could be made an effective body of men for sea service. Seeing, therefore, that in any provision for the future we must spend some £300 000 a year out of the Federal Treasury for the maintenance of naval defence, the question very opportunely comes up again whether we cannot spend this money much more advantageously for ourselves than by handing it over to the British Admiralty.

In adding its support to Creswell's scheme for Australian naval defence, the *Sydney Morning Herald* remarked on 20 December 1901 that:

There is an element of incongruity in the spectacle of some five million Anglo-Australians with an army splendidly equipped but unable to prevent the burning of a cargo ship in sight of Sydney heads. Of course there is a pardonable touch of rhetoric about this because we have the protection of His Majesty's ships and the auxiliary squadron as a first line of defence. We contribute largely to the maintenance of this squadron mainly because we recognise the necessity for some such provision and our moral obligation to bear a share in its cost. But Captain Creswell's contention is that we can arrive at the same result in another way, which, while probably less burdensome on the mother country, would ensure to us a permanent result.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* stressed the need for self-help and self-reliance but felt the lack of Australian ships made it impossible for the new nation to train its own naval personnel.

Clearly, then, the first requirement of any scheme for federal naval defence is the provision of the necessary ship or ships to form the nucleus of a squadron. Since we in this State lost the *Wolverine*, we have had no means of giving our men training afloat, yet the services of our Naval Brigade in China showed that we are as capable of taking part in the Empire's wars with this arm of the service as with the Bushmen and Mounted Infantry who served in South Africa. What is wanted is the opportunity for training afloat. Once that is forthcoming we shall be better able to judge the amount of effective material that can be drawn from the available total of nearly 30 000 men engaged in the sea and river and fisheries services of the Commonwealth.

Anticipating fears in London that Australia would abandon its links to the Empire, the 21 December 1901 edition of the *Brisbane Courier* explained that:

The creation of an Australian navy would in no sense mean the separation of Imperial from Australian defence, but rather the co-operation for a certain definite purpose. It may easily happen that the whole strength of the Imperial navy would be engaged in another part of the world in opposing the ships of other countries, or in protecting British commerce and at such a time it would be of extreme importance to have the Australian coastal trade protected by our own fleet from raiding cruisers.

It was obvious that the assumption of independence and sovereignty by the Australian colonies would not be an empty achievement. Within the first months after Federation, Australians were expressing a sincere commitment to accepting all of the responsibilities of nationhood, including naval defence. But the Colonial Conference held the following year at which the extant Naval Agreement was to be renegotiated overshadowed Creswell's creative plan. The First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Selbourne (William Palmer), had made the Imperial position very clear.

It is desirable that the populations of the Dominions should become convinced of the truth of the proposition that there is no possibility of the localisation of naval forces, and that the problem of the British Empire is in no sense one of local defence. The sea is all one, and the British Navy, therefore, must be all one; and its solitary task in war must be to seek out the ships of the enemy wherever they are to be found, and destroy them.

The Australian Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, and his ministry generally ascribed to this view but there were many who voiced their disapproval. The member for Bendigo, Sir John Quick, pointed out that more than a decade earlier Read Admiral George Tryon had favoured some form of local naval control, arguing that: 'It is blood rather than gold that is the basis of every true force; and to awaken the proper spirit, the Government of each Colony, the people of each Colony, should manage as far as possible, their local naval forces during times of peace.' Billy Hughes noted that the Government's attitude was 'the death blow to the budding aspirations for an Australian Navy'.

In spite of all the opposition, the *Naval Agreement* (1903) was agreed in principle, providing for the stationing in Australian waters of one armoured First-Class cruiser (HMS *Euryalus*), two Second-Class cruisers (*Challenger* and *Cambrian*) and five Third-Class cruisers (*Psyche*, *Pyramus*, *Pioneer*, *Pegasus* and *Prometheus*) and four sloops. Article IV of the Agreement stated:

Of the ships referred to in Article I, one shall be kept in reserve and three shall only be partly manned and shall be used as Drill Ships for training the Royal Naval Reserve, the remainder shall be kept in commission fully manned.

In explaining the Government's decision and in seeking approval for payment of the subsidy, Barton told Federal Parliament.

I wish to say at the outset that I do not decry, but on the other hand, fully appreciate, the spirit of local patriotism which animates those who hold that our seagoing defence should be provided for wholly by means of an Australian navy. There are two reasons in the main why the Government cannot adopt that proposal for the purposes for which this agreement has been entered into. The first of these is the principle of the unity of control in naval defence, and the second the cost of any minimum adequate defence provided for in that way.

Australia agreed to pay a subsidy of five-twelfths of the annual cost of maintaining the squadron to a maximum of £200,000. Barton compared this amount with the £500,000 he claimed it would cost to maintain an Australian squadron of comparable capability. A former Commander-in-Chief of the Australia Station, Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge, was critical of the Imperial government for proposing subsidy policy. He expressed the view that

badgering our fellow subjects beyond the seas for money payments towards the cost of the Navy is undignified and impolitic. The greatest sum asked for by the most exacting postulant would not equal a twentieth part of the Imperial naval expenditure, and would not save the taxpayer of the Mother Country a farthing in the pound of his income.

It was a pity he had not made the point so strongly during his service in Australia.

