

Growler Airborne Electronic Attack Capability Facilities Project

- 3.1 The Department of Defence (Defence) seeks approval from the Committee to conduct works at Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base Amberley, Queensland, Army Aviation Centre Oakey, Queensland and Delamere Air Weapons Range (Delamere), Northern Territory.
- 3.2 The primary objective of the project is to provide purpose built facilities and adaptively reused facilities to support the introduction of the EA-18G Growler Airborne Electronic Attack capability.¹ The project will provide civil works, infrastructure, landscaping and conduct demolition works.²
- 3.3 Defence has purchased 12 new-build EA-18G Growler aircraft (Growler). These will operate in conjunction with air, land and sea forces and will reduce the risk to forces and improve their situational awareness.³
- 3.4 The estimated cost of the project is \$348.6 million, excluding GST.
- 3.5 The project was referred to the Committee on 19 August 2015.

Conduct of the inquiry

- 3.6 Following referral, the inquiry was publicised on the Committee's website and via media release.
 - 3.7 The Committee received one submission and three supplementary submissions from Defence. A list of submissions can be found at Appendix A.
 - 3.8 The Committee received a briefing from Defence and conducted an inspection at RAAF Base Amberley on 3 November and public and in-camera hearings at Ipswich on 4 November 2015. A transcript of the public
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1 Defence, submission 1, p. 16.

2 Defence, submission 1, p. 3.

3 Defence, submission 1, p. 1.

hearing and the public submissions to the inquiry are available on the Committee's website.⁴

Need for the works

- 3.9 The first Growler aircraft is scheduled to be delivered to Australia in February 2017 with the Initial Operating Capability milestone scheduled for July 2018.⁵
- 3.10 At the public hearing, the Committee heard that the Growler is owned by the United States and that, on receipt of the first aircraft, Australia will be the only other operator.⁶
- 3.11 The aircraft will be based at RAAF Base Amberley and will be operated by No. 6 Squadron (6SQN), an element of No. 82 Wing (82WG) which is the strike and reconnaissance wing of the Royal Australian Air Force.⁷
- 3.12 82WG is headquartered at RAAF Base Amberley, Queensland and is part of Air Combat Group. It currently operates F/A-18F Super Hornet (Super Hornet) multirole fighters and Pilatus PC-9 forward air control aircraft.⁸
- 3.13 The facilities requirements to support the introduction of the Growler capability include:
- operational, administration, logistics, and operational level maintenance facilities for 6SQN;
 - minor adjustment to existing 1SQN facilities to account for the Super Hornet aircraft being transferred from 6SQN once the Growler aircraft have been delivered;
 - working accommodation for Air Combat and Electronic Attack System Program Office;
 - simulator training facilities;
 - intermediate level maintenance facilities;
 - warehousing;
 - administration and operations facilities for the Mobile Threat Training Emitter System (MTTES) at Army Aviation Centre Oakey and Delamere Air Weapons Range; and
 - associated support services and infrastructure.⁹

4 <www.aph.gov.au/pwc>.

5 Defence, submission 1, p. 2.

6 Group Captain Timothy Churchill, Defence, transcript of evidence, 4 November 2015, p. 3.

7 Defence, submission 1, p. 2.

8 Defence, submission 1, p. 2.

9 Defence, submission 1, pp. 2-3.

3.14 During the inspection, the Committee saw secure facilities and existing aircraft hangars, as well as the site of the proposed multi-storey car park.

3.15 At the public hearing, the Committee asked why the MTTES was an important part of the project. Defence responded:

It is an essential element of our ability to what we call 'raise, train and sustain'. The emitter is basically out there to provide signals in space that Growler can detect, geo-locate and classify. That is one of the key capabilities for Growler air cruisers to understand the environment in which they are flying. There are also other emitters out there in our training capability that can be affected by jamming, which is what we plan to do up in the Northern Territory, where it is relatively unfettered by any spectrum – that is, licensing or other urban encroachment issues in the electromagnetic spectrum. Basically it is core business of Growler to understand what is out there in the battle space, and then – depending on tactics, techniques and procedures – to emit certain frequencies and jamming techniques to influence that environment.¹⁰

