
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

171st Aviation Squadron Relocation, Holsworthy Barracks, NSW

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

February 2006
Canberra

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Membership of the Committee

Chair Hon Judi Moylan MP

Deputy Chair Mr Brendan O'Connor MP

Members Mr John Forrest MP

Senator Michael Forshaw

Mr Harry Jenkins MP

Senator Stephen Parry

Mr Bernie Ripoll MP

Senator the Hon Judith Troeth

Mr Barry Wakelin MP

Committee Secretariat

Secretary Mrs Margaret Swieringa

Inquiry Secretary Ms Vivienne Courto

Research Officer Mr Raymond Knight

Administrative Officer Mr Peter Ratas



List of Abbreviations

ABGR	Australian Building Greenhouse Rating
ANEC	Australian Noise Exposure Concept
ANEF	Australian Noise Exposure Forecast
Defence	Department of Defence
the Act	Public Works Committee Act 1969



Extract from the Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives

No. 61 dated Wednesday, 12 October 2005

20 PUBLIC WORKS – PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE – REFERENCE OF WORK – PROPOSED RELOCATION OF 171ST AVIATION SQUADRON TO HOLSWORTHY BARRACKS, NSW

Dr Stone (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration), pursuant to notice, moved – That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report: Proposed relocation of 171st Aviation Squadron to Holsworthy Barracks, NSW.

Question – put and passed.



List of Recommendations

3 Issues and Conclusions

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that after the consultation process on environmental and cultural heritage matters has been completed, the Department of Defence report its findings to the Committee.

Recommendation 2

Subject to satisfactory reporting of the first recommendation, the Committee recommends that works relating to the proposed relocation of the 171st Aviation Squadron to Holsworthy Barracks, NSW, proceed at the estimated cost of \$92 million.

Introduction

Referral of Work

- 1.1 On 12 October 2005 the proposal to provide facilities for the relocation of the 171st Aviation Squadron to Holsworthy Barracks, NSW, was referred to the Public Works Committee for consideration and report in accordance with the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969* (the Act).¹ The proponent agency for this work is the Department of Defence (Defence).
- 1.2 The Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration, advised the House that the out-turn estimated cost of the project was \$92 million. Subject to parliamentary approval, the proposed works were planned to commence in May 2006, with practical completion and occupation scheduled for mid-2008.

¹ Extract from the *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives*, No. 61, Wednesday 12 October 2005

Background

The Site

- 1.3 The proposed works will be constructed at Gallipoli Lines and Luscombe Airfield, two sub-areas of the Holsworthy Barracks precinct, located within the Liverpool Military Area.²
- 1.4 Sites selected for proposed works are Commonwealth owned and Defence controlled, zoned for Defence purposes, and require no State or local government approvals.³

Options Considered

- 1.5 Options considered in the relocation of the 171st Aviation squadron included three sites in NSW, namely:
 - Holsworthy Barracks;
 - HMAS Albatross at Nowra; and
 - RAAF Base Richmond.
- 1.6 Holsworthy was selected as the preferred option due to “the operational training and whole of life benefits of having the 171st Aviation Squadron collocated at Holsworthy with the 4th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (Commando) and its C Company component of the Tactical Assault Group (East)”⁴ .
- 1.7 Additional advantages of relocation to Holsworthy are identified as:
 - a higher standard of operational capability and efficiency;
 - improved coordination with Special Operations units; and
 - lower capital and operating costs.⁵

2 Appendix C, Submission No 1, Department of Defence, paragraphs 11 – 12.

3 *ibid.*, paragraph 31.

4 *ibid.*, paragraph 24.

5 *ibid.*, paragraph 29.

Inquiry Process

- 1.8 The Committee is required by the Act to consider public works over \$6 million⁶ and report to Parliament on:
- the purpose of the work and its suitability for that purpose;
 - the need for, or the advisability of, carrying out the work;
 - whether the money to be expended on the work is being spent in the most cost effective manner;
 - the amount of revenue the work will generate for the Commonwealth, if that is its purpose; and
 - the present and prospective public value of the work.⁷
- 1.9 The Committee called for submissions by advertising the inquiry in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on Saturday, 22 October 2005. The Committee also sought submissions from relevant government agencies, local government, private organisations and individuals, who may be materially affected by or have an interest in the proposed work. The Committee subsequently placed submissions and other information relating to the inquiry on its web site in order to encourage further public participation.