The Australian press reflected popular disappointment with the Government's policy. The *Adelaide Register* made no secret of its opposition: '[For] the Commonwealth to request an outside body to perform any act of defence, which the people are able to do for themselves, is to enfeeble the national character and lower Australian prestige.' The English *Spectator* was afraid that the Commonwealth's decision would have regrettable broader consequences: 'Canada, Australia and New Zealand will never attain to that Naval spirit which is the life breadth of maritime empire if they hire their naval protection in Britain or merely pay in money'. But the *Sydney Morning Herald*, previously reticent about Australia's capability to provide for its own needs, supported Barton's position by arguing that those proposing an Australian navy overstated the size and capability of the squadron Australia could purchase for the proposed outlay. The newspaper claimed on 12 November 1902:

There is, of course, something flattering to the new Federation about the idea of its possessing and directing a fleet of its own; but the very circumstances that make it so would reduce this miniature navy for all practical purposes to a nullity ... Sir Edmund Barton condemned the theory that the fleet could be kept selfishly at home as hopelessly wrong, insisting that to be of any real service it would have to be part of the general defence scheme of the Empire, and liable to work with ships of His Majesty's navy under common direction. This view of the case has been so often urged that it only needs to be mentioned here to ensure due weight being given it in debate.

But the *Sydney Morning Herald* was attacking 'straw men' when it accused the 'Creswell' group of advocating an independent navy.

The Admiralty must have single and undivided control of the national sea power if it is to be effectively used for purposes of Imperial defence. A number of isolated fleets under independent direction would be a source of weakness rather than of strength to the nation, and a standing invitation to the enemy in critical times. Our security lies in cooperating with the British Navy as to make such ships as we have on the Australia Station an integral part of it. This is a portion of our heritage of Empire, and we must not forget nor depart from it.

The strongly nationalistic *Bulletin* was the most strident opponent of naval subsidies. After claiming that Australia received 'nothing that is of any value' in return for the subsidy, the 4 October 1902 edition of the *Bulletin* railed against the terms of the new agreement which it thought gave the Commonwealth government

some sort of shadowy control over the fleet in its waters by a clause providing that the ships are not to leave 'the Australian Station' (which embraces nearly all the South Pacific) – without permission. But it was never pretended that that this limitation would be respected in a time of crisis. If Britain called, the ships of the Australia Station would go to the Mediterranean, to China, or to the English Channel. The proposed new agreement dispenses with the hypocrisy of the control condition, and frankly allows that the subsidy is to Britain's defence not Australia's. This continent can have the benefit of the warship's presence in peacetime; when war breaks out they may continue in her waters or they may not, just as it suits Britain. Obviously, this is a bad bargain for Australia.

*The Bulletin* argued that Australia did need 'a few swift cruisers to protect her coastal commerce in wartime against a sudden swoop from a privateer or a vagrant warship' but that these could and should be built by Australia in due course. Consistent with its aggressive nationalism, *The Bulletin* told the Parliament that 'doubling the subsidy ... will in no way assist Australian defence, will in no way help to dispense with an Australian fleet, and is purely and simply an addition to the charity grant now paid to a rich uncle'. *The Bulletin* stepped up its criticism of Barton's administration a week later (8 October) when it condemned the Prime Minister for stating:

Unofficially, yet very openly and significantly, that any idea of Australia creating a fleet of its own must be severely discouraged. This is a broad and conspicuous hint that Australia can't be trusted or that the marine glory of the empire, with the pomp, dignity, salary, and brass buttons attached thereto, are not for common people like Australians, but for the superior Briton only; and that Australia must be compelled to rely on Britain for defence – and be reminded unpleasantly at intervals that it doesn't defend itself but hides behind the skirts of its venerable parent. The theory that the empire's great weapon of offence must be wholly in the hands of that small fragment of the empire called Britain, embodies the idea of subjection and inferiority on the part of the rest of the empire.

The debate continued into the new year. It was universally recognised to be a matter of national importance. *The Age* featured a long article entitled 'An Australian Navy: Policy of Self-Reliance' by 'A naval officer' in its edition of 7 April 1903.

It is not singular that the proposal to increase the naval subsidy to Great Britain, and simultaneously abandon all voice in the disposition of our coastwise defence, should be received with distrust and dislike, even by those who can claim no special knowledge of matters naval. But while the man in the street resents the course to which Sir Edmund Barton, when amid the seductive surroundings of the conference in London agreed to commit Australia, the man who has devoted his whole life to naval questions is able to show incontrovertibly that on the broadest basis of imperial policy the establishment of a locally owned, officered and manned fleet would make immeasurably more for the safety of the Empire and the weal both of England and Australia than any naval subsidy.

The writer – probably Creswell noting the writing style – was keen to deny the assertion that an independent navy was being proposed and posed the question: ‘why should the idea that a portion of the Empire’s sea forces could be raised and operate from Australia be interpreted as a desire for separation and as the most wicked naval blasphemy and infidelity?’. The writings of the great American naval strategist, Alfred Thayer Mahan, were cited as an authority for the wisdom of ‘the defence of the commerce of the great self-governing dependencies by the dependencies themselves, by their own ships and men.’ ‘What Australia needs’, Mahan wrote in 1902, ‘is not a petty fraction of the Imperial Navy, a squadron assigned to her in perpetual presence. A continent in itself with a thriving population and willing apparently to contribute to the general naval welfare, let Australia frame its schemes and base its estimates on sound lines ... recognising that local safety is ... best found in local precaution.’ But against the might and persuasive power and prestige of the Admiralty, could local precaution prevail? Australia’s maritime geography was depicted as a strength to be exploited rather than a difficulty to be overcome:

The length of the coastline is not a weakness but an element of solid strategical advantage to Australia’s defence. It multiplies the ports and places at which Australian warships can coal and refresh in security denied to the enemy, and for roughly 7800 miles the coast offers nothing to attack. For all practical purposes the main ports are islands situated at convenient distances and constituted, from the naval point of view, coaling bases. Commerce attack, according to Captain Mahan, is the only risk Australia is open to in war. The idea that towns are to be attacked is to suppose that the enemy’s cruiser commanders would be mad enough to empty their magazines with no base at which to refill them, and with the risk of meeting a foe when they are in that condition.