3.16 The Committee heard that the MTTES component of the works would be necessary irrespective of the new aircraft, as this upgrade in capability was originally required for the Super Hornets.¹¹

3.17 Given that the United States is currently the sole owner and operator of the Growler aircraft, the Committee asked if elements of the project were influenced by United States' requirements. Defence responded:

There are classified security requirements that are placed upon us by the [United States] to protect these sensitive capabilities that are embodied in the Growler, and they involve physical process and personnel and procedures. There are also international trade in arms regulations that apply to this equipment.¹²

3.18 The Committee is satisfied that the need for the work exists.

Options considered

3.19 Defence has considered a number of options including the adaptive reuse of existing facilities and the construction of new facilities at the three locations.¹³

10 Group Captain Timothy Churchill, Defence, transcript of evidence, 4 November 2015, p. 5.

11 Group Captain Timothy Churchill, Defence, transcript of evidence, 4 November 2015, pp. 5-6.

12 Group Captain Timothy Churchill, Defence, transcript of evidence, 4 November 2015, p. 5.

13 Defence, submission 1, p. 5.

RAAF Base Amberley

- 3.20 Adaptively reusing existing 6SQN facilities was not considered to be a feasible option as the existing facilities do not provide the appropriate level of functionality or security. Consequently, Defence's preferred option is to construct new facilities.¹⁴
- 3.21 The following preferred options have also been identified:
- extending the existing aircraft simulator facility;
 - constructing a new two-storey building for the Air Combat Electronic Attack System Program Office;
 - constructing a new multi-storey car park;
 - adaptively reusing the existing Super Hornet warehouse;
 - constructing an aircraft apron, ground support equipment shelters and in-ground hydrant refuelling system to supplement existing facilities; and
 - constructing two new aircraft shelters in addition to three existing aircraft shelters.¹⁵

Army Aviation Centre Oakey

- 3.22 The adaptive reuse of existing facilities is the preferred option, as existing facilities are available and suitable for requirements.¹⁶

Delamere Air Weapons Range

- 3.23 Many of the existing facilities have deteriorated and no longer meet current building standards or functional requirements. Consequently, Defence has determined that they are not suitable for reuse.¹⁷
- 3.24 The preferred option is to construct new facilities within Delamere's existing entry and relocate all supporting capabilities and infrastructure. MTTES emitter sites and associated access roads will also be provided.¹⁸
- 3.25 An element of overlap exists between this project and a separate project proposed for Delamare. See Chapter 4.
- 3.26 The Committee found that Defence has considered available options to deliver the project and has selected the most suitable option.

14 Defence, submission 1, p. 6.

15 Defence, submission 1, p. 6.

16 Defence, submission 1, p. 7.

17 Defence, submission 1, p. 7.

18 Defence, submission 1, p. 7.

Scope of the works

3.27 Defence has separated the works into 13 scope elements, which are listed below.¹⁹

RAAF Base Amberley

1. construction of new, purpose built facilities for 6SQN;
2. construction of new, purpose built facilities for the storage and preparation of the electronic attack pods;
3. 1SQN internal refurbishment;
4. flight line and ground support equipment shelters;
5. construction of new, purpose built aircraft apron;
6. in-ground aircraft hydrant refuelling system;
7. construction of new, purpose built facilities for the Air Combat Electronic Attack System Program Office;
8. refurbishment of a warehouse to provide suitable logistics for the Super Hornet and Growler capabilities;
9. construction of new, purpose built facilities for additional Growler aircraft simulator requirements; and
10. construction of new, purpose built multi-storey car parking facilities; and
11. upgrades to base services and infrastructure.²⁰

Army Aviation Centre Oakey

12. adaptive reuse of two existing buildings at Army Aviation Centre Oakey , including:
 - office working accommodation and amenities for 15 personnel;
 - covered parking for six vehicles;
 - covered parking for six trailers; and
 - a vehicle electronics workshop.

Delamere Air Weapons Range

13. construction of new, purpose built facilities at Delamere to support the training of the Growler capability, including:
 - a Range Operations Centre;
 - living accommodation;

¹⁹ Defence, submission 1, p. 17.