Inspection and Public Hearing

- 1.10 Under the terms of the Act, the Committee may not convene at any place outside Australia and its external Territories. Where a public work is to be carried out outside Australia and its external Territories, the Committee:
- ...shall consider the work on the basis of plans, models and statements placed before it and of evidence (if any) taken by it.⁸
- 1.11 On Monday, 12 December 2005 the Committee visited Holsworthy Barracks, NSW to inspect at first hand the scope and environs of the proposed works. This was followed by an in-camera briefing on

6 *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Part III, Section 18 (8)

7 *ibid*, Section 17

8 *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Part III, Section 18B

operational matters and confidential costs, after which a public hearing was held at the Barracks.⁹

⁹ See Appendix D for the official Hansard transcript of the evidence taken by the Committee at the public hearing on Monday, 12 December 2005 Holsworthy Barracks, NSW

The Proposed Works

Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of the proposal is to provide facilities to support the relocation of the 171st Aviation Squadron to Holsworthy Barracks, NSW. ¹ The 171st Aviation Squadron is an independent squadron under the direct command of Commander 16th Brigade (Aviation), the primary function of which is to provide troop lift support to the Tactical Assault Group (East) and to the East Coast Special Forces capability at Holsworthy.²
- 2.2 Defence's primary aim in relocating the 171st Aviation Squadron to Holsworthy is to improve the ability of Army aviation to provide troop lift support to the newly established Special Operations command and counter-terrorist capability also located at the Barracks.³
- 2.3 The collocation of dedicated army aviation support with counter-terrorist and special operations forces is expected to enhance capability and improve safety, thus satisfying one recommendation of the Board of Inquiry into the Black Hawk accident that occurred in Townsville in 1996.⁴

1 Appendix C, Submission No.1, Department of Defence, paragraph 4

2 *ibid*, paragraphs 3 and 9

3 *ibid*, paragraph 22

4 *ibid*, paragraph 3

Need

- 2.4 The primary reason for the relocation of the 171st Aviation Squadron to Holsworthy is to provide troop lift support to the newly established Special Operations Command and the east coast counter terrorist support capability based at the barracks. In announcing the establishment of these capabilities, the Government specified that a squadron of helicopters would be based in the Sydney region.⁵

Scope

- 2.5 The proposed relocation project will comprise the following elements:
- Interim Facilities
 - ⇒ refurbishment of Mackie Building, Gallipoli Lines, to accommodate command, operations and logistics elements; and
 - ⇒ accommodation at Luscombe Airfield for technical support, aircraft repair, avionics and repair parts store.
 - Permanent Facilities
 - ⇒ new buildings at Luscombe Airfield to accommodate command and operations, refuelling, aircraft shelters, workshops and aircraft corrosion control functions;
 - ⇒ new apron and taxiways to connect to the existing Luscombe Airfield runway;
 - ⇒ refurbishment of buildings at Jordan Lines to accommodate logistics, vehicle compound and shelters.⁶

Project Delivery

- 2.6 Subject to Parliamentary approval, early works are planned to commence in May 2006, with progressive completion by March 2008. The project will be delivered using a proven project management approach. Construction works will occur progressively to ensure the quickest possible completion, while minimising disruption to the affected Army units. Major elements

5 *ibid*, paragraphs 22 and 23

6 *ibid*, paragraph 27

are to be delivered through a traditional process of detailed design and documentation by a design consultant, and construction by a number of head contracts.⁷

Cost

2.7 The estimated out-turn cost of the project is \$92 million.⁸ This figure includes:

- professional design and management;
- fees and charges;
- construction;
- furniture, fittings and equipment; and
- contingency allowances.⁹

