COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Reference: RAAF Base Pearce redevelopment stage 1, Pearce, Western Australia

THURSDAY, 19 JULY 2007

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JOINT STATUTORY COMMITTEE ON

PUBLIC WORKS

Thursday, 19 July 2007

Members: Mrs Moylan *(Chair)*, Mr Brendan O'Connor *(Deputy Chair)*, Senators Hurley, Parry and Troeth and Mr Forrest, Mr Jenkins, Mr Ripoll and Mr Wakelin

Members in attendance: Senators Hurley, Parry and Troeth and Mrs Moylan

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

RAAF Base Pearce Redevelopment Stage 1, Pearce, WA.

WITNESSES

Committee met at 10.59 am

CHAIR (Mrs Moylan)—Welcome. I declare open this public hearing into the proposed RAAF Base Pearce redevelopment stage 1, Pearce, Western Australia. This project was referred to the Public Works Committee on 31 May 2007 for consideration and report to the parliament. In accordance with subsection 17(3) of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, which concerns the examination and reporting on a public work, the committee will have regard to the following: (a) the stated purpose of the work and its suitability for that purpose; (b) the necessity for or the advisability of carrying out the work; (c) in carrying out the work, the most effective use that can be made of the moneys to be expended; (d) where the work purports to be of a revenue-producing character, the amount of revenue that it may reasonably be expected to produce, and the present and the prospective public value of the work.

The committee earlier received a confidential cost-briefing from the Department of Defence and an inspection of the proposed works. The committee will now hear evidence from the Department of Defence and the Bullsbrook and Chittering Chamber of Commerce.

[11.01 am]

GRICE, Brigadier William Alfred, Director General Infrastructure Asset Development, Department of Defence

MARTINIELLO, Mr Gino, Project Director, Western Australia, Department of Defence

THORPE, Wing Commander Anthony, Base Commander, RAAF Base Pearce, Department of Defence

REVIE, Mr Ian Cameron, Project Manager/Contract Administrator, RAAF Base Pearce Redevelopment Stage 1, Sinclair Knight Merz Pty Ltd

CHAIR—I remind witnesses that they are still under oath from the confidential cost-briefing. Once again, I acknowledge the base commander, Wing Commander Anthony Thorpe, and thank you for facilitating this hearing today. I now invite Brigadier Grice to make an opening statement.

Brig. Grice—Thank you. The Department of Defence is proposing to undertake the first stage of redevelopment of RAAF Base Pearce. RAAF Base Pearce is very important to air force capability, being the flying training base for Royal Australian Air Force and Royal Australian Navy pilots. RAAF Base Pearce is the only fully-manned military air base in Western Australia and supports deployments, transit operations and exercises of the Australian Defence Force and foreign military forces.

The proposed redevelopment aims to replace aged infrastructure and facilities, with a focus on facilities related to pilot training. The RAAF Base Pearce redevelopment stage 1 project will involve: the upgrade and replacement of ageing base-wide engineering services to comply with Australian standards as well as with state and local codes and guidelines; the construction of a new base fuel farm to replace the current substandard facility; construction of a new fuel quality control centre to replace the current non-compliant facility; the construction of a new, combined mess to meet the needs of all personnel on base—replacing four ageing individual messes and reducing operating costs; upgrade of the air movements terminal and restoration of air cargo hangar facilities; upgrade of PC-9/A aircraft maintenance facilities to improve functionality and to ensure compliance with the Building Code of Australia, occupational health and safety regulations and the *Defence Manual of Fire Protection Engineering*. It will also include the construction of a new noise attenuated engine run-up facility to provide noise protection for personnel and reduce noise emissions outside of the base; the installation of a defence restricted network connection to the base cinema—this facility we are now in—to enhance its reuse as a base briefing facility. It will include the construction of 128 new level-3 living and accommodation rooms for trainee pilots to replace the current substandard facilities. It will also include the demolition of redundant facilities.

