

## **Government to protect export supply lines**

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Defence Minister makes defending sea-lanes a priority

Newly sworn in Defence Minister David Johnston says projecting Australia's resource projects and export supply lines is a major Defence priority.

"We have hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of investment in offshore developments, particularly in the north and northwest of Australia," Johnston says.

He also has praise for Defence chiefs who he thinks have dealt well with massive budget cuts under Labor.

Johnston points to the gap between equipment promised by Labor and the money available to pay for it, and says the Coalition will increase Defence spending to 2 percent of GDP to pay for promised equipment.

With troops returning from the Middle East, Johnston expects a greater focus on maritime security.

"We are a maritime trading nation so even our agriculture is exported. So are coal, iron ore, and oil and gas. It's all on the water."

Johnston says Australia must take responsibility for securing the sea last as best as possible, particularly to customers in South Korea, Japan and China.

"To do that you need cutting-edge, cost-effective ships. You need to retain your ship-building capacity."

The Minister was also quick to rule out defence cuts, or moving the navy out of Sydney Harbour, dismissing Kevin Rudd's proposal as a thought bubble.

Australians will get a Defence white paper within 18 months.