7 *ibid*, paragraph 81

8 *ibid*, paragraph 67

9 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 3

Issues and Conclusions

Site Considerations

Site Selection

- 3.1 The site of Holsworthy for the location of the 171st Aviation Squadron was determined by operational and financial factors. Special Operations Command is located at Holsworthy because of its central location on the eastern seaboard.¹ Defence explained to the Committee that the location of a squadron of helicopters in the Sydney region enabled training to be conducted in conjunction with the Special Forces. The collocation also improved safety as helicopters would be continuously available for training exercises without having to be moved from Townsville for single deployments. This met a key recommendation from the investigation into the 1996 Black Hawk crash.² The inquiry recommended specifically that:

Dedicated Army aviation assets be allocated in support of counter terrorist and special operations capability and that

1 Appendix D, op. cit., page 4

2 *ibid.*, page 3.

the units be collocated during training, planning and the conduct of operations.³

- 3.2 Defence further explained that the cost of a helicopter's operation was \$20,000 per hour, making the cost of transit from Townsville to Sydney, a journey which took a number of hours, expensive. Collocation allowed considerable savings in this area alone. Alternative sites were considered and discarded. Both Williamtown and Richmond would have required the helicopters to traverse Sydney to provide support to the Special Forces and Nowra, somewhat distant from Sydney, would have added a \$10 million premium to the operational costs.⁴

Timing of Relocation

- 3.3 The Committee expressed concern that the relocation had taken 10 years from the time of the recommendation in the Black Hawk inquiry. Defence responded that there had been 'real reticence to split the aviation capability' based on the size of the squadron and the technical, trade capabilities needed to support it. Only when the squadron reached a critical mass with the announcement of an additional 12 helicopters was the decision made that the split would be sustainable.⁵ Moving a capability permanently also involved the movement and relocation of families, something Defence did not want to do without sufficient preparation for the housing of families.⁶

Base Population

- 3.4 With the relocation of 171st Aviation to Holsworthy, the base population will increase by 200 personnel.

Interim Facilities

- 3.5 Personnel will be moved to Holsworthy in January 2007. The expected completion date of the general works is mid-2008. Interim works are to be built to cover the 18 month period before all works are finished. Members asked Defence why the interim works were

3 *ibid.*, page 4.

4 *ibid.*, page 3.

5 *ibid.*, page 5.

6 *ibid.*, page 6.

necessary and whether it would not be possible to synchronise the completion of the works with the relocation.

- 3.6 Defence responded that it was a Government decision, post 11 September 2001, to improve the counter terrorism capability as quickly as possible. That decision had impelled the permanent relocation of the helicopter support for the Special Operations Command as early as the Defence forces could feasibly manage the transfers.
- 3.7 Part of the interim facilities, the deployable shelters, will be re-usable when the unit is deployed elsewhere in Australia or overseas.⁷

Environmental Impacts

Hazardous Materials

- 3.8 The Committee asked, given the vintage of the buildings, whether there was a problem with asbestos. Defence said that they had conducted surveys and there was asbestos present. It had been factored into the contracts. It would be removed, or, if it was in a stable, bonded form, as most of the asbestos at Holsworthy was, efforts would be made to ensure that no occupation was endangered. Tradesmen would be made fully aware of its existence and 'work would be carried out in accordance with the code'.⁸
- 3.9 Questions were also asked about the extent to which the corrosion control facility would be self-contained to ensure that chemicals used in the treatment of aircraft did not leach into the surrounding soil or water. Defence explained that lessons had been learned from the experience in Townsville. At Holsworthy, there would be a closed system so that 'run off from the washing operation goes through a separate filter, ... [and] we are investigating whether we can reuse the water.'⁹

7 *ibid.*, page 13.

8 *ibid.*, page 7.

9 *ibid.*, page 8.

Bushfire Dangers

- 3.10 The Sutherland Shire Council raised some concern about the incapacity of Holsworthy to take preventative action against bushfires, such as back burning, because of unexploded ordnance.

