

Fight Tonight: Exploiting Australia's Strategic Advantage

23 April 2026, National Gallery of Australia

Context

The 2026 seminar series will continue to focus on readiness and the 'Fight Tonight' to identify and discuss strategic themes which impact the Whole of Australian Government, Defence and industry, as well as international partners in a multi-domain context. It is also set within the context of the emerging issues aligned with the development of the NDS, and the broader international context where air and space capability is becoming an increasingly important factor in strategic competition.

Acknowledging the current resource pressures in the defence budget, the seminar series will reinforce the need to balance near-term decisions in air and space capability to ensure Defence and industry investment also provides the sustainable foundations for future force structure planning and growth.

Aim

The aim of April's seminar is to explore the ways and means of exploiting Australia's enduring natural strategic advantages to provide deterrence against attacks on defence assets and critical national infrastructure. The intent is to generate ideas that work towards a comprehensive approach to the integration of science and technology, natural geography, capability, industry, workforce, and partnerships across Governments, industry, and society as a whole.

In short, it's about exploiting home team advantage and identifying strategic vulnerabilities.

Background

The main contextual developments shaping the April seminar are:

- Observations from operations in Europe and the Middle East continue to drive the need to assess ongoing relevance to the context, threats, and scale of the Indo Pacific theatre.
- The need to enhance theatre deterrent effect by the further integration of air and missile defences with counter force and long-range strike capabilities.
- Broader inflationary pressures continue to impact sustainment costs and preparedness.
- US Government maintains pressure on allies to increase defence spending.
- PLA remains the pacing threat.

Strategic Themes 2026

The Sir Richard Williams Foundation strategic themes for 2026 extend from those in 2025 to cover mass, depth, agility, industry involvement, and redundancy.

The intent of the themes is to provide an objective consideration of those measures which balance combat effectiveness with an increasing demand for efficiency in a fiscally constrained national security environment. While all themes are relevant across the NDS planning epochs, prioritisation of near-term effort is generating and exploiting depth in air power.

Building Combat Mass and Depth Across Domains: How can new technology be applied to the extant force structure to enhance a focussed force and achieve critical mass and depth. The ability to mass power, plus sustain and replace it includes consideration of force protection and generation requirements for sustained operations across multiple rotations in a high threat environment where success is by no means assured. This could involve reliance on international partnerships.

Generating Tempo Across Domains: How can the ADF respond at speed and scale across a vast geographical area in strategically relevant timeframes and remain survivable.

Enhancing Industry capability and the National Support Base: How can industry be more involved in planning to mitigate key replenishment, sustainment and preparedness risks not least in relation to cost, and the broader demand for increased capacity and workforce integration. Growing the industrial base to keep pace with the need for increased combat mass across domains will involve more detailed consideration of risk tolerance, and attritable equipment and weapon systems.

Survive to Operate: How does the ADF build redundancy to sustain integrated operations across multiple domains and critical nodes in the face of an increasingly complex and lethal threat. Beyond the ADF there is the broader need for an objective assessment of industry competencies, workforce preparedness, and national will. Moreover, a central question emerges around whether the nation is ready for the realities of a future war?

Agenda

Cutting across each of the strategic themes are policy, process, technology, basing / infrastructure, and workforce considerations including, but not limited to:

- Natural strategic advantages, such as airspace and continental geography.
- Operational Risk Management: Balancing Lethality and Survivability
- Workforce: Management, Automation, and Development
- Training System Effectiveness & Mission Rehearsal
- Future Technologies and Collaborative Combat Systems
- Accelerating Capability Development
- Preparedness, Replenishment, Basing, Logistics & Supply Chains

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Program

(updated 18 April 2026)

0800-0830	Registration Light breakfast, tea and coffee on arrival
0835-0840	Welcoming Remarks <i>ACM (Retd) Mark Binskin AC, Chair, Sir Richard Williams Foundation</i>
0840-0845	MC Introduction <i>WGCDR Sally Knox, Commanding Officer 6SQN</i>
0845-0910	Whole of Government Security Challenges in the Current Environment <i>Mike Pezzullo, Former Secretary Department of Home Affairs</i>
0910-1000	Global Trends: Air and Missile Defence, and Strike <i>Professor Justin Bronk, Senior Research Fellow/Editor, Royal United Services Institute</i>
1000- 1015	Better, Faster, Smarter: Scalable Aircrew Training for Modern Air Power <i>Alexander Robinson, Sales and Capability Director Pilatus Aircraft Australia</i>
1015-1045	Morning Tea - Gandel Hall
1045-1055	Move to James Fairfax Theatre
1055-1110	Space: Reliance and Resilience <i>Jeremy King, Chief Executive Lockheed Martin Australia and New Zealand</i>
1110-1140	Air Combat Group - Australia's Apex Force-in-Being Carnivore <i>AIRCDRE Matthew McCormack AM, Commander Air Combat Group</i>
1140-1155	Enhancing Industry Capability – Space Domain <i>Harvey Wright, Executive General Manager, Optus Satellite and Space</i>
1155-1245	Panel Discussion - Exploiting Strategic Advantage <i>Facilitator: AIRCDRE Jo Brick AM, Director General Pacific, Strategy, Policy, and Industry Group</i> <i>Panel</i> <i>Professor Justin Bronk, Senior Research Fellow/Editor, Royal United Services Institute</i> <i>Col. James E. Landreth, USAF United States Indo-Pacific Command Liaison Officer</i> <i>AIRCDRE Hannah Jude-Smith AM, Assistant Director General Military Expeditionary, Australian Signals Directorate</i> <i>WGCDR Jaimee Maika, Deputy Director Futures, Partnerships, Implementation, Space Command</i>
1245-1355	Lunch
1355-1405	Move to James Fairfax Theatre
1405-1425	Chief of Navy Perspective <i>RADM Matt Buckley AM, CSC, RAN, Acting Chief of Navy</i>
1425-1440	Exploiting Australia's Strategic Advantage <i>Kisa Christensen, Director, Integrated Defence & Autonomy Systems, BAE Systems</i>
1440-1455	Industry and Strategy: Australia's Strategic Advantage <i>Richard Morris, Pursuit Analyst, Northrop Grumman Australia</i>
1455-1525	Air Force Perspective <i>AIRMSHL Stephen Chappell DSC, CSC, OAM, Chief of Air Force</i>
1525-1540	Formal Close <i>ACM (Retd) Mark Binskin AC, Chair, Sir Richard Williams Foundation</i>