Vice – Admiral, Ray Griggs – “The Navy Today.”

Leonard Regan who stated that Vice Admiral Griggs has been appointed Vice Chief of Defence Forces effective 3 July 2014 introduced our speaker, Vice-Admiral Ray Griggs, Chief of Navy.

Born in Sydney his naval career started in Adelaide in 1978 with the reserve but he then went on to HMAS Creswell in 1979 for a short-term commission. What followed was service on a number of vessels including the aircraft carrier HMAS Melbourne and a secondment of 12 months to the Royal Navy at HMS Jersey. Admiral Griggs saw the introduction of the ANZAC Frigates and was also involved in the Iraq war and the North West Indian Ocean following the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. He has held various shore postings including ADC to the Governor of Tasmania. Admiral Griggs was appointed Chief of Navy in 2011.

Admiral Griggs opened his address by looking at where the Navy had come from. Three years ago it was subject to much adverse publicity, which mainly emanated from internal leaks to the media. To combat this it was necessary to improve internal communications to keep their personnel informed and equally important to listen to their workforce and to work with the media to improve the navy’s image in the community. Communication with the media has to be very disciplined to keep messages on track.

With a total of seventeen thousand personnel including full time, part time and civilian staff, communication up and down the line is paramount. At present their number is below requirement, which has partly been exacerbated by the mineral boom where personnel leave the service, particularly in Western Australia, to work in the mines where the remuneration is too high for the Navy to compete. As the boom is receding he is seeing some return to the service.

On the subject of political correctness he advised that 18.5% of the Navy personnel are women, which is the highest participation in the services. He observed that in recruitment they cannot ignore or exclude 50% of the population. The Navy is aiming for its workforce to be more inclusive for all the population. They have made progress in indigenous recruits, with success in Northern Queensland and Torres Strait where the population has affinity with the sea. He still wants to see an increased participation of minorities in the Navy to be more representative of the community.

Navy personnel show great compassion in dealing with human crises involving many acts of bravery that are not readily recognised. Quite often there is a need for senior officers to defend Navy people against outrageous accusations.

Selling the Navy is a tough call with a disconnected lifestyle in a connected society. This can be hard on family life and “Fly In-Fly Out” is not an option.

In managing such a large workforce the emphasis is on establishing accountability rather than measurement and punishment. His aim is to leave the Navy in better shape than he found it.

He referred to the publicity surrounding the recent transgression into Indonesian Waters and the management actions needed to address the matter. The Australian Navy continues to have good relations with the Indonesian Navy and a good transparent dialog resulting in a positive response from them.

He advised that the search for MH370 has stretched their resources and noted that the Chinese Navy had ten Navy vessels on site very quickly to assist in the search. He noted that HMAS Success was due into Sydney Harbour as he spoke after seventy nine days out of port, seventy of them constantly at sea, a long period in today’s environment.
He emphasised that engineering has to be seen as an integral part of the Navy and not as an overhead. This calls for a structured approach to engineering to ensure ships are ready and seaworthy as required. He referred to the HMAS Canberra, which has a docking and amphibious capability and can work with a thousand troops and their equipment as all the services work together. He spoke of the three destroyers being built in South Australia and observed that ideally we should have a continual ship building program to avoid "an on again off again" program which does not cater for a continual experienced capability. The Navy is in a strategic environment to ensure the importance of our ocean capability in the Pacific Islands and the South China Sea and the need for compatibility with other navies. He highlighted that we could not refuel the Chinese ships in the South Indian Ocean and vice versa which is a regrettable waste of resources.

He emphasised the importance of Liaison Officers both in Australia and internationally in communicating the Navy’s role in border protection both in the public and political environment. The Maritime narrative needs to be better understood by the community to maintain Australia’s capability to unhampered trade. Australia has twenty-eight days supply of oil after which great difficulty would be experienced. Just in time management requires uninterrupted supply lines for the security of the trade system.

In summary Admiral Griggs said the Navy is in good shape and must move to be more representative of the community. Following questions, Ray Hyslop in a humorous thank you observed how privileged we were to hear such a candid address from Vice-Admiral Griggs.

Your Editor is very grateful to member Derrick Docherty for completing this summary of Admiral Griggs’s presentation.