The proposed redevelopment strategy involves a combination of new and refurbishment works. The total estimated out-turn cost of the proposal is $A142.2 million. Subject to parliamentary clearance of the project, detailed design, tendering and then construction are

scheduled to commence in late 2007, with completion of the project forecast for the middle of 2011.

Over the construction period of nearly four years, it is estimated that approximately 50 local trade subcontractors and 10 local subconsultant companies will be contracted for this project. In addition, it is anticipated that construction will generate further job opportunities offsite for the supply, manufacture and distribution of components and materiel for local and national contractors and suppliers. That ends our statement, and the Defence witnesses are ready to take questions from committee members.

CHAIR—As the federal representative for the electorate of Pearce, in which this base sits, I have been a regular visitor to the base and recognise the importance of this work taking place, given the age of many of its facilities and buildings. I know that personnel at the base work hard at being good members of the community, and I am sure that the work will be generally welcomed. Our job as a committee is to make sure, as I said, that the work represents good value for money for all taxpayers. We will now go to Senator Troeth for questions.

Senator TROETH—On our tour of the base earlier this morning, the first section that we looked at was the noise attenuated engine run-up facility. Could you provide us with further details on that—how it will be built and how it will improve the present situation.

Brig. Grice—The base has a requirement to conduct testing of aircraft engines after maintenance. As you saw on the tour today, currently that is conducted on an open concrete slab, which is located about 100 metres away from the boundary of the base. During the process for testing the engines, maintenance personnel are required on the apron and protect themselves from noise damage by using ear muffs. We are going to deliver a new noise attenuation system, which will consist of a building into which the aircraft will be placed and a sound attenuation tube which will absorb noise emitted from the rear—the pollution.

In answer to your question of how the tube attenuator reduces noise emissions, to reduce the sound levels produced by the particular test aircraft, the noise levels, the decibels, must be reduced. To achieve this, the sound must be reduced in amplitude and in intensity. The tube attenuator is a tunnel structure through which the aircraft noise is directed. Its construction consists of a suitably supported dense outer layer, normally concrete, which is lined with a sound absorbent material such as glass fibre or rock wool. This is then separated from an inner liner by an air gap. The inner liner also has a sound absorbent layer, which is attached to a perforated steel sheet facing, which forms the initial contact face with the soundwaves. Sound enters through the perforated sheets and its acoustic energy is reduced by absorption by the lining materials as the soundwaves are reflected across the void. Further sound reduction is achieved by the introduction of baffles at the exit of the tube attenuator, which again reflect and absorb the energy. The overall shape, length and other factors of the tube attenuator determine the amount of noise reduction that is achievable. In addition, the area above the aircraft enclosure to which the attenuator is attached will also be acoustically designed to minimise sound break-out.

Senator TROETH—How are the personnel who are performing this duty also protected from excessive noise?

Brig. Grice—Inside the engine run-up facility will be a sound attenuator protected booth. The maintenance operation will be conducted from there and maintenance personnel will be enclosed in that facility. This will reduce their exposure to noise and increase their occupational health and safety.

Senator TROETH—That is obviously a vast improvement on their standing on the open concrete slab and wearing ear muffs.

Brig. Grice—It will also reduce noise emissions from the base.

Senator TROETH—Good. I understand that the building in which we are having this hearing is the former base cinema. One of the options considered for part of the works was to undertake a substantial upgrade of this building to improve its level of amenity for alternative use as a briefing facility. Are you going ahead with that option? What are the further developments for this building that you have planned?

Brig. Grice—The only work that we will do in this building will be to increase its utility by installing a Defence restricted network hub to the building. This will give us the capability of plugging up to 24 computers into this facility so that it can be used for computer based training and other activities, such as presentations and briefings during which an overhead projector and computer based PowerPoint presentations can be used for display purposes. We are not going to do any other work on the building. As you can see, base maintenance personnel from Defence Support Western Australia have done a good job in maintaining this building over its more than 70-year life span. It will remain and will continue to be maintained in its current condition.

