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Sappers Mend Vital Transport Links in Australia

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During Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025, held in Townsville, sappers constructed a Fixed Modular Bridge (FMB) to showcase their capacity to rapidly establish access in difficult terrain. The biennial exercise, involving 12 partner nations including the United States and United Kingdom, emphasised the strategic and economic importance of military engineering capabilities in disaster-prone areas. The FMB, designed to support heavy vehicles, is critical to maintaining supply chains during emergencies.

In 2023, sappers conducted a controlled demolition of the Elanora Bridge in Shoalwater Bay, marking the first such operation in 15 years. Corporal Matthew Kenny described the

task as “a unique opportunity” to refine skills essential for both combat operations and humanitarian assistance. These engineering activities demonstrate the broader economic impact of reliable transport infrastructure, supporting freight movement, tourism, and regional development.

Australian Army sappers, highly skilled combat engineers, are playing a vital role in restoring and maintaining key transport infrastructure, helping to keep economic lifelines operational in times of crisis. From erecting temporary bridges in flood-affected Queensland to demonstrating engineering innovations during multinational exercises, their work supports regional communities and industries. However, some observers question the government’s reliance on military engineering solutions rather than prioritising long-term civilian infrastructure investment.

In February 2025, sappers from the 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment (3CER) deployed a Medium Girder Bridge (MGB) over the flood-damaged Ollera Creek Bridge in Queensland, reconnecting the Bruce Highway and facilitating resupply efforts for the town of Ingham. Major Liam Clarke, Officer Commanding 25 Support Squadron, highlighted the bridge’s practical design, stating it is “built with muscle power and minimal tools, yet supports heavy vehicles.” The temporary 25-metre structure enabled emergency and freight traffic to continue flowing while permanent repairs were underway, helping to avert significant economic disruption for local businesses reliant on road freight.

Despite these contributions, critics argue that the Labor government’s delays in upgrading civilian infrastructure force greater dependence on temporary military solutions. The opposition has pointed to the need for increased investment in permanent projects, such as the Bridges Renewal Program, which has completed over 700 projects since 2015, to ensure long-term economic stability and reduce pressure on Defence resources.