

Issues and Conclusions

Defence Housing Requirements

- 3.1 The Defence Housing Forecast (DHF) for Puckapunyal details a requirement to house 412 ADF families, of which 80 per cent are to be on-base, over the next 5 years.¹
- 3.2 DHA indicated that the School of Military Engineering may be relocated to Puckapunyal by 2008; and the School of Infantry may be relocated to Puckapunyal by 2011, thus increasing the net on-base housing requirement by 120 – 180.²

Previous Works

- 3.3 In its main submission, DHA reported that 21 new on-base residences had been completed at Puckapunyal in mid-2002, and that a further 20 houses were constructed by December 2004 at a cost of \$5.4 million.³
- 3.4 At the public hearing DHA advised the Committee that undertaking these smaller construction projects gave a good indication of infrastructure

1 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 2.3

2 *ibid*

3 *ibid*, paragraph 2.6

requirements at the PMA and also provided an opportunity to test DHA's capacity to obtain competitive bids from local construction agencies.⁴

Site Selection

On-Base Housing and Off-Base Housing

- 3.5 The Committee sought clarification as to how DHA determined on-base housing to be the preferred option for ADF personnel at Puckapunyal. At the public hearing, DHA informed the Committee that a major survey of 340 households at the PMA was undertaken in August 2003. Of the 204 responses, 91 per cent indicated a preference for on-base housing.⁵
- 3.6 DHA's main submission identified on-base housing as the most feasible option at Puckapunyal, as land availability in nearby Seymour was very limited, and the Seymour housing market would be too readily distorted by Defence requirements.⁶ DHA also informed the Committee that, that there are currently 45 houses (as annuity properties) occupied in Seymour.⁷
- 3.7 Given the Defence Housing Forecast and current level of occupancy on and off-base, the construction of 80 dwellings may be excess to requirements and result in vacant properties.⁸
- 3.8 DHA replied that it has to provide a degree of housing choice for Defence personnel, and reassured the Committee that the amount of on-base housing to be demolished would be approximately equivalent to the number to be replaced. DHA explained further that housing that no longer meets DHA specifications is handed back to Defence, which then decides how that housing will be utilised.

Lot Size

- 3.9 During the site inspection the Committee was shown a schedule of different lot sizes which was not included in DHA's main submission. According to this document, the new development would comprise:

4 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 3

5 *ibid*, p. 4

6 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 3.2

7 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 5

8 *ibid*, p. 7

“...26 blocks of 650 to 699 square metres, 12 blocks of 700 to 749 square metres, 10 blocks of 750 to 799 square metres, 16 blocks of 800 to 849 square metres, 13 blocks of 850 to 899 square metres, and three blocks of 900 to 999 square metres.”⁹

Nature of Development

Community Integration

- 3.10 The Committee was interested to know of any issues related to living in a relatively isolated community. The witness for Defence Families Australia (DFA) responded that the housing arrangement at the PMA resulted in the formation of strong social networks. This view was supported by the submission of the Senior Army Representative for PMA which states that the PMA offers extensive support networks for families.¹⁰ Furthermore, those who do not wish to be part of that network, or for personal reasons wish to live outside such an environment, have the option of living off-base in Seymour.¹¹

Cabling Network

- 3.11 At the public hearing, the Committee noted that the needs of DHA clients (Defence personnel) are in part dictated by community standards. Given the increasing importance of broadband connections in the wider community, the Committee enquired as to what optical fibre or cabling provision was incorporated into the proposal.¹²
- 3.12 DHA informed the Committee that presently, the married precinct of PMA was not connected to the optical fibre network that runs through the base, but added that a decision to connect on-base housing to the optical fibre network may occur in the future. However, the current project does not include any provision for the laying of optical fibre cables.¹³

9 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 18

10 Submission No. 3, p.2

11 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 23

12 *ibid*, p. 10

13 *ibid*

On-Base Amenities

- 3.13 Amenities within the PMA include a golf course, schools, shops, churches, fitness centre and child care centre. As no provision for upgrade to amenities is included in the current proposal,¹⁴ the Committee was interested to learn how the proposed construction project would impact upon the available facilities.¹⁵ DHA responded that there should be little or no impact to on-base amenities and facilities as a result of the proposed housing project, mainly because the proposal is replacing older houses and not changing the number of families on-base.¹⁶
- 3.14 The witness for DFA commented that the on-base school was a major drawcard to PMA, as proximity to school and the safety of children is a major concern of young Defence families. The DFA witness continued that the standard of on-base amenity meets the needs of the isolated community.¹⁷
- 3.15 DHA further stated that the recently opened child care centre was built for existing demand, and it is anticipated that this demand will not change as a result of the proposal.¹⁸ DFA agreed that existing amenities were being utilised well, and that no change would be required as a result of the proposed housing.