The *Bulletin* resumed its campaign against Barton’s decision on 4 April 1903 with a sense of wounded national pride after the Commander-in-Chief of the Australia Station, Vice Admiral Sir Arthur Fanshawe, took a swipe at Australian naval aspirations by warning against the establishment of ‘little petty navies’ in a speech he delivered in New Zealand. Fanshawe subsequently argued that ‘Australia and New Zealand’s sole defence for many years to come rests upon the capacity of the Royal Navy to maintain command of the Eastern seas.’ The *Bulletin’s* editor pronounced:

Under these circumstances all true Australians naturally revert to the idea of creating and gradually strengthening and building up our own fleet, and against this view the present British government has set its face hard. Its servile subordinates naturally follow its lead. The ill-bred sneer of Admiral Fanshawe at the 'petty fleets' which would naturally represent the first beginnings of the Australian marine, reflects the latest turn of the British political kaleidoscope. Yet Fanshawe's tall, bloated scoff comes badly from the representative of a country which was glad so very lately to get the aid of Australia's petty army, and which is cadging so hard for Australia's petty cash in the shape of a naval subsidy, and which boasts so much of the petty dependencies which, added together, make up its empire. If a separate Australian marine force is a matter of such utter absurdity, then a separate Australian land force is equally ridiculous, likewise a separate Australian subsidy.

The *Bulletin* also pointed out that the Admiralty seemed to have reversed its policy on local arrangements between 1887 and 1902.

[It] had been for many years agreed by practically all British authorities that Empire defence depended for one of its essentials on local defence of outlying dependencies. Australia had received no intimation that this opinion had altered, and that these local defences were no longer regarded with a friendly eye. Then the information was sprung upon this country, after dinner, that local defences are no longer looked upon with a friendly eye; that they are rather regarded as wicked and almost insurrectionary.

The *Bulletin* also criticised the Australian Labor Party in its edition of 6 June 1903 for failing to assert its ideals in relation to naval defence:

The party professes to be White Australian and democratic in its ideals, and should have fought from the first, with tooth and nail, a scheme which, in the case of war, might leave Australia at the mercy of the fleet of Britain's ally – Japan.

A week later (20 June) the *Bulletin's* editor was attacking the Governor of Victoria, Sir George Clarke, and other former British service officers holding vice-regal appointments for supporting the naval subsidy proposal. Its form of attack was to lampoon those it felt were improperly interfering in what was a purely political matter.



The fact that a man has walked fiercely up and down the quarterdeck of a British ship for many years with a brass telescope under his arm, isn't evidence that he knows anything at all about the political aspects of the case. It doesn't go to show either that he knows anything about naval administration; that he knows anything about the necessities of Australian defence; it doesn't even show that he knows much about war. It only shows that he is an interested party with a telescope under his arm. That applies to the Naval governor who interferes with Australian naval questions; but if a purely military governor like Clarke attempts, however covertly, to advocate the naval subsidy folly, then he doesn't even rank as the most obscure kind of expert. It is difficult to say what he ranks as unless it be some kind of horse-marine.

Political opposition to Barton's decision continued.

During parliamentary debate on the *Naval Subsidy Bill* in August 1903, Senator Alec Matheson criticised the 'pauper dependency' of the Defence Minister, Sir John Forest, who was firmly opposed to an Australian navy. It was also noted that Britain spent £1/5/0 per head of population on the Royal Navy whereas Australia was spending fractionally more than one shilling. Matheson pointed out that if Australians contributed at the same rate as the British there would be £5,000,000 – more than the sum required for Australia to provide for itself. But the Commonwealth was, of course, caught by the 'Braddon clause' requiring three-quarters of all revenue from customs and excise collected by the Commonwealth in the first decade after Federation to be returned to the States. For politicians like Bill Hughes, the provision of a navy was fundamentally about accepting the responsibilities of nationhood.

[It] is calmly proposed by this agreement to remove the local Imperial fleet now stationed here and – though not in so many words – to give the death blow to the budding aspirations for an Australian navy ... no matter what it costs, we must have it if it be necessary.

There was fierce debate but the Bill was passed and the Agreement was finally ratified. Although Alfred Deakin voted in favour of the Agreement, he later contended that it was 'incompatible with the status and dignity to which the new Commonwealth should aspire'.

With the *Naval Agreement* ratified and public funds made available for the subsidy, Federal Parliament was in a position to consider draft legislation for the internal regulation of Australia's naval and military

affairs. The Commonwealth Government 'inherited' the former colonial navies following Federation. The ships and personnel of the former Colonial navies were transferred to the Commonwealth Government on 1 March 1901 under Section 51 of the Australian Constitution although they continued to be administered under State Acts and Regulations until the proclamation of the *Defence Act* on 1 March 1904. The Australian Commonwealth Naval Board (ACNB) was constituted on 12 January 1905 and headquartered in Melbourne. The Board originally consisted of the Minister for Defence, the Director of Naval Forces and a Finance Member. Captain Creswell was appointed the first Director of Naval Forces. His task was less to do with command and leadership and more to do with molding the various propositions raised by politicians, the press and the Australian people into a policy acceptable to both the Commonwealth and the Admiralty in London. Creswell had to help the Government strike a balance between Australia's diplomatic and strategic responsibilities as a dominion of the British Empire and its operational and tactical needs as a nation at the foot of the Dutch East Indies Archipelago far removed from Europe, its maritime geography and the internal and domestic political struggles of the day.

In 1905, the indefatigable Creswell put forward a scheme for a local Squadron of three 3000-ton cruisers, sixteen destroyers, five First-Class and eight Second-Class torpedo boats. Creswell envisaged the local manufacture of munitions and an assumption of responsibility by Australia for local defence. He was very forthright in putting his case and was rarely concerned about allegations of political partisanship.