²⁰ Defence, submission 1, pp. 17-23.

- a MTTES maintenance workshop;
 - a MTTES vehicle shelter;
 - Authentic Defence Radar System storage and emitter shelters;
 - A vehicle wash bay and loading ramp; and
 - MTTES emitter sites and access roads.²¹
- 3.28 At the public hearing, Defence explained that emitters operating in remote areas will rely on satellite capability for communication and to record events.²²

Transport and car parking

- 3.29 During the site inspection, the Committee noted the dispersed nature of car parking at RAAF Base Amberley. At the public hearing, the Committee noted that the increase in personnel numbers forecast for RAAF Base Amberley warranted the need for a multi-storey car park. Nevertheless, the Committee expressed concern that it might be under-utilised, with personnel continuing to park at various locations on base in order to be close to worksites.

- 3.30 Defence responded to these concerns:

As we all saw yesterday, the current availability of on-grade car parking is inadequate for that central part of the base at the moment. I think that is acknowledged, and that is driven by the rather ad hoc parking patterns in that area because of the lack of available on-grade parking. As the brigadier has touched upon, the multi-level car park will replace current on-grade car parking and provide additional car parking capacity for the additional people.

Once that multi-level car park is constructed and opened, the parking requirements for those personnel working in that base will be enforced, so there is a purpose-built facility with adequate spaces to park a car. Our base leadership will enact more strict parking requirements around that area. For those members who do not abide by that requirement the necessary action will be taken against them to ensure that they follow and park their vehicles in the appropriate car parking spaces. Once that car parking is provided, a stricter regime can then be enforced for the base.²³

21 Defence, submission 1, pp. 23-24.

22 Group Captain Timothy Churchill, Defence, transcript of evidence, 4 November 2015, p. 5.

23 Air Commodore Scott Winchester, Defence, transcript of evidence, 4 November 2015, p. 11.

- 3.31 Additionally, the Committee noted that there were no public transport options between RAAF Base Amberley and Ipswich town centre. The Committee queried if there were any plans for a public transport system to be developed, given that RAAF Base Amberley employs a large number of local residents. Defence responded:

For the last 15 or 20 years there has been a deliberate decision to, on the whole...[have] the Defence Housing Authority provide [housing] within the broader community. For RAAF Base Amberley, there are houses throughout Ipswich and Springfield. Some members, including me, live in Brisbane and travel out to the base. We are dispersed. A public transport solution would be difficult to achieve because of the dispersed nature of Defence personnel around the broader community, either in their Defence provided residences or their own private residences – some people rent their own houses. There is no critical mass of houses.

- 3.32 Defence stressed the importance of the 24/7 cycle that the base operates on and how this impacts on transport needs of base personnel:

There are shift workers...You are not looking at an eight-to-five cycle all the time. Trying to devise a viable public transport solution to meet the needs of shift workers and a base population that is dispersed in the broader community would be very challenging. In addition to that, as you have seen, the base is quite dispersed, so having security cleared buses coming onto the base, again, is another factor that will need to be factored into that. Suffice to say, the vast majority of people will elect to make their own way to the base to meet their own shift requirements and personal requirements and then return to the home residence based on that.²⁴

Project delivery

- 3.33 Subject to Parliamentary approval of the project, construction at RAAF Base Amberley and Army Aviation Centre Oakey is expected to be delivered in two phases in order to align with the available funding for the project.²⁵
- 3.34 The first phase will commence in the first half of 2016, and will be complete by the end of 2017. It will deliver all facilities to meet the Growler's Initial Operating Capability.²⁶

24 Air Commodore Scott Winchester, Defence, transcript of evidence, 4 November 2015, p. 12.

25 Defence, submission 1, p. 38.

26 Defence, submission 1, p. 38.

- 3.35 The second phase is expected to commence in the second half of 2020, and will be complete by mid-2021. It will deliver all facilities to meet the Growler's Final Operating Capability.²⁷
- 3.36 At the public hearing the Committee noted that the first Growler aircraft is scheduled to be delivered before the project's initial phase has been completed. Defence assured the Committee that the aircraft will be stored in existing shelters until completion of the first phase, but noted these structures were unable to house all 12 aircraft in the long-term.²⁸
- 3.37 Subject to the separate Parliamentary approval of the Delamere Air Weapons Range Redevelopment Project, Northern Territory (see Chapter 4), construction at Delamere is expected to commence in the first half of 2016 with construction completed by the first half of 2018.²⁹
- 3.38 The Committee finds that the proposed scope of works is suitable for the works to meet its purpose.