Senator TROETH—So you are satisfied with the level of maintenance that you have at the moment. Thank you for that. That is probably all I want to ask about.

Senator PARRY—Perhaps I could thank Wing Commander Thorpe. You have made me feel at home, as the temperature here is very similar to that of Tasmania! Thank you very much. Here am I thinking that I was escaping the winter weather! I want to discuss the tender process. Is it correct that Sinclair Knight Merz have been appointed the managing contractor?

Brig. Grice—They were appointed the project manager/contract administrator for the project. John Holland was selected as the managing contractor for the development phase of the project.

Senator PARRY—How many tenders were received for each of those two appointments?

Brig. Grice—The procurement of the managing contractor was a two-stage open tender process. As a result of expressions of interest, three nationally based companies that were qualified to do the work were short-listed for the second stage of the tender process. All three companies submitted a tender for the work and John Holland was selected as the best value for money for the Commonwealth for the development phase of the project.

Senator PARRY—Again without giving away any financials that we have discussed previously, can I ask whether the tenders were within a reasonable range of each other?

Mr Martiniello—In assessing the tenders, we had an average of what we were expecting and they all came within that average.

Brig. Grice—The other thing to say is that our tender evaluation process is a two-step process where, independent of the costs, we look at the technical merit of the proposals and come up with an initial technical evaluation board's agreed technical order of merit. We then look at the costs of the separate proposals and a value-for-money assessment is made, involving both technical and cost, to come up with the best value for money for the Commonwealth.

Senator PARRY—Moving to the tour we had this morning, I think you, Wing Commander, spoke of throughput when we went to the passenger terminal. Could you state for the public record the maximum volume expected at any peak or any surge period in the passenger terminal?

Wing Cmdr Thorpe—Peak in number of aircraft?

Senator PARRY—The number of passengers.

Wing Cmdr Thorpe—Based on projections—and I guess the basis of the project is really about being able to support future operations—obviously, with the new aircraft types that we have here, the potential number inwards and outwards is in the order of hundreds. Flights coming in are not necessarily limited to single aircraft movements at any one time. We have the capacity in that area to put at least three C130s in close proximity to each other and, with the new capacities coming on board, certainly a couple of C17s. So certainly the capacity would be in the area of several hundred people at any one time.

Senator PARRY—I gather that frequency of passenger throughput, which you mentioned this morning, is not a confidential matter.

Wing Cmdr Thorpe—It is probably more a case of cargo at this stage, but certainly passenger movements could be determined on a weekly basis.

Senator PARRY—So there is a need to upgrade the facility, as clearly established, due to volume.

Wing Cmdr Thorpe—Certainly.

Senator PARRY—In addition, Customs will be improved in that new facility.

Brig. Grice—The new facility will include facilities for AQIS and Customs to undertake their activities for both arriving and departing flights.

Senator PARRY—Are they co-located here currently; is a Customs facility co-located?

Wing Cmdr Thorpe—No. Typically, when we have international flight requirements, we will contact them through our operations staff. With the good relationship we have with those staff, they will come out on an as required basis, and they work from the facility that we saw this morning.

Senator PARRY—We discussed thermal relief this morning and I asked a question on tour about thermal relief of the fuel pipes. The current situation is not dangerous, but you need new piping for thermal relief. I gather that a valve structure just does not exist. Could you explain further?

Brig. Grice—When the fuel facility was built, the codes and standards were not what they are today. Those requirements are for the current standards for the construction of those facilities. There is a low risk of a pipe bursting, but Australian standards are designed to eliminate the great majority of risks and it is incumbent on Defence to provide a facility that meets those standards.

Senator PARRY—Is that through both atmospheric temperature as well as pressure in the pipes or just atmospheric temperature?

Brig. Grice—Atmospheric temperature would lead to pressure in the pipes.