The pledge given, when Parliament assented to the *Naval Agreement Bill*, that local defences would be maintained, has not so far been observed. No ships have been obtained for more than twenty years. It is the same with personnel. Practically, there have been no officers entered on the permanent staff for the same period. There are this moment [September 1905] only two Lieutenants on the active list really fit for duty and the whole Lieutenants List (Permanent) numbers only three.

Creswell's views were, however, unpersuasive to a section of the public and many politicians despite the nationalistic mood prompted by Federation. There was reluctance to spend large sums of money on a Navy when it seemed, even according to some navalists in London, to be little point given the alleged absence of an adversary. The strategic situation in the

Pacific and Indian Ocean basins was apparently benign and an Australian navy would be of limited practical value. The 1907 edition of *Brassey's Naval Annual* commented that the retention of a Commonwealth Naval Force was the product of the enthusiasm of a few 'naval commandants'. It concluded that Creswell's idea for a flotilla of destroyers 'will not be of much value against any attack that is likely to be made on Australia'.

It would have been easy for Creswell to simply give up in the face of political opposition and public ridicule. But he did have some well-placed supporters that encouraged him and those to whom he addressed his proposals. After the Army retained something of a stranglehold on the vice-regal office in New South Wales with the arrival of Lachlan Macquarie in 1810, Admiral Sir Harry Rawson became the first former naval officer to be Governor of New South Wales since Captain William Bligh when he was appointed in 1902. Serving until 1909, Rawson was a well-known and widely-respected governor and a champion of the Dominion navies. The Army had used the vice-regal position to great effect for nearly a century. It was now the Navy's turn.

Barton's successor as Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, supported the idea of an efficient local naval force and voiced his criticism of the 1903 *Naval Agreement*, suggesting that the subsidy should be applied to 'securing up-to-date ships usefully engaged in commerce during times of peace, but capable of being employed economically and at short notice in time of war'. Deakin was a staunch and most vigorous proponent of the need for an Australian navy.

But for the British Navy there would be no Australia. That does not mean that Australia should sit under the shelter of the British Navy. We can add to the Squadron in these seas from our own blood and intelligence, something that will launch us on the beginning of a naval career and may in time create a force which will rank among the defences of the Empire.

The Admiralty turned a deaf ear to these suggestions except to agree that the Imperial Defence Committee should frame a scheme of defence for Australia. In May 1906, the Committee issued its report confirming that the *Naval Agreement* was adequate. The Australians were not going to be put off that easily. Efforts to reach some sort of acceptable agreement continued with Deakin suggesting in 1907 that Australia should provide 1000 sailors for the Royal Navy at Commonwealth cost estimated at

£100,000 per annum, 'the remainder of the present subsidy' to be applied to a local defence force. The Admiralty refused to accept this scheme as the basis for a new agreement.

At the Colonial Conference held in London in 1907, Alfred Deakin and Sir William Lyne, the Minister for Trade and Customs, put the case for an Australian navy. Deakin took a great personal interest in the Navy. His contemporaries described him as the last of the patriot statesman and the 'greatest imperialist of them all'. The Admiralty proposal was for Australia to have a naval force consisting of small coastal destroyers and a small submarine flotilla. Lord Tweedmouth (Edward Majoribanks), the first Lord of the Admiralty, speaking on 23 April 1907 in response to the Australian proposals, stated that Australia would need to build locally 'the smaller craft which are necessary incident to the work of the great fleet of modern battleships'. His reason for saying this was straightforward: 'You cannot take the smaller craft such as torpedo boats and submarines across the ocean.' He suggested very strongly to the Australians that they should have submarines:

above all things in this work, the submarine is probably the most important and most effective weapon ... That is the view that is very strongly taken by some of the leading men in the French Navy, who think the submarine is really the weapon of the future.

This view no doubt reflected that of the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir John Fisher, who favoured submarines and had his own ideas on how Australia should support the Royal Navy. He did not support the establishment of a Dominion navy that did not also meet pressing Imperial needs. Tweedmouth also asserted that such an acquisition would be useful to Britain as well, 'supposing as it were, as I hope it may not be, drawn into a war abroad'. The Conference closed with the decision that the Admiralty would wait for formal submissions from the colonial governments as to the form of assistance with naval defence that was desired.

As Deakin's delegation returned home, the Commonwealth government learned that a large American fleet would be undertaking a worldwide tour starting in 1908. Deakin wanted the ships to visit Australia. In his invitation to President Theodore Roosevelt, Deakin remarked that:

No other Federation in the world possesses so many features [in common with] the United States as does the Commonwealth of Australia ... and I doubt whether any two peoples could be found

who are likely to benefit more by any thing that tends to knit their relations more closely ... Australian ports and portals would be wide open to your ships and men.

In conveying the invitation to President Roosevelt, Secretary of State Elihu Root remarked: 'The time will surely come, although probably after our day, when it will be important for the United States to have all ports friendly and causes of sympathy alive in the Pacific'. Roosevelt readily perceived the long-term value of accepting the Australian invitation. 'Some day the question of the Pacific will be a dominant one and it will be necessary to know the sentiment of Australia and New Zealand'. Roosevelt then decided to make public Deakin's invitation. This produced a cool reaction at the Admiralty because the Royal Navy could not mount a comparable show of naval strength in the region at that time.

