



Royal Australian Armoured Corps Association (NSW)

Submission to the Senate Inquiry

Management of Defence Estate Assets

Royal Australian Armoured Corps Association (NSW Branch)

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Executive Summary

The Royal Australian Armoured Corps Association (NSW Branch) submits that the proposed divestment of **Lancer Barracks, Parramatta** poses a direct and unacceptable risk to:

- Army Reserve armoured capability in New South Wales, particularly the 1st/15th Royal New South Wales Lancers
- ADF mobilisation capacity in the geographic centre of Sydney
- Recruiting, retention and training pathways for RAAC and Army
- Cadet development and future ADF recruiting
- Heritage, commemoration and RAAC identity
- Interagency emergency response capability in Western Sydney
- The remaining Defence footprint in Western Sydney, already diminished by the proposed closure of Timor Barracks

Lancer Barracks is not surplus land. It is a functioning Defence asset supporting **100–150 Reservists, 100–150 Cadets**, a **Sydney University Regiment detachment**, the **Parramatta Defence Recruiting Office**, and the **Royal NSW Lancers Museum & Association**, a nationally significant RAAC heritage institution.

Divestment would degrade capability, sever a 135-year regimental connection, and remove the only Defence presence in central/western Sydney. The risks materially outweigh any short-term financial return.

This submission has been prepared with the direct involvement of **Major General Michael Krause AM** and **Brigadier Phillip Bridie AM ADC**, both members of the RAACA(NSW) Executive.

1. About the RAACA (NSW Branch)

The Royal Australian Armoured Corps Association (NSW Branch) represents serving and former members of the RAAC across New South Wales.

Our mission is to:

- Support RAAC soldiers, veterans and families
- Preserve RAAC heritage and identity
- Advocate for the capability and welfare of RAAC units
- Maintain the historical continuity of armoured service in NSW

Lancer Barracks is central to RAAC identity in NSW and has been the home of the 1st/15th Royal NSW Lancers for approximately **135 years**.

2. Importance of Lancer Barracks to RAAC Capability

2.1 Home of the 1st/15th Royal NSW Lancers

Lancer Barracks provides:

- Regimental Headquarters
- Squadron elements
- Secure training, administration and mobilisation infrastructure
- Public transport access essential for Reserve service
- A central location for Western Sydney's large recruiting base

Travel to the proposed alternative location at Holsworthy Barracks is typically **45–90 minutes** each way in peak periods, depending on origin — a significant additional burden for Army Reserve personnel weeknight parading. In addition, historical evidence shows that when Reserve units are moved too far from their catchment, **soldier numbers collapse**, and regeneration takes **years**, if it occurs at all.

This risk is amplified by the proposed closure of **Timor Barracks**, which would leave only **Blacktown Depot** as the remaining Army Reserve presence in Western Sydney.

2.2 Reserve recruiting and catchment viability

Army Reservists join **units and depots**, not Corps.

Their viability depends on:

- A large, accessible **recruit catchment area**
- Proximity to home, work and study
- Public transport access

- Predictable Tuesday night parading

Defence assumptions that Reservists can simply “parade at Holsworthy” are **strategically unrealistic** and contradicted by decades of experience.

3. Impact on Lodger Units and Defence Pathways

3.1 Sydney University Regiment (SUR) Detachment

SUR provides officer training and leadership development.

Its presence at Lancer Barracks:

- Supports RAAC officer pathways
- Provides a central, accessible location for university students
- Strengthens Army’s leadership pipeline

Relocation to Holsworthy would significantly reduce participation, particularly for students reliant on public transport.

3.2 203 Regional Cadet Unit (RCU)

203 RCU comprises **100–150 Cadets**, many of whom later join the ADF.

Cadets require secure storage, parade grounds, classrooms and safe training environments.

A “school hall” or community venue cannot provide these.

Loss of 203 RCU would weaken ADF recruiting in Western Sydney.

3.3 ADF Recruiting – the visibility factor

Lancer Barracks directly supports the **Parramatta Defence Recruiting Office**, a key ADF recruiting presence in Sydney’s geographic centre.

