

Issues and Conclusions

Security and Safety

- 3.1 Defence's submission to the inquiry identified 'protective security' as a key consideration governing the design of the proposed EOB facility.¹ Specific security measures described in the submission include installation of a Type 1 security system and the extension of the existing P&EE perimeter fence to enclose the new facility.²
- 3.2 At the public hearing, the Committee sought clarification of the specifications for the proposed security arrangements. Defence explained that the measures included in the works proposal would ensure a level of security at the new facility commensurate with that of the existing P&EE site. To this end, it is proposed that security provisions at the site would comprise both perimeter fencing, to prevent the inadvertent or deliberate incursion of members of the public, and an alarm system within the site to guarantee security of discrete building elements. Defence undertook to supply confidential written details of the specific elements comprising a Type 1 security system to the Committee at a later date.
- 3.3 The Committee was also concerned to ensure that the proposed works would guarantee public safety. Defence assured members that the testing area at the site was clearly marked and signposted, and that radar

¹ Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 6.a

² *ibid*, paragraphs 9.g and 24

monitoring was activated during firing activities to prevent incursions into the range.³

Environment and Heritage

3.4 At the public hearing, the Committee explored a number of environmental issues arising from the Defence proposal.

Soil Contamination

3.5 In view of Defence evidence to the effect that soil contamination constituted the most significant environmental risk at the site⁴, the Committee sought further information the nature and resolution of this matter. Defence confirmed that the contamination referred to was of the type usually associated with farming activities and was concentrated on the land currently occupied by the farm and piggery. Given that the area is intended to serve primarily as a 'buffer zone' around the EOB site, the Committee queried whether rehabilitation of the soil was essential and cost-effective. Defence replied that it takes its environmental responsibilities very seriously and, whilst the contamination is not serious, will be remediating the site at the earliest opportunity.⁵

Flora and Fauna

3.6 In respect of the effects of the proposed work upon local flora and fauna, Defence submitted that there would be no impact upon any plants of significance and further, that the development may improve conditions for the survival of the vulnerable Slender-billed (Samphire) thornbill.⁶ At the hearing, Defence elaborated on this, stating that the thornbills were monitored on an annual basis, and that the department had received recognition for its treatment of local endangered species. The Committee was informed that the P&EE site had been nominated for inclusion on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance, and had met four of

³ Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 4

⁴ Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 34

⁵ Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, pages 5 - 6

⁶ Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 38

the eight criteria for listing. Defence assured the Committee that Ramsar listing would not impede core operations at the site.⁷

Waste Disposal

3.7 The Committee was concerned to ensure that no deleterious environmental impacts would arise from the ordnance testing and disassembly activities carried out at the site. Defence stated that the proposed ordnance breakdown buildings would be designed to meet standard requirements for the handling of explosives and other hazardous materials, and that none of these materials would be released into the environment. Defence explained that a key reason for collocating the EOB facility with the existing P&EE was that the site was well-equipped to execute the environmentally safe handling and disposal of explosives and associated materials. Further, as the activities to be carried out at the new EOB facility would be an extension of existing site functions, it is expected that only small amounts of waste would be added to the current disposal system.⁸

Cultural Heritage

3.8 Defence submitted that an Environmental Impact Assessment had determined that the proposed works would not impact upon any indigenous heritage sites of significance.⁹ At the public hearing, the Committee sought clarification as to the nature of the heritage survey. Defence replied that an indigenous heritage survey had been conducted as part of the project investigations and that while four sites of significance had been identified, none of these was within ten kilometres of the proposed EOB facility site.¹⁰

⁷ Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, pages 6 - 7

⁸ *ibid*, page 7

⁹ Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 35

¹⁰ Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 7

Building Standards

Accommodation Standards

3.9 Defence's main submission stated that the proposed EOB facility would meet Defence accommodation standards "where feasible".¹¹ The Committee sought clarification as to the nature of these accommodation standards and the circumstances under which they may not be achievable in the new facility. Defence responded that the standards referred to in the submission were the *Department of Defence Accommodation Guidelines for Open Plan Office Environment 1996*. Specifically, there had been some concern as to whether these standards could be met in the proposed main control building, but at the public hearing, Defence expressed confidence that required standards would be met throughout the facility.¹²