Deakin was not embarrassed when the details were made public and widely reported. He was delighted when the Americans accepted and told Federal Parliament: 'The least we can do is give three cheers for the United States ... I venture to say that a welcome such as no fleet has ever seen outside its own country will be given in Australia to the American Fleet'. Shortly afterwards a rumour began circulating in Australia that President Roosevelt was planning a visit to coincide with the arrival of the American Fleet. When American expatriate Labor politician King O'Malley asked Deakin in Parliament whether Roosevelt was coming to Australia, such a visit being the first by an American president to Australia, Deakin replied that he was not. Apparently, said Deakin, the President was planning a big-game hunting trip to Africa and another to New Zealand to study that country's 'modern industrial economic methods'. One suspects that Roosevelt's real interest in New Zealand was probably trout fishing. Whatever the reason, Australians were naturally disappointed as the visits of national dignitaries were always met with great public enthusiasm. Roosevelt explained in a private letter to King Edward VII, however, that he was closely watching international reactions to visits by the Fleet and hoped the King would share his opposition to spreading Asian influence in the Pacific region.

I am much interested in the trip of our Fleet to the Pacific; the ships have just come out of the Straits. I feel very strongly that the real interests of the English-speaking peoples are one, alike in the Atlantic and Pacific; and that, while scrupulously careful neither to insult nor

to injure others we should yet make it evident that we are ready and able to hold our own.

There was no doubt that Japan was the unnamed pariah. After the victory of the Japanese over the Russian fleet at Tsushima Strait on 27 May 1905, the *West Australian* claimed the Imperial Japanese Navy was a threat to White Australia: 'After Tsushima, the British withdrew their battleships from the East and Australians were, to put it in Billy Hughes' words, worried 'that we should now rely on the Japanese for the maintenance of British naval supremacy in Eastern seas'. Japan was now seen as a credible threat to Australia. This made the American fleet visit crucial. The *Age* took the lead in suggesting the messages that would be conveyed and lessons that should be learned.

It is no less our proper business, while the Fleet is here, to use the object lesson of patriotic effort and achievement it will furnish us to steel our resolution to obtain as soon as possible a navy that will not disgrace us in comparison. Australia is an island continent. Our destiny lies on the sea. No friend or enemy can reach us save by the sea. A friend is coming to us soon along the ocean highways; but who shall dare to say that almost as powerful an enemy may not one day steam into our waters in ironclad might to fight us for our heritage? Nothing is plainer than that we must have a navy. We must arm, and inasmuch as the sea while we possess no warships puts us at the mercy of any hostile Power possessing ships, it is our first duty to arm navily. That is the lesson of the forthcoming visit – that and the fact that without a navy we should be useless to the Motherland or to a friendly Power like America as an ally.

The sixteen white painted American warships, dubbed the 'Great White Fleet', departed from Hampton Roads in Virginia in December 1907 for a 14-month cruise including 29 international ports of call. It attracted enormous attention during its visits to Sydney and Melbourne which each hosted the Fleet for one week. [After departing the eastern seaboard, the Fleet also spent one week in Albany (with a population of 4000) while it took on fuel]. The Australian response to the visit was overwhelming. Public holidays were declared and funerals were delayed as a carnival spirit enveloped the host cities with balls, parades, receptions, concerts and parties. The Australian public feted the 14,000 American sailors.

The visit of the Great White Fleet was a clear indication that Britain was not the only nation possessing naval might and not the only nation

with which shared a 'natural' bond with Australia and its people. This notion of a 'natural' bond was central. As Rear Admiral Charles Sperry USN, the commander of the American Fleet told a crowd in Melbourne, the visit of his ships and men 'bring on both nations a realisation of their close relationship and common interests, and foster sympathy and mutual understanding more binding than treaties.' The sentimental component of the relationship, an important motivator for building and sustaining the trans-Pacific friendship, was reflected in Deakin's proposal of 1909 that the Monroe Doctrine be extended to all countries around the Pacific Ocean, supported by guarantees from Britain, Holland, France, China and the United States. Perhaps caught up in the euphoric aftermath of the Great White Fleet's visit, the *Age* stated that people in Australia were 'always cheered to know America is watching their efforts with more than a friendly interest and ready at a pinch to show that blood is thicker than water.'

The visit of the Great White Fleet could not have been better timed to assist the Australian navalists in their campaign to create an Australian navy. There was a growing fear of both Japanese expansionism and German Imperial aspirations in the Pacific. After the Colonial Conference, Deakin proposed a variation of the increasingly unpopular *Naval Agreement*. The Commonwealth offered to substitute the subsidy with the provision of 1000 Australians sailors for service on the Australia Station with the remainder of the subsidy to be applied to local naval construction. Four hundred sailors would man two 'P' Class destroyers retained in Australia notwithstanding prevailing strategic conditions elsewhere while another two cruisers would be lent for training purposes at a cost of £60,000 per annum to the Commonwealth. On 20 August 1908, the Admiralty said that it 'had difficulty in fully comprehending the extent of the scheme' outlined by Deakin and pointed out that the cost of the Australian naval proposal consisting of six destroyers, nine submarines and two depot ships was £1,277,500. Their Lordships believed that this was beyond Australia's means. Having given careful consideration to Deakin's scheme, the Admiralty 'could not see their way to accept the proposals as a basis for a new agreement.' The Admiralty waited for the Australians to respond.

Deakin's party lost office at the polls in November 1908 and was replaced by the Labor government led by Andrew Fisher. The new administration promised immediate action on naval defence and the cost and the conditions for sharing the overall responsibility for Australian naval defence became

the subject of great debate over the next twelve months. Deakin's proposals had not met with much domestic support and the only action taken had been to earmark £500,000 of surplus revenue for naval defence. The new Defence Minister, Senator George Pearce, asked Creswell to produce some plans for a destroyer program. The Government announced that two destroyers would be built in England with a third to be fabricated in England for subsequent transport and construction in Australia. In clear defiance of Admiralty advice, the design selected was an oil-burning, turbine driven torpedo-boat destroyer of 600 tons. The armament was one 4-inch gun and three 12-pounders. The main capability was three 18-inch torpedo tubes. This destroyer was twice the size suggested by the Admiralty and featured a high forecastle to permit sustained speeds in heavy seas. Australia's isolation, according to Creswell, was the principal reason for their acquisition.