Senator PARRY—We have hangars 93 and 95, with 94 as a blank. It is very confusing for us when we do not see 94. You indicated this morning, Wing Commander, when we were travelling around that there will be a relocation and you will be able to accommodate everyone when you decant from hangar 95 into another facility. That poses the question: why do we need the facility upgrade if you can relocate them elsewhere on the base? Could you explain, please?

Brig. Grice—I will start with this question and then pass to Wing Commander Thorpe to provide a bit more information. We will have to tighten our belt in other areas on the base in order to make space so that up to 12 aircraft, which can be serviced in that facility, can be serviced in two other locations on the base. It is not that there is an empty facility out there that can be used. With some workarounds, including possibly taking materiel out of a warehouse and putting it in temporary storage, either in isocontainers or under some other cover, space could be created to be used for an intervening period so that maintenance could be undertaken. Of course, that would be a temporary facility. It would have the barest of fire detection and suppression measures. During the period that we operate out of such temporary facilities, we will need some waivers from our detail design acceptance agency in Defence.

Senator PARRY—You used the word ‘squeezed’ this morning, which is probably quite appropriate. Will there be any compromise in operational capability?

Wing Cmdr Thorpe—As we saw this morning, that hangar space has the capacity for 12 aircraft to be worked on at any one time. The proposed facilities that we would temporarily use do not necessarily have the capacity for up to 12. The air flight contractors believe that they are able to provide the aircraft requirement, given the facilities that we are talking about and proposing that they use. So I do not expect that we will have any compromise in capability for pilot training.

Senator PARRY—With safety for maintenance, the issue is the same; there will be no compromise there?

Wing Cmdr Thorpe—Certainly, there is no going backwards in terms of the support associated with the use of the facility that we are offering and talking about.

Senator PARRY—You indicate that there will be a reduction of the sound attenuation that Senator Troeth asked about. Is there a known percentage reduction or an approximation of a percentage reduction in the sound emission?

Wing Cmdr Thorpe—Significant sound testing has been done in and around the base, so we do have good figures on the sound from aircraft engine running across the base.

Brig. Grice—A noise modelling report was undertaken in December 2006 and a further field study to record the actual noise levels emitted by aircraft being tested to establish the degree of noise attenuation required was carried out and a report was issued in May 2007. These results provide the information upon which the design will be based. Based on the results of testing the information provided for the run-up of Hawk and the proposed location with no enclosure, there is potential for the emitted noise level contributed to exceed the set Western Australian government's environmental protection authority noise summary of the regulations by 24 decibels at residential receivers external to the base location. The maximum required attenuation that would have to be achieved by the new run-up facility would equate to at least 24 decibels. That would be the level of reduction.

Senator PARRY—Is that the level, or is that the desired level?

Brig. Grice—No. That is the reduction. I do not have the desired level here.

Senator PARRY—So you will be reducing noise emissions by 24 decibels?

Brig. Grice—Correct.

Senator PARRY—Do you know the percentage? What is the current decibel level?

Brig. Grice—This is a logarithmic scale, so it is of the order of maybe 10,000. It is a big number.

Senator PARRY—There is a significant reduction, in any event.

Brig. Grice—And the noise at the boundary of the base will then comply with the Western Australian Environmental Protection Authority requirements.

Senator HURLEY—I would like to go through the water conservation and other measures on the base. I understand that the base uses a groundwater bore field. Is that shared with other properties in the area and all of the town, or is it a separate field underneath the base itself?

Brig. Grice—The RAAF Base Pearce water supply is currently drawn from a base bore field which is approximately 3.5 kilometres west of the base, on Neaves Road. The water is drawn from the shallow Leederville aquifer by bore pumps, and it is fed to the Neaves Road pumping station from where, upon demand, it is pumped to the base tank at Pearce. Upon demand, it fills the base's potable water storage tanks on Chittering Road, approximately two kilometres east of the base. Water is then gravity fed to the base from that site.