Green Star Rating

3.10 Under normal circumstances, Defence designs new facilities to achieve a minimum four-star rating on the Green Building Council of Australia Green Star rating scheme. However, Defence noted in its submission that the specialised security and safety requirements of the proposed new ordnance breakdown facility would preclude many of the usual ecologically sustainable design features, but that such features would be incorporated wherever practicable.¹³ At the public hearing, Defence explained that the Green Star rating scheme had been designed for office accommodation and that there were difficulties inherent in adapting the requirements to the unique facilities proposed for construction at the P&EE site. Nevertheless, Defence outlined its intention to integrate a range of ecologically sustainable design features into the EOB buildings, including the installation of a cost-effective and automatically controlled air-conditioning system, and the inclusion of roof insulation.¹⁴

¹¹ Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 13.f

¹² Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 5

¹³ Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 14

¹⁴ Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 10

Associated Works

- 3.11 The Committee sought to discover whether there were any other services or facilities required by the DSTO Weapons Systems Division that might logically have been included in the current works project. Defence responded that, while this would depend upon any future tasks given to the Division, the department believed that the proposal before the Committee would satisfy all its requirements.¹⁵

Land Acquisition

- 3.12 In order to provide an appropriate safety buffer for the new EOB facility, it was necessary for Defence to acquire a farmhouse, piggery and farmland adjacent to the existing P&EE site. In its submission to the inquiry, Defence reported that this acquisition took place in 2002 at a cost of \$642,300,

...with negotiations currently underway to resolve any outstanding claims for these properties.¹⁶

- 3.13 At the public hearing, Committee members inquired how the land acquisition process was progressing. In particular, the Committee wished to learn about any unresolved matters and whether these may impact upon the project cost or schedule. Defence responded that it was acquiring three parcels of land from three separate owners, under the provisions of the *Land Acquisition Act 1989*. The acquisition of the first parcel of land had been completed at the time of the hearing, whilst the two remaining landowners had been presented with pre-acquisition declarations (PADs). Defence explained that, following the presentation of the PAD, and the absence of any appeals, the usual course of events was for the Commonwealth to pay the landowner 90 per cent of the value of the land up-front, with the remaining ten per cent to be paid upon completion of negotiations. Defence reported that the ninety per cent payment had been made to the two other landowners from which property was to be acquired, and that final negotiations were in train.¹⁷

¹⁵ Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 9

¹⁶ Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraphs 31 - 32

¹⁷ Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, pages 2 - 3

Consultation

3.14 Having received no public submissions to its inquiry, the Committee sought confirmation that this indicated general approval of the project throughout the community. Defence advised that it had undertaken extensive consultation with local Federal and State representatives, and with relevant government agencies at the Federal, State and local level. Further, Defence stated that the base had close ties with the local community and was held in high regard.¹⁸

Port Wakefield Council

3.15 Prior to the public hearing, the Committee received a letter from the Wakefield Regional Council regarding the Proof Range Road, which lies within the Council's jurisdiction. Whilst having no objection to the works proposal, the Council expressed concern that the expansion of the P&EE facility would increase use, and thereby the maintenance requirements, of the road. In view of this, the Council requested that the Commonwealth bear responsibility for future roadworks, in consultation with the Council's Infrastructure Services Manager.

3.16 The Committee explored this claim with Defence at the public hearing. Defence replied that the Council should approach the Department formally, with a view to reaching an agreement for the maintenance of the road on a cost-apportionment basis. Defence added that it did not believe that maintenance of the Proof Range Road was the Department's responsibility, but would welcome the opportunity to liaise directly with the Council in respect of the matter.¹⁹

Local Employment

3.17 According to Defence's submission, it is estimated that proposed EOB facility works will engage an average of ten personnel, with a maximum of 20 at peak construction.²⁰ The Committee invited Defence to comment on any opportunities that the project may generate for local workers and

¹⁸ Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 8

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 29

businesses. Defence responded that, while employment opportunities would depend upon the skill sets available in the region, the Department would encourage its contractors to hire locally where possible.²¹

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the proposed construction of an ordnance breakdown facility for the Defence Science and Technology Organisation at Port Wakefield, South Australia, proceed at the estimated cost of \$8.4 million.

Hon Judi Moylan MP

Chair

1 June 2005

²¹ Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 9