We are at the end of the world. We are nearly at the exact point of the antipodes to the heart of the Empire. Asia, with its illimitable and perhaps threatening possibilities, is to the north of us. Foreign bases are being established in the Pacific around us. Political changes in Europe, not regarded as improbably, may later determine the ownership of the immense archipelago stretching from east to west to the north of us.

According to Creswell, defence of coastal and international trade was the first consideration followed by the threat of continental invasion. Because aggressors would come by sea, Creswell argued that Australia needed a navy on which it could rely. Creswell's views had gradually gained currency within the community. In its editorial on March 1909, the *Age* complained that:

Germany has stolen a march on Britain, and Britain's naval supremacy is threatened. A war may occur in a few years when one Dreadnought might turn the scale. The crisis is without parallel since the time of the Armada. The question arises therefore, is Australia rich and loyal enough to give Britain the wherewithal to build a Dreadnought? The people of the Commonwealth will be eager to make the gift, and being a gift, it will not interfere with the issue of the naval subsidy which Britain realises is doomed.

This sparked a spirited public reaction which the Government could not ignore. But there was another view. *The Bulletin* thought the Australian



people were responding with 'mental drunkenness' and asserted that the gift might result in an 'embarrassing ironclad'. While two State governments pledged assistance, the Commonwealth Government took a broader view. Prime Minister Andrew Fisher contended that Australia needed its own Navy quite apart from British needs in relation to Germany. Creswell pointed out that Australian seaborne trade in 1909 was worth £170 million and that at least 1 per cent of its value ought to be invested in its protection. At that time, he stressed that Australia's expenditure including the subsidy was merely a tenth of 1 per cent.

But much of the debate was overtaken by the 'Imperial Conference on the Naval and Military Defence of the Empire' that began in London on 9 July 1909. In calling this conference, the British government admitted that it had to reconsider the propositions of the dominions again in a broader context and recommended that the whole system of Pacific defence should be re-cast. The Conference concentrated on finding the best means for Dominion governments to participate in the burden of Imperial defence. The Conference adopted a general proposition that: 'Each part of the Empire is willing to make its preparations on such lines as will enable it, should it so desire, to take its share in the general defence of the Empire.' It was decided to form a Pacific Fleet of three units, one on the Australia Station, one in the East Indies and one on the China Station. Each unit would consist of a battle cruiser, three light cruisers, six destroyers and three submarines with the necessary depot and store ships. It was agreed that the East Indies and China units should remain under Admiralty control whereas the Australian unit would be funded, controlled and ultimately manned by Australians. New Zealand agreed to contribute towards the cost of the unit based in China. The Admiralty claimed that

Such a fleet unit would be capable of action not only in defence of coasts, but also of the trade routes, and would be sufficiently powerful to deal with small hostile squadrons should such ever attempt to act in its waters.

A meeting was then convened between the representatives of the Admiralty and of the Australian government. They met on 19 August 1909 with the Australians provisionally adopting the Admiralty's suggestion of a fleet unit. The total initial cost of such a unit was £3,695,000. The Commonwealth government would also pay approximately £750,000 to Britain for maintenance, pay and allowances for loan personnel, training

and other associated costs. The Minister for Defence, Joseph Cook, put the scheme for an Australian 'Fleet Unit' to Federal Parliament on 29 November 1909. Speaking in support of the proposal he said:

We must remember, first of all, that Australia is part of the Empire, and that within our means we must recognise both our Imperial and local responsibilities. The Empire floats upon its fleet. A strong fleet means a strong Empire, and therefore it is our duty to add to the fleet strength of the Empire. Our first object is the protection of our floating trade and the defence of our shores from invasion or hostile attack ... Should the motion be carried, we shall turn over a new leaf in the book of our evolution. Our tutelary stages are past, our time of maturity is here.

The motion was accepted and a *Naval Loan Bill* was passed shortly afterwards to provide funds for the construction of the Australian Fleet Unit.

On 9 December 1909 the Governor-General, Lord Denham, despatched a cable to the Secretary of State for the Colonies at the request of Prime Minister Deakin. The Admiralty was asked 'to arrange for construction without delay' of the armoured cruiser (*Indefatigable* Class) and the three unarmoured cruisers. 'The destroyers and the submarines,' said the cable 'would be the subject of special despatch.' But the armoured cruiser was to be superseded by a new battlecruiser – the *Dreadnought*. Battle cruisers were heavily armed but fast and comparatively lightly protected ships designed to support cruisers in their scouting operations, and also to destroy enemy cruisers. Their lighter armour made them unsuitable for action with battleships. They were designed primarily to act as scouts for battleships and to attack light enemy forces. Not surprisingly, the Commonwealth Government decided that its battlecruiser would be named HMAS *Australia* and that it would have the honour of serving as Flagship. The light cruisers were also reasonably well protected. The Admiralty had been conducting experiments with the old ironclad HMS *Edinburgh* which:

showed that ships protected only by a thick deck near the water line would be exposed to great damage from high explosive shell ... An entirely new method of protection for light cruisers was therefore introduced into the ships of the 1910–11 programme, known as the *Chatham* Class, which were protected amidships by 3 inches of protective plating consisting of side plating 1 inch high tensile steel behind 2 inches of nickel steel.

*Australia* was to gain the benefits of the latest technology in the crucial area of ship's side armour.