The base's infrastructure is up to 70 years old in some areas and has been built upon over the years as the base has grown. The base's potable water system provides potable water for drinking, domestic and industrial needs of the base, and it is the firefighting supply and the second-class water supply for the base gardens. The nine-megalitre Chittering Road tanks are sized to provide a backup for the base's firefighting needs, and the potable water main is made up of a variety of materials such as cement lined cast iron pipe from the thirties, asbestos cement pipe and PVC pipe.

Due to the age of the infrastructure, Pearce is experiencing a significant amount of water main and tributary failures. In 2006 there were 33 failures and, so far this year, there have been more than 17 failures. We are currently drawing water from our own bore field, not the town supply. However, over the past three years, RAAF Pearce has had significant water quality issues with the water from this bore field that have posed some risks to health and required the base to go on to bottled water and stop using its own potable supply. There were incidences in the water of amoeba, naegleria, ecoli, thermotolerant coliforms and high heterotrophic platelet counts that were the result of these water quality issues.

The cause of the issues was attributed to some problems with the water system. The Western Australia Water Corporation regard the Leederville aquifer as a medium risk for pollution from surface contaminants, such as farming operations and livestock, and that could be contributing to the contamination of our drinking water. The existing RAAF Pearce potable water system does not have a filtration system. The piping system on RAAF Pearce is old and has a significant build-up of corrosive materials, sediments which can harbour bacteria and contribute to high heterotrophic platelet counts. The RAAF Pearce pipeworks system feeds the base's second-class grounds reticulation systems, and these systems are currently predominantly not fitted with backflow prevention devices. This has the potential to allow contaminated water back into the potable water mains.

RAAF Pearce also has a number of cross-connection points from the hill tank supply system that have the potential to allow untreated water contamination of the potable water system. Pearce water quality is also adversely affected every time there is a pipework failure. So, 33 times a year, when there is a pipework failure, sedimentation in the pipes is disturbed and this increases our problems. During the early part of 2007, the local district support group was unable to maintain adequate chlorination levels in accordance with the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. Due to the current water quality concerns, the base has stopped personnel drinking the water from the base's potable water supply.

As a result of the drinking water supply being shut down, the local DSG region fast tracked negotiations with the Western Australia Water Corporation to provide a potable water supply from their system to our Chittering Road tanks. An order has been placed with the water corp to provide a 50 mm supply line to our site. Currently, DS Western Australia are running an investigation on the site to determine the scope of the works required to enable the base supply to return to potable quality in accordance with the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. Because of all the issues I told you about that are basically the result of the age of the infrastructure, there is the possibility that the base will not be able to return to drinking water standards until the base redevelopment project has been completed and we have replaced all the potable water mains on the base. So that is the current situation with water. It is a complex situation and it shows, again, the need for the engineering services part of this upgrade, which, as

you saw from the confidential cost estimate this morning, is a substantial part of the redevelopment works.

Senator HURLEY—Given the number of buildings on the site, has or will any consideration be given to retaining stormwater and using it for services? You say you currently use potable water for irrigation and firefighting and so on.

Brig. Grice—On the tour this morning, one of the A1 drawings we held up was for the irrigation piping system. The redevelopment project will split the current combined system into a potable water system, which will be fed with potable water, and then an irrigation system, which will be fed with non-potable water. With regard to water conservation measures, we will be reusing captured rainwater from roof structures, primarily in the living-in accommodation for toilet flushing. We will be installing waterless urinals throughout all the areas touched by the redevelopment project. Each waterless urinal installed will result in water savings in the order of 150,000 litres per year.

We will be using a selection of restricted flow tap ware and fittings to meet the requirements of the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards. In the buildings that are affected by the redevelopment, we will be installing grey water pipe work for toilet flushing so that if in the future recycled water is made available on the base or through the local supply authority we will be able to retroconnect those buildings to use wastewater and recycled water. Because we are splitting the irrigation main from the potable water main should recycled water become available in the future, we will be able to use recycled water for that purpose.