Because of the unexploded ordnance ... and because of the topography, you get strong westerly winds coming across the plain. A fire builds up an incredible head of steam at which time it then crosses Heathcote Road and hits shire residents.¹⁰

- 3.11 Defence responded that the Holsworthy base maintains a first response fire fighting capability. In addition, there was a controlled plan by which the New South Wales and local bushfire brigades were allowed to the base in order to fight fires. Some restrictions were maintained for the safety of the fire fighters.¹¹

Noise Levels

- 3.12 A further issue raised by the Sutherland Shire Council related to the impact of aircraft noise. The Committee asked Defence whether the relocation affected the frequency of air movements on the base and what effect the noise levels generated by such movements had on the surrounding communities. The Committee noted that there had been correspondence on this matter with the Sutherland Shire Council.

- 3.13 Defence explained that they had applied the Australian Noise Exposure Forecast (ANEF) and the Australian Noise Exposure Concept (ANEC) to the question. This was a computer modelling system which provided a forecast of likely aircraft noise over a period of time, perhaps 10 or 20 years. This in turn created a primary document for planning purposes which met the Australian Standard 2021 covering aircraft noise intrusion, building siting and construction.¹² Ideally, noise would be kept within certain contours, ANEF 20, on a diagram developed from the model.

- 3.14 The result of this work in relation to Holsworthy was:

The ANEF 20 that is generated by these helicopter operations that we are proposing is all contained within the base boundary except for one small section on the lower right

10 *ibid.*, page 21..

11 *ibid.*, page 38.

12 *ibid.*, page 8.

hand side, where it goes outside the range boundary but is still within the military controlled airspace. That is also national park – there is no housing in that vicinity. No citizen should experience planning controls when trying to submit a building application or the like resulting from aircraft noise generated by 171 Aviation Squadron.¹³

- 3.15 Defence did agree, however, that should Councils approve developments that encroached on the boundary of the base then such developments will be affected by noise. This noise will remain below the ANEF 20, that is, noise below the critical level; however, some noise below this level will be heard on the boundaries of the range. To this extent Defence had written to Councils expressing concern about Council approvals for development which encroached on the boundaries of the base.¹⁴
- 3.16 Members also asked whether the frequency of air movements affected the level of noise and whether Defence considered this in their assessment of the impact of the relocation.
- 3.17 Defence reported that there were limitations on the use of aircraft. Training hours were affected by the aircraft and pilot availability. Movements would be less than domestic aircraft and the general entrance and egress would be to the south over the less populated areas. In particular, the number of movements over the northern, more populated egress routes was estimated to be one in every 18 days.¹⁵

Native Fauna

- 3.18 Defence was conducting an environmental impact study to determine the impact of the works on the flora and fauna. The initial assessment was that flying helicopters over the area did not have a significant impact on birds or bats.¹⁶ Nor did Defence believe that bird or bat strike would create problems for aircraft.

In five years of flying out of Luscombe field, which has involved some 3,000 flight hours in Black Hawks, there has never been any bat or bird strike in this area at all. ... Since

13 *ibid.*, page 9.

14 *ibid.*, page 12.

15 *ibid.*, page 10.

16 *ibid.*, page 6.

1988, ... we have flown over 110,000 hours around Australia and the world and there have been only 38 incidents of bats or birds impacting a Black Hawk at all. Of those, none has caused damage to engines or rotors [or] has caused the helicopters to be in any dangerous situation.¹⁷

Creation of Wetlands

- 3.19 Defence did not believe that the local wetlands increased the vulnerability of the aircraft. Many airports had adjacent wetlands and it appeared that birds stayed away from the vibrations of aircraft.¹⁸

Energy Efficiency

- 3.20 In the project, Defence is aiming to achieve an energy rating of 4.5 on the Australian Greenhouse rating scale, the Australian Building Greenhouse Rating (ABGR).¹⁹ This would apply to office accommodation and new buildings only, not to workshops. Defence informed the Committee that no tools were yet available for rating workshops.²⁰
- 3.21 In its submission Defence described a number of systems that they would incorporate into the design of the project to improve energy consumption:

The design of all power supply, electrical and mechanical equipment will include an assessment of energy use, applying life-cycle costing techniques and power demand analysis ...