British shipyards would construct two of the light cruisers to be named *Sydney* and *Melbourne*. A third, to be named *Brisbane*, would be built in Australia. When Andrew Fisher became Prime Minister again in April 1910 he repealed the *Naval Loan Act*. The cost of the naval unit would be paid from revenue. He also decided against accepting the Imperial government's offer of assistance with paying for the ships. Australia, he proudly stated, would meet the whole cost. With the decision made to establish an Australian navy, Federal Parliament debated the *Naval Defence Bill*. The *Argus* wanted to enlighten its readers to the nature of naval defence and the need for Australia to cooperate with the Admiralty on 14 October 1910.

It is utterly inconceivable that the Imperial fleet should be working out some great plan of Imperial strategy, and that at the same time the Australian unit should be obeying orders framed apart from the general scheme. Australia would sacrifice none of her dignity and ambition if the control of her ships in wartime went without question to the powers commanding the whole great Imperial fleet ... When the need comes, the naval principle – with which is bound up the Imperial principle – will triumph irresistibly by the force of logical necessity, and with the fervently expressed approval of Australians. Our ships will form part of the Imperial fleet, since, saving in that character, they cannot operate in war, or count so much as a single gun in Imperial or Australian defence. Therefore, however much we may claim for our political individuality in naval control during peace, in time of war there will be only one course for our ships to travel, and that will be the course ordered by the Imperial plan. In that way Australian defence will be best realised for it is not upon any naval unit or upon the fleet in any one ocean that the Australia depends, but upon the giant strength of the whole Imperial navy.

This sentiment was echoed the Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Station, Admiral Sir Richard Poore, during a speech reported in the *Argus* a month later.

The first and most obvious danger to Australia in any war of the high seas will be danger to her shipping ... the immense peril to which Australian trade would be exposed travelling through the Suez Canal and its approaches. The canal itself is less than 100 miles long but

on both sides of the canal there are narrow seas for 3000 miles and right along this vast stretch of water a happy hunting ground will exist for hostile commerce destroyers. Consequently, war will almost certainly drive Australian shipping around the Cape of Good Hope and he warns shipbuilders to prepare accordingly. What must be the influence of such an expectation upon naval defence in Australia? [The nation] must not rest content with coastal ships to protect us against the possibilities of invasion – possibilities which are happily distant while the Imperial navy is triumphantly strong – but [it] must possess cruisers able to patrol the ocean and guard our seaborne trade from hawks in the shape of commerce destroyers. It is quite natural to suppose that in time of war Australian cruisers would be expected to protect Australian shipping as far as the Cape. But without strength in ocean-going cruisers to shelter trade, Australian will not be providing the defence which it most obviously needs.

To assist the Commonwealth Government in determining its naval infrastructure needs, Admiral Sir Reginald Henderson was invited to Australia in June 1910. The Government had asked the Admiralty for the services of Admiral Fisher who had recently retired after six years as First Sea Lord. During his term of office Fisher had achieved a small revolution in preparing the Royal Navy for possible war. The Australian Government was informed that Lord Fisher was unavailable but that he had recommended Admiral Sir Reginald Henderson who was considered to be an expert on dockyards. Henderson proposed an elaborate scheme of 16 bases and a long-term development program involving a fleet of 52 ships and 14,844 personnel. Henderson's report was much more grandiose than Australia could ever afford. Prime Minister Andrew Fisher declared that the Admiral's recommendations 'could not in any way serve as Australia's share in the defence of the Empire. Henderson has only concerned himself with the local aspect of defence, and has not gone into matters affecting the Empire generally'. This was as good as saying Henderson had neglected to mention the role of the Royal Navy and Britain's share in the financial burden. In any event, other events overtook Henderson's inquiry and report.

As the Australian ships were being built, the Admiralty planned for the withdrawal of its Squadron. At that time it consisted of the 14,200-ton First-Class cruiser HMS *Powerful*, three Second-Class cruisers, five Third-Class cruisers and three survey vessels. With the proclamation of the *Naval Defence Act*, all was ready for the Commonwealth Government to assume

responsibility for the naval defence of Australia. On 10 July 1911, King George V granted the title of 'Royal Australian Navy' to the Permanent Naval Forces of the Commonwealth and the title 'Royal Australian Naval Reserve' to the Citizen Naval Forces. The abbreviations 'RAN' and 'HMAS' were also authorised. A Naval Forces Regulation stated that 'all ships and vessels of the RAN shall fly at the stern the White Ensign as a symbol of the authority of the Crown, and at the Jack Staff the distinctive flag of the Australian Commonwealth'. The administration of the Australia Station by the Royal Navy also ceased in favour of the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board (ACNB) on that date. For the next two years, the Naval Board prepared for the arrival of the Fleet Unit by recruiting officers and sailors, establishing state-based naval administrations, acquiring support vessels and building shore facilities.

On 1 July 1913, all of the Admiralty's establishments in Australia were transferred to the Commonwealth. This marked the formal end of the Royal Navy's direct responsibility for the naval defence of Australia. It also marked the conclusion of a long and drawn-out effort to create an Australian navy which could meet the burden of responsibility which had now passed to the Commonwealth Government. The Australian Fleet Unit ceremonially entered Sydney harbour on the morning of 4 October 1913. The Commander-in-Chief of the Australia Station, Admiral Sir George King-Hall, struck his flag in the Second-Class protected cruiser HMS *Cambrian* anchored off Fort Denison with Rear Admiral Sir George Patey hoisting his flag as Commander of the Australian fleet in the largest warship in the southern hemisphere, HMAS *Australia*, which was under the command of Captain Stephen Radcliffe RN. Displacing 21,300 tons and with a complement of 820 men, *Australia* was armed with eight 12-inch guns, sixteen 4-inch guns, four 3-pounders, five machine guns and two 18-inch torpedo tubes. The new RAN Flagship was a truly impressive vessel and a decisive asset in large fleet actions. Then followed the light cruisers *Sydney* (Captain John Glossop RN) and *Melbourne* (Captain Mortimer Silver RN). They were ideally suited for long-range patrol and escort duties. Both displaced 5400 tons with eight 6-inch guns as their main armament. Their sister ship, *Brisbane*, would be completed in October 1916. The two new Australian cruisers were followed by the protected cruiser HMS *Encounter*. The two River Class torpedo boat destroyers, *Yarra* and *Parramatta*, were the fastest vessels in the Fleet Unit being capable of 28 knots. Their sistership, *Warrego*, had earlier been