Senator HURLEY—I am thinking of systems whereby stormwater is channelled into retention ponds and kept there for future use. So it is not only water from roofs and water tanks but also stormwater from around the base that could be retained.

Brig. Grice—We have an existing bore field. I think the climatic data for this part of Australia does not lend itself to that for the long term.

Senator HURLEY—So there has been some investigation of that option?

Brig. Grice—Yes. The non-potable water will continue to, obviously, be sourced from our bore-water field. That is the most cost-effective option at this stage.

Senator HURLEY—So there is an existing bore field on base?

Brig. Grice—It is on Defence land about three kilometres from here.

Senator HURLEY—Is that the aquifer you were talking about before?

Brig. Grice—Yes. And there are water quality issues because of the livestock grazing and that type of thing.

CHAIR—I want to talk about some of the energy and water conservation measures too. I think members of the committee would join with me in congratulating Defence on addressing

some of the energy conservation issues. The public are often not aware, as you say in paragraph 63 of your submission, that:

> Defence reports annually to Parliament on its energy management performance and on its progress in meeting the energy efficient targets established by the Government as part of its commitment to improve Ecologically Sustainable Development.

I note there is quite a lot of information for the committee on what you are proposing to do in terms of sustainable energy. There was only one reference to water conservation that I could see and that was at paragraph 64(g)—and that was only one line. So I was pleased to hear you elaborate a little more on that.

As the federal member for this area—and I know we are going to hear from the local chamber business organisation—I am aware of tremendous pressures on these communities along this stretch of the Great Northern Highway and the fact that development is seriously impeded by the lack of availability of water and sewerage. I know it is critical just further up the track; they have considerable development pressures placed upon them and are not able to maintain infrastructures and services like schools and aged-care facilities because there is simply no water. This is a very serious issue right around the country, but it certainly is one I am aware of here. I wonder whether there is scope to do much more with regard to water conservation. For example, I was talking to one of my constituents the other day who has installed two 2,000-litre rainwater collection tanks on his small property and that goes a long way to making him water efficient.

There is nothing in here about how laundry is managed from the living-in accommodation and the messing facilities, and what might be able to be done to have a rainwater collection system to service laundries, if that is a facility that is going to be available on base. With living-in accommodation, I note there is a report that came out recently saying that in many cases rainwater tanks are not efficient. I understand that in the case of firefighting services and the necessity for large quantities of water for industrial areas, but I would have thought—and I would like for you to go back to the drawing board on this one—that a lot more could be done to collect rainwater off those buildings for domestic arrangements and to use it for potable water. This constituent tells me that he collects all his drinking water and uses the water also for his laundry and bathroom facilities. The other thing is that in the messing facility, one of the biggest users of water will probably be the constant need to wash and clean. I wonder what capacity there is for rainwater collection to provide potable water to the messing facility and for the other water requirements for that building. Would you like to comment on that? I know we will have an opportunity to pursue this a little further when we hear from our colleagues.

Brig. Grice—We have discussed the water and energy efficiency measures that we are proposing with the Australian Greenhouse Office. Currently, we will meet federal water efficiency use guidelines. With regard to laundries, there is no centralised laundry here; there are laundries in the living-in accommodation. Part of our green building requirements is for dishwashers, refrigerators, washing machines and clothes driers to have minimum energy and water use efficiency ratings of different levels. There are 3½ stars, four stars for washing machines and that type thing. We are reducing the irrigated area on the base significantly. We will be reducing the amount of potable water that we use. In 2006 the total water consumption of

the base was of the order of 107 megalitres, which is about 1½ days use for the city of Canberra. That is for all purposes—irrigation, washing, drying, potable and non-potable uses.

We do not have an estimate of what the reduction in usage will be following the completion of the redevelopment, but it is expected that water use will reduce significantly once we have redeveloped the water and irrigation systems. Currently, there is significant water wastage due to water main failures and system flushing being required every time there is a water main failure. These failures will reduce once the mains have been completely replaced. Additionally, the ESD measures that we are introducing through the redevelopment project will result in reduced consumption of water overall, with AAA rated shower heads and all those types of things. We have commissioned an ESD report to look at the feasibility of how to minimise our usage to meet the government's policies, and these are the activities that we have decided to do.