Lighting is to be controlled, where possible, by photoelectric switches in conjunction with time switch schedules, ... personal sensor controlled lighting, ... high efficiency fluorescent lamps [and] time switches at air conditioner controls.²¹

17 *ibid.*, page 6.

18 *ibid.*, page 7.

19 Appendix C, *op. cit.*, paragraph 61.

20 Appendix D, *op. cit.*, page 14.

21 Appendix C, *op. cit.*, paragraphs 57 and 59.

Heritage Implications

- 3.22 The Defence submission stated that there were no heritage issues in relation to the proposal and that this had been accepted by the Department of Environment and Heritage.²²
- 3.23 In its submission, Defence also stated that there were no Native Title claims over the proposed works sites and no known indigenous sites were affected by the project.²³
- 3.24 Two Aboriginal groups, the Cubbitch Barta Native Title Claimants Aboriginal Corporation and the Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council, gave evidence to the Committee. The Land Council spokesman explained that under the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Rights Act cultural heritage matters were part of the core business of the Council. The Council had 700 members, consulted widely and formed partnerships with other organisations.
- 3.25 Mrs Chalker, from the Cubbitch Barta Native Title Claimants Aboriginal Corporation, agreed that there was no native title claim over the Holsworthy site.²⁴
- 3.26 However, both groups before the Committee expressed concerns about the possible impact of the proposed changes to the operations of the base on aboriginal sites. The area had been partially surveyed as part of the EIS conducted in 1997 in respect of the proposed airport at Badgerys Creek. The Holsworthy area was then listed as part of the national estate in 1998.²⁵ However, both groups put the view that their survey had been incomplete, conducted in haste over a period of seven weeks and covering only one third of an area of 19,000 hectares. They had discovered 3,000 sites in that time including rock carvings and rock paintings.²⁶ They believed that there were potentially other sites. They asked for some access to conduct further surveys and for their concerns to be taken seriously.²⁷
- 3.27 The Land Council noted that the military had been good custodians of the land; 90 per cent of the sites had not been impacted upon,

22 *ibid.*, paragraph 79.

23 *ibid.*, paragraph 80.

24 Appendix D, *op. cit.*, page 18.

25 *ibid.*, page 16.

26 *ibid.*, page 17.

27 *ibid.*, page 26.

protected by being locked up for a long time as military land.²⁸ Their concern was that two new ranges were to be built, usage was to be increased and a private company, not the Defence Department, was to be responsible for the maintenance of the range.²⁹

3.28 In addition, the Committee asked Defence about the proposed level of consultation with local Aboriginal groups. In particular, the Chair asked whether Defence would consider employing a cultural heritage specialist from the local Aboriginal Community as a site monitor as the work continues.

3.29 Defence argued that an environmental consultant had been employed to produce

an open, transparent and comprehensive public environmental report. ... As part of the development of that report, we have obviously asked our consultants to look at the Aboriginal cultural heritage issues.³⁰

And

We do not have any project allowance in the budget for the employment of an Aboriginal heritage specialist.

And

We need to try to separate the broader Aboriginal community concern for the range from the project specific stuff ... the great bulk of all the sites we are talking about are beyond the areas we are dealing with. We have a bit of work to do to sort that out, particularly on the boundaries.

3.30 Finally Brigadier Hutchinson sought to reassure the Aboriginal groups present that Defence was passionate about its caretaking responsibilities,³¹ that it would not be doing anything on the base that was not already happening, and that the work would impact on brownfield sites, already much disturbed, rather than the range.³² He assured the Chair of the Committee that Defence would continue to consult with local Aboriginal groups and, should something of

28 *ibid.*, page 26.

29 *ibid.*, page 25 and 28.

30 *ibid.*, page 35.

31 *ibid.*, page 32..