Infrastructure

- 3.16 Noting that the DHA proposal does not include significant provision for essential services infrastructure to the proposed new dwellings, the Committee sought clarification as to who would bear responsibility for lot servicing. At the public hearing, DHA responded that its responsibility in this respect ends at the lot boundary, beyond which services and infrastructure are provided by Defence.¹⁹

14 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 9.3

15 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 13

16 *ibid*, p. 14

17 *ibid*, p.23

18 *ibid*, p.14

19 *ibid*, p. 10

Environmental Considerations

Energy Rating

3.17 In its main submission, DHA states that houses are built to:

“...a minimum of 4-star energy rating in accordance with Commonwealth Government policy and a 5 star energy rating under the Victorian Government 5 Star House Policy.”²⁰

3.18 The Committee sought confirmation that DHA would be meeting its stated energy rating objectives. DHA reported that houses would meet the Victorian Government standard.²¹

Retention of Trees

3.19 In its main submission, DHA stated that the retention of large sized trees in the construction area would be encouraged.²² During the site inspection, the Committee noticed that, whilst there were many trees within the general PMA, there was not an overabundance of trees on the land where the houses are proposed to be built. At the public hearing, DHA reiterated its intention to retain as many mature trees as possible, adding that landscape plans for the development would include significant new plantings. DHA added that trees may be removed where they affect the orientation of the housing, or where they pose a threat to the operation of essential services.²³

Environmental Management Plan

3.20 The Committee sought clarification on the environmental impact mitigation strategies and assessments described in DHA’s main submission. DHA responded that an environmental management plan had been developed for the site and would be discussed with the local Defence Corporate Support and Infrastructure Group (CSIG). Strategies included in the plan would include erosion control, stormwater management and litter minimisation.²⁴

20 Appendix C, Submission No.1, paragraph 15.1

21 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 11

22 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 16.1

23 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 12

24 *ibid*, p 16

Contamination Assessment

3.21 DHA's main submission states that

*"An assessment has not been undertaken of chemical, heavy metal and unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination."*²⁵

3.22 When asked why this was the case, DHA replied that, as the proposed site was previously a residential area, an assessment of this nature was not required. DHA added that, through discussions with local CSIG consultants, it had ascertained that the site has no history of contamination by chemicals, heavy metals or unexploded ordnance. Geotechnical tests undertaken by DHA had confirmed the absence of hazards at the site.²⁶

Sir Walter Buffalo Grass

3.23 During the site inspection the Committee noted the proposed use of Sir Walter buffalo grass in the landscaping of the development, and sought more detail as to why this particular grass was chosen. The DHA landscape architect informed the Committee that Sir Walter buffalo grass is a:

*"...low maintenance, drought tolerant lawn suitable for Australian conditions. Sir Walter buffalo is a non-invasive, creeping type lawn that will tolerate full sun to 90 per cent shade and has low water and maintenance requirements."*²⁷

DHA's landscape architect continued:

*"Average lawns need to be watered every three to four days. This type of buffalo requires watering once every 15 to 20."*²⁸

Consultation

Defence Personnel

3.24 The Committee were interested to hear how DHA had conducted the PMA personnel housing preference survey, which had shown a clear preference for on-base housing. DHA reported that in mid-August 2004, a

25 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 10.2

26 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 17

27 *ibid*, p.19

28 *ibid*, p. 20

self completion questionnaire had been hand-delivered to 340 Puckapunyal area households. The return rate of the questionnaire was 60 per cent (204 households).²⁹ Of the returned questionnaires, 91 per cent had indicated a preference for detached housing and 86 per cent preferred single-storey dwellings.

Local Impact

3.25 The Committee sought more detail on the tendering process for the proposed 80 houses. DHA explained that the civil component of the tender would be arranged first, followed by the tendering of the housing construction as 16, 17 or 18-house packages, as dictated by the market. DHA anticipates that this will enable a wider range of subcontractors and suppliers to participate in the project, and will also allow for staged delivery.³⁰ DHA added that the proposed tendering process would provide opportunities for local subcontractors and suppliers, resulting into economic benefits for the local community.³¹

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the proposed development of on-base housing for the Defence Housing Authority at Puckapunyal, Victoria, proceed at the estimated cost of \$19.6 million.

Hon Judi Moylan MP
Chair
1 June 2005

²⁹ Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 18

³⁰ *ibid*, p. 14

³¹ *ibid*, p. 15

