



Coimisiún um Óglaigh na hÉireann  
Commission on the Defence Forces

7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Commission on the Defence Forces  
Tuesday, 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021  
By Video Conference  
Minutes

**In attendance**

**Commission Members**

- Mr. Aidan O’Driscoll (Chair)
- Ms. Jane Williams
- Professor Maura Conway
- Ms. Marie Cross
- Mr. Dan Harvey
- Ms. Caitriona Heintz
- Mr. John Minihan
- Lt Gen. (Retd) Conor O’Boyle
- Lt Gen. (Retd) Esa Pulkkinen
- Ms. Geraldine Tallon
- Dr. Gerry Waldron
- Mr. Shay Cody
- Adm. (Retd) Haakon Bruun-Hanssen
- Ms. Stephanie O’Donnell

**Secretariat**

- Mr. Cathal Duffy, Head of Secretariat
- Ms. Gráinne Guinan
- Lt Cdr. Paul Hegarty
- Mr. Jerry Higgins
- Mr. David Cullinane
- Ms. Clodagh Callanan

## **1. Introduction**

The Chair, Mr. Aidan O'Driscoll, began by welcoming members to the seventh plenary meeting of the Commission.

## **2. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The draft minutes from the sixth meeting were agreed.

The Chair referred to and summarised the key takeaways from the Commission's recent meetings with the EDA, the EEAS and the UN, as well as the Commission's recent meeting with Major General Maureen O'Brien.

## **3. Review of Recent Visits to Military Installations**

The Commission discussed a variety of issues concerning Structures, Staffing and Capabilities that had been raised during recent visits to various Defence Forces installations. The Chair noted that Commission members had the opportunity to engage and interact with personnel of all ranks and experience, including members of the Army Reserve and the Naval Service Reserve during these visits.

The Commission noted the prevalence of Human Resources issues and also discussed current capability constraints raised during the visits. The Commission also noted that there were a number of instances where relatively straight-forward internal issues were frequently raised and, while the Commission would not have a role in resolving these, it discussed raising these with the Defence Organisation with a view to having them addressed. It was agreed that the Secretariat would note these instances.

## **4. Level of Ambition**

The various level of ambition papers received from the Defence Forces and the Department of Defence were reviewed. The Commission also reviewed a set of briefing papers on Finnish approaches in this regard where adjustments can be made from time to time to the level of ambition in response to strategic reviews and an assessment of the threat environment.

## **5. Progress Update – Structures Sub-Group**

A status paper from the Structures sub-group was presented and reviewed which considered issues in the context of various higher and lower levels of ambition. The concept of jointness was discussed in terms of the role of each component of the Defence Forces, depending on the level of ambition. Based on the sub-group's work to date, there was also a discussion regarding the Army brigade structures and the role of the Reserve Defence Force.

## **6. Progress Update – Staffing Sub-Group**

The Staffing sub-group provided a progress update and drew attention to practical and well-informed suggestions made in various submissions received in response to the recent public consultation exercise.

A presentation on gender issues in the Defence Forces, including a review of lessons learned elsewhere, both in the public and private sectors and internationally, was provided and discussed. The sub-group also referred to various issues from its work-plan that will be addressed at the next Commission meeting and outlined plans for finalising much of its work in the period ahead.

## **7. Progress Update – Capabilities Sub-Group**

The Capabilities sub-group provided an update to the Commission on its progress, with particular focus on a paper presented that addressed maritime capabilities. There was a discussion regarding levels of ambition and capability implications, including the role new technologies can play. The capabilities of naval forces in comparable countries was also discussed.

## **8. Future Work**

### **○ Defence funding**

An initial paper summarising Ireland’s relatively low level of defence funding was reviewed, while various measures of comparability with other states were also discussed. The importance of sustained funding to support long-term capability development was noted.

### **○ Programme of visits to military installations**

Commission members were informed of plans and arrangements for forthcoming visits to military installations.

## **9. Update on Public Consultations**

### **○ Draft report on submissions received**

The Commission was advised that the first of two tranches of submissions have now been published on the CODF website. The Commission noted that a report is to be produced, for publication, that will provide an overview of common themes and trends identified in the submissions. The draft report will be brought to a future meeting of the Commission prior to publication.

### **○ Demonstration on use of NVivo software**

Commission members were provided with a demonstration on the use and capabilities of the NVivo software package used by the Secretariat to analyse and interrogate the submissions. A demonstration was provided showing how reports can be produced to locate material of relevance according to themes or issues being

addressed by the various sub-groups. Commission members were requested to submit all requests for reports through the Secretariat.

## **10. AOB**

There was a broad-ranging discussion on the findings of various published opinion polls on public attitudes to matters of European security and defence.