32 *ibid.*, page 33.

cultural heritage value be found, contingency funds would be spent on preserving it.³³

- 3.31 Once the scoping of the consultation process on environmental and cultural heritage matters was finalised, the Chair asked Defence to let the Committee know precisely what they were intending to do in this area.³⁴

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that after the consultation process on environmental and cultural heritage matters has been completed, the Department of Defence report its findings to the Committee.

Consultation

- 3.32 On the question of consultation, Defence informed the Committee that they had extensive contact with a number of interested groups and councils. This included notification about environmental processes to 83 organisations.³⁵ However, they noted that the formal process only began when sufficient documentation was completed at the time when the matter was referred to the Committee. In the weeks before the hearing, there had been public consultations at Moorebank, Illawong and Ingleburn.³⁶
- 3.33 A number of consultations were foreshadowed at the hearing: an extensive environmental consultation process; consultation with a range of aviation related organisations; consultation with various State instrumentalities and organisations; and consultation with various building and planning agencies. A full list is provided in the submission at paragraph 72.

33 *ibid.*, page 36.

34 *ibid.*, page 36.

35 *ibid.*, page 12..

36 *ibid.*, page 12..

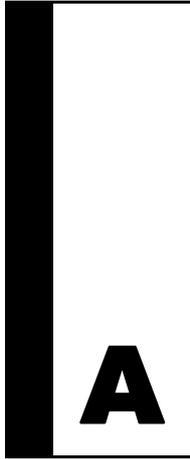
Recommendation 2

Subject to satisfactory reporting of the first recommendation, the Committee recommends that works relating to the proposed relocation of the 171st Aviation Squadron to Holsworthy Barracks, NSW, proceed at the estimated cost of \$92 million.

Hon Judi Moylan MP

Chair

15 February 2006



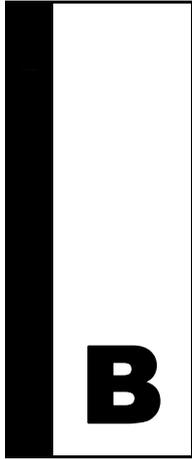
Appendix A – List of Submissions and Exhibits

Submissions

1. Department of Defence
2. Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council
3. Sutherland Shire Council
4. Cubbitch Barta Native Title Claimants Aboriginal Corporation
5. Department of Defence (Supplementary)
6. Department of Defence (Supplementary)
7. Department of Defence (Supplementary)

Exhibits

1. Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council, Supplementary Information



Appendix B – List of Witnesses

Mr Mark Carlon, Manager, Environmental Planning, Sutherland Shire Council

Mrs Glenda Chalker, Chairperson, Cubbitch Barta Native Title Claimants
Aboriginal Corporation

Colonel Andrew Dudgeon, Deputy Commander, Headquarters 16th Brigade
(Aviation), Department of Defence

Mr Clifford Foley, Chairperson, Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council

Mr Michael Healy, Director, Project Development and Delivery Australian Capital
Territory/New South Wales, Department of Defence

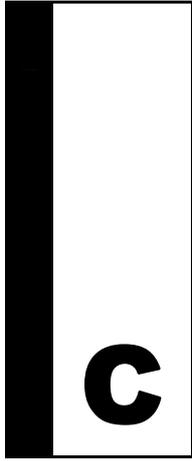
Brigadier Peter Hutchinson, Director General, Infrastructure Asset Development
Branch, Department of Defence

Mr Charles Mundine, Member, Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council

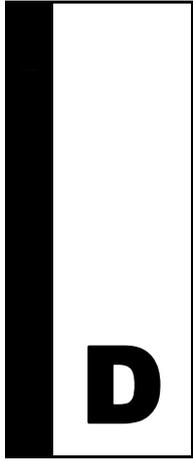
Mr Colin Trinder, Director, Environmental Stewardship, Department of Defence

Mr Peter Watson, Regional Manager, CSI Sydney West/South Region, Corporate
Services and Infrastructure Group, Department of Defence

Mr Rod Weir, Consultant to Infrastructure Asset Development Branch,
Department of Defence



**Appendix C – Submission No. 1 from the
Department of Defence**



Appendix D – Official Transcript of Evidence