

Yet another reform, but not without potential

THE ALBANESE GOVERNMENT'S proposed reforms to a Defence Delivery Agency (DDA) framework mark a familiar moment in Australian defence policy: a re-centralisation of acquisition, sustainment and capability oversight that, for many in the system, feels like a selective return to the old Defence Materiel Organisation (DMO).

While the rhetoric stresses modernisation and efficiency, the structural logic, consolidating authority, clarifying accountabilities and creating professionalised acquisition cadres echoes the very functions DMO was designed to deliver before its dissolution a decade ago.

The underlying risk is that the reform becomes a rebranding exercise rather than a decisive transformation. Defence has cycled through more than 30 major reviews, inquiries and restructures over the last half-century, many of which sought to fix the same problems: fragmented decision pathways, unclear accountability and capability outcomes too slow to keep pace with the prevailing strategic environment. Unless the new DDA framework embeds genuinely evidence-based decision-making, Australia risks repeating the cycle rather than breaking it. That means rigorous cost-benefit analysis, realistic scheduling, transparent contestability and the courage to prioritise ruthlessly, especially when political pressure leans toward spreading investment thinly.

Yet within this moment lies opportunity. Australia's defence industrial base is more technologically capable than at any point in its history. With targeted policy settings, modest but smart regulatory tweaks and a procurement



system that rewards innovation rather than procedural compliance, the DDA reforms could unlock a wave of sovereign industrial growth. The potential exists for Australia not just to assemble or sustain overseas technology, but to generate and export highly specialised capabilities, particularly in areas such as autonomous systems, cyber and secure networks, critical minerals processing, directed energy prototypes, advanced munitions and niche electronic warfare solutions. These are global demand markets where Australian firms already demonstrate world-class performance, but are held back by inconsistent acquisition signals, slow approvals and complex, shifting pathways to defence customers.

A reformed DDA, if it combines disciplined governance with a willingness to take informed risk, could become the catalyst for a more competitive export sector, one that strengthens



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sovereign capability while deepening strategic partnerships across the Indo-Pacific and beyond. But this requires discipline, patience and leadership that values evidence over inertia.

Australia cannot afford to drift. In an era defined by strategic compression, the nation must choose whether to time its watch or watch the time slip away. Our defence preparedness is both our greatest vulnerability and our greatest opportunity. **DTR**