CHAIR—Again, I appreciate all that you are doing. It is commendable that all of these things have been thought through, but I still think that the particular problems within this corridor that I am aware of—and I have taken those matters to the federal minister and we are still not able to resolve them—are causing critical problems for the community. I would be surprised if there are not further measures that could be taken. We are talking about a $142.2 million project, so putting water collection systems into the domestic facilities and into the messing facilities surely could not represent a huge percentage of the total development cost.

Brig. Grice—We are putting rainwater tanks in, both in the mess and in the living-in accommodation. The rainwater collection system will be used for toilet flushing and there will be a cold water inlet into the laundry as well.

CHAIR—What about using it for potable water?

Brig. Grice—The best use for rainwater is to minimise the use of potable water, not to use it as potable water. With rainwater, you have to ensure the cleanliness and the condition of the collection mechanism to guard against giardia and bird-borne diseases. Where in an individual house or in an individual block that may be relatively easy, that would greatly increase the maintenance bill on a base such as this.

CHAIR—Forgive me, but it sounds like it is riskier drinking the water from the tap as things stand at the moment.

Brig. Grice—At the moment, yes, that is correct.

CHAIR—You might like to come back to the committee after you have re-examined some of those issues. As I said, the submission makes only one very short reference to water efficient features. It gives no scoping of just how you are proposing to do that.

Brig. Grice—Would you like us to come back with a full discussion of the water-saving measures that we are implementing with the project?

CHAIR—Yes, please.

Brig. Grice—We would be pleased to do that.

Senator PARRY—I would like Brigadier Grice to quote those bacteria names again!

CHAIR—He did get better on the second reading, I thought—without looking at your notes, please, Brigadier Grice.

Brig. Grice—I am waiting to see how Hansard copes with that.

Senator PARRY—So am I.

CHAIR—Thank you. We may require you to come back.

[11.46 am]

LOMBARDO, Mr David, Vice-President, Bullsbrook and Chittering Chamber of Commerce Inc.

Witness was sworn—

CHAIR—Welcome, Mr Lombardo. Thank you for participating in this hearing today. The committee has received a submission from the Bullsbrook and Chittering Chamber of Commerce. Do you wish to make any amendments to the submission made to the committee?

Mr Lombardo—No.

CHAIR—I am aware of your long involvement in the chamber of commerce and the business community. If you would like to make a brief opening statement, we will then proceed to questions.

Mr Lombardo—Thank you. Firstly, I would like to commend all the officers—I will not try to remember their titles; David Stockdale and Gino Martiniello—for the professionalism they have displayed in their communications with us on this project. The chamber of commerce has raised two points. Before I touch on those, I make it very clear that we fully support the proposed redevelopment as documented, together with the C17 airlift—whether that is part of this hearing I do not know. There are two points that we raise. I will be very brief. Firstly, we read with interest the possibility of the RAAF base connecting into town water. Whilst we support that, our request is that the chamber and the local government be involved in those discussions with the water corporation in relation to the project.

The second point—and I acknowledge that there has been a response from the department which has probably addressed this second point quite adequately—is in relation to the oval parklands on the south-east section of the RAAF base which almost spearhead into the existing town centre and whether there was any scope for that boundary being slightly modified and the uses of that particular corner being shared with the local community. In closing, I reiterate the chamber's full support for the redevelopment project and hope that the powers that be endorse this sooner rather than later.

CHAIR—Thank you. Clearly, water is an issue right across the country and I am aware of the tensions along this stretch of the Great Northern Highway, and not just here but further north—it is holding back a good deal of critical infrastructure development. Knowing Defence as I do, I am sure they will be happy to continue a dialogue with you and the council, but we will have them back shortly to answer that question directly. How do you see the matter of water being resolved? Do you have some suggestions or are there particular things that might be done to alleviate some of the pressures on water in this area?