Environmental considerations

- 3.39 A site assessment at Delamere identified two threatened species of birds, the Gouldian Finch and the Crested Shrike-tit.³⁰ Two emitter sites were moved to alternate sites due to the presence of Gouldian Finch habitats.³¹
- 3.40 At the public hearing, the Committee queried what steps Defence had in place to monitor the birds. Defence's Project Manager advised that, during the construction phase, bird spotters would be engaged to ensure the birds' continued safety.³²

Community consultation

- 3.41 In accordance with its community consultation and communications strategy, Defence undertook the following consultative activities:
- detailed email correspondence with local groups and State and Federal members, with individual briefings conducted where requested;
 - notices in the local newspapers providing information on opportunities for the public to comment on issues relating to the project; and
 - a public consultation session held on 14 October 2015.³³

27 Defence, submission 1, p. 38.

28 Group Captain Timothy Churchill, Defence, transcript of evidence, 4 November 2015, p. 2.

29 Defence, submission 1, p. 38.

30 Defence, submission 1, p. 10.

31 Defence, submission 1, p. 17.

32 Mr Lindsay Murray, Defence, transcript of evidence, 4 November 2015, p. 6.

33 Defence, submission 1.2, pp. 1-13.

- 3.42 At the public consultation session, Defence responded to a number of issues, including questions from potential contractors about the tendering process and trade packages. An overview of this process and the procurement methodology was presented and further queries directed to the Managing Contractor.³⁴

Cost of the works

- 3.43 The estimated cost of the project is \$348.6 million, excluding GST.
- 3.44 At the public hearing, the Committee sought assurances that construction of the new aircraft apron would achieve best value for money. The Managing Contractor's representative stated:
- In determining that we are going to deliver it at the best value level, prior to going out to tender and as part of our development of our costs, we get market pricing. We generally go out to two or three providers in the marketplace so that we get contemporary pricing on the work and, in addition to that, we will do benchmarking against other projects. We have undertaken this for this project...³⁵
- 3.45 During the in-camera hearing, the Committee sought assurances that the phased approach to project delivery would not increase project costs unreasonably. Defence provided evidence and the Committee was subsequently satisfied.
- 3.46 Defence provided further detail on the project costs in the confidential submission and during the in-camera hearing.
- 3.47 The Committee considers that the cost estimates for the project have been adequately assessed by Defence and the Committee is satisfied that the proposed expenditure is cost effective. As the project will not be revenue generating, the Committee makes no comment in relation to this matter.

Committee comments

- 3.48 The Committee did not identify any issues of concern with Defence's proposal and is satisfied that the project has merit in terms of need, scope and cost.

34 Defence, submission 1.2, p. 14.

35 Mr Brendan Sowry, Lend Lease, transcript of evidence, 4 November 2015, pp 7-8.

- 3.49 Having regard to its role and responsibilities contained in the *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, the Committee is of the view that this project signifies value for money for the Commonwealth and constitutes a project which is fit for purpose, having regard to the established need.

Recommendation 2

- 3.50 **The Committee recommends that the House of Representatives resolve, pursuant to Section 18(7) of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, that it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work: Growler Airborne Electronic Attack Capability Facilities Project.**
- 3.51 Due to the scale and phased approach of the project, the Committee requires Defence to provide it with a mid-term status report on completion of phase one.

Recommendation 3

- 3.52 **The Committee requires the Department of Defence to provide a mid-term status report on completion of the first phase of the project which is to deliver facilities to meet the EA-18G Growler aircraft initial operating capability.**
- 3.53 Proponent agencies must notify the Committee of any changes to the project scope, time, cost, function or design. The Committee also requires that a post-implementation report be provided within three months of project completion. A report template can be found on the Committee's website.