completed at Cockatoo Island Dockyard in Sydney. In addition to their three 18-inch torpedo tubes, they were armed with one 4-inch gun, three 12-pounders, one machine gun and three Lewis guns. Three other ships were built at Cockatoo – *Swan*, *Huon* and *Torrens* – and entered service in 1916. Vickers Maxims at Chatham built the two submarines, *AE 1* and *AE 2*, which were to arrive at Sydney in late May 1914. They displaced 725 tons on the surface and were powered by two sets of 8-cylinder diesels. Their passage to Australia would be the longest submarine transit in history.

The entry of the Fleet Unit was by far the proudest moment in Australia's short national history. Enormous crowds gathered from dawn right around the harbour to gain a good viewpoint. To mark the occasion, all school children in New South Wales were granted a special holiday and given a small silver medallion commemorating the event. Rudyard Kipling even wrote a short verse for the arrival:

Carry the word to my sisters,  
To the Queens of the North and the South.  
I have proven faith in the heritage.  
By more than word of mouth.

In his address at the Sydney Town Hall that evening, Prime Minister Joseph Cook remarked:

The coming of our Australian Fleet marks a place in the naval history of the Empire. We enter upon it regretting the international necessities which make it urgent, yet feeling proud of our Australian public spirit which makes it possible. We face the future grateful for the protection of the Mother Fleet in the past, while we have acquired the ability and resource to build our own. Our resolve is greater than ever to link our destinies with those of our brethren overseas, who are, day by day, using their naval strength to guarantee the peaceful development of the Christian civilisation of the Empire and the World. A definite place has already been assigned it in the scheme of imperial defence. It is the Australian section of the Imperial Fleet.

The Defence Minister, Senator Edward Millen, shared the same sense of euphoria.

Since Captain Cook's arrival, no more memorable event has happened than the advent of the Australian Fleet. As the former marked the birth of Australia, so the latter announces its coming of age, its

recognition of the growing responsibilities of nationhood, and its resolve to accept and discharge them as a duty both to itself and to the Empire. It is the expression of Australia's resolve to pursue, in freedom, its national ideals, and to hand down unimpaired and unsoiled the heritage it has received, and which it holds and cherishes as an inviolable trust. It is in this spirit that Australia welcomes its Fleet, not as an instrument of war, but as a harbinger of peace.

The local press exhibited an unrestrained sense of pride. The *Daily Telegraph* declared that

Australia's claim to nationhood finds endorsement in the arrival in Sydney of a fleet which, though but a unit of a naval fighting force, is her earnest of a determination to assist in building up a buttress to Old England's naval prestige ... It was certainly an epoch in nation building when they steamed in stately dignity into Sydney harbour on Saturday.

In London, the *Daily Mail* reported that 'as the world views such matters, it was a small naval display. But that was hardly the point. The sight of the *Australia* and the *Sydney* ... was an expression of an Australian patriotism ... The spectacle was inspiring, the soul of it was patriotism.' But the *Daily Mail* pointed to a wider significance for the day's events.

The achievement is a feather in the Australians' cap, and the rest of the Empire will frankly envy the exploit which, with the very useful work in the Pacific already standing to their credit, overwhelmingly justifies the prescience and patriotism that led them in 1909 to start a naval unit of their own.

While the Commonwealth government turned its attention to other aspects of national life, the newly formed RAN prepared for operations at sea under the tutelage of experienced British officers and senior sailors. As none of the other British Dominions had attempted to create its own navy, the audacity of the Commonwealth government was tempered by the realism of men like Creswell who knew the continuing importance of learning from the strongest naval power the world had ever seen – the Royal Navy. As the strategic situation in the Pacific deteriorated and the stability of Europe was subjected to a succession of disturbances, the beginning of 1914 brought a sober realisation that the RAN had not been formed a day too soon. Australia was threatened and the nation was prepared to respond.

## CHAPTER 1

# The German Navy and the global war at sea

Michael Epkenhans

### The German Navy and the war on distant oceans

On 9 November 1914 the German Light Cruiser *Emden*, after successfully waging cruiser-warfare in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, tried to destroy a British wireless station on North Keeling Island. Unfortunately, its arrival was detected and a battle with the Australian light cruiser HMAS *Sydney* soon followed. Despite fighting bravely, the *Emden*, severely damaged the superior guns of the *Sydney*, had no option but to scuttle herself on the shores of the Cocos Islands.

At first glance, this event might create the impression that the Imperial German Navy not only had a continental strategy but a global naval strategy as well. In naval history cruiser or commerce warfare has always been a strategy implemented by numerically weaker navies in order to inflict losses upon an overwhelming enemy. By destroying enemy merchant vessels and thus causing serious problems for trade, industry, and the provision of food or the destruction of vessels transporting troops and war materials from distant parts of the British and French Empires to the main theatre in Europe, fast cruisers could help force a powerful opponent to sue for peace. Subsequently, it would have been natural for the Imperial German Navy to devise plans for cruiser warfare. Such a strategy would not only have seriously threatened Britain's and even France's lifelines, but also