Mr Lombardo—I am not a qualified engineer. At the moment there is a limited 300-millimetre supply that comes from the south to the town. We are probably the most northern extent of the existing Water Corporation infrastructure. The concern is that that existing

infrastructure has a limited capacity. Clearly, depending on the future growth of the town and the needs of the RAAF, that supply is going to have to be increased. I am aware of the Water Corporation's preliminary plans, which involve possibly a further mains extension from south to Bullsbrook and also a new supply from the Ellenbrook region to the Bullsbrook township. I do not have a direct answer to your question other than to say that any more strain on the existing supply should take into account the future needs of this township and the future township.

CHAIR—Before you arrived, Defence did elaborate further on some of the water conservation measures that they intend to undertake. Have you had any opportunity to have any discussions yet?

Mr Lombardo—Not as yet.

CHAIR—Perhaps we can ask some questions with regard to that. I have no further questions.

Senator PARRY—In your opening submission you have indicated support. Did you receive a copy of the response that Brigadier Grice sent to the committee?

Mr Lombardo—Absolutely.

Senator PARRY—You referred to the second matter being resolved. I certainly concur that it is a matter between the base and the local community. Regarding the first matter, you did not mention in your opening submission that the discussions between the Department of Defence and WA water are continuing and that the chamber and the local government authority will be advised as to the outcomes of those discussions.

Mr Lombardo—I acknowledge that.

Senator PARRY—Thank you.

CHAIR—Senator Troeth, do you have any questions?

Senator TROETH—No. We will ask Defence further about their response but certainly I can see that you are at least happy with the issue of the parkland.

Mr Lombardo—Absolutely.

CHAIR—We will now recall representatives of the Department of Defence.

[11.53 am]

GRICE, Brigadier William Alfred, Director General Infrastructure Asset Development, Department of Defence

MARTINIELLO, Mr Gino, Project Director, Western Australia, Department of Defence

THORPE, Wing Commander Anthony, Base Commander, RAAF Base Pearce, Department of Defence

REVIE, Mr Ian Cameron, Project Manager/Contract Administrator, RAAF Base Pearce Redevelopment Stage 1, Sinclair Knight Merz Pty Ltd

CHAIR—I remind witnesses that they are still under oath. Brigadier Grice, would you like to respond? I know it is in the letter but for the *Hansard* could you respond to the comments made by Mr Lombardo?

Brig. Grice—Thank you. Firstly, as I stated 20 minutes ago, we have an emergency situation on the base. There are contamination issues with the water supply out of the bore field which are complex and may be a combination of surface contamination of the aquifer as well as issues related to our on-base infrastructure. Defence Support Western Australia has been speaking with the Western Australia Water Corporation for an emergency fix—a small 50-millimetre potable water supply to help restore potable water supplies in the short term. Defence Support Western Australia will continue to discuss with Western Australia Water Corporation and with Bullsbrook and Chittering Chamber of Commerce the long-term resolution of water supply issues. As I mentioned earlier, there are several options; permanent connection to the water supply and a refurbishment of our water purification system are two. There is a parallel investigation being undertaken by Defence Support, which will take some time, to determine the options and the best outcome for Defence and the community. We are a member of the community and we take that very seriously. We would not do anything to jeopardise the remainder of the community. We will continue with those parallel studies, and in consultation with the Western Australia Water Corporation and the chamber of commerce we will come to what I am sure will be a mutually agreeable long-term solution.

CHAIR—Thank you. That brings the hearing to a conclusion. I thank all the witnesses who have appeared before the committee today, and at the earlier private briefing on the confidential cost estimates.

Resolved (on motion by **Senator Troeth**):

That, pursuant to the power conferred by section 2(2) of the Parliamentary Papers Act 1908, this committee authorises publication of the evidence given before it and submissions presented at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 11.56 am