Its loss would:

- Reduce Defence’s visibility in Western Sydney
- Limit access for potential recruits
- Undermine RAAC and Army recruiting pipelines

As noted by one of the RAACA(NSW) Executive: “Lancer Barracks is a very visible Defence establishment in the centre of Parramatta. It is seen and attracts attention. Holsworthy is well out of Liverpool and is not visible. Without misquoting the Minister too much — you can’t be what you can’t see.”

Permanent, visible Defence presence is one of the strongest recruiting tools available. Removing Defence from Parramatta would significantly reduce Army Reserve and RAAC recruiting.

4. Heritage, Identity and RAAC Continuity

Lancer Barracks is the **oldest continuously occupied military site in mainland Australia** and the historic home of RAAC in NSW.

It contains:

- Two Commonwealth Heritage Listings
- The Royal NSW Lancers Museum & Association (6,000+ artefacts, rare armoured vehicles, regimental archives, historic vehicle troop)
- A consecrated memorial space, including ashes of former members
- 206 years of continuous military occupation

Divestment would sever RAAC's physical and cultural continuity, fragment collections, and risk permanent loss of heritage capability.

4.1 Site ownership and implications

Lancer Barracks was **transferred**, not sold, from NSW to the Commonwealth following Federation under the constitutional transfer of Defence powers (s. 69 of the Constitution). It was NSW Crown Land under **Crown Grant Vol 14337 Fol 144**, transferred for Defence purposes.

This means:

- The Commonwealth did not acquire the site as a commercial asset
- It holds the land **in trust for Defence purposes**, not for disposal
- Disposal contradicts the basis of the original transfer
- Financial return cannot be used as the primary justification for divestment

This strengthens the argument that Lancer Barracks should be **retained**.

5. Mobilisation, Emergency Response and Interagency Operations

Lancer Barracks has repeatedly served as a reception, staging and operating location for:

- Bushfire and flood response
- COVID-19 operations
- Counter-terrorism training

- Police emergency accommodation
- Sydney 2000 Olympic Games security

5.1 Example: Holsworthy flooding (March 2022)

In early March 2022, **Holsworthy Barracks was severely impacted by flooding**, requiring support operations to be managed from alternative locations.

During this period, **Lancer Barracks served as a key military base in Western Sydney**, providing operational backup and support during emergency response scenarios.

This demonstrates the strategic necessity of maintaining **multiple Defence sites** across Sydney, not consolidating them into a single vulnerable location.

6. Issues

The RAACA(NSW) believe:

- Concerns raised by senior Defence members were not incorporated into the Defence Estate Review
- The assumption that Reservists can parade at Holsworthy is **strategically unrealistic**
- Army's position is that **no unit should move until a viable alternative exists**—none has been identified for Lancer Barracks
- Divestment contradicts the ADF Reserves Review, which calls for **Reserve expansion**

6.1 Historical examples of Reserve decline after relocation

- **5 Brigade consolidation (2004)**: Units moved to Holsworthy rapidly lost soldiers; HQ 4/3 Royal NSW Regiment had to relocate to Sutherland due to insufficient catchment.
- **Allara Street Depot, Canberra**: When units were moved to HMAS Harman, Reservist numbers collapsed — students and north-side members would not travel.
- **Melbourne University Regiment**: Relocation away from campus would severely reduce officer cadet participation.
- **Tasmania**: Closure of the only live-fire range would require interstate travel, limiting Reserve training and mobilisation.

These examples demonstrate that relocation beyond local catchment areas leads to **unit decline or collapse**, with regeneration taking **many years**.

7. Compliance with Inquiry Terms of Reference

This submission addresses all Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into the Management of Defence Estate Assets:

1. **Alignment with Defence capability needs** – Sections 2, 3, 5
 2. **Estate planning and disposal processes** – Sections 2, 5
 3. **Requirements of permanent, Reserve and Cadet forces** – Sections 2, 3
 4. **Financial assumptions underpinning divestment** – Sections 3.3, 4
 5. **Heritage significance and protection** – Sections 4, 3.2
 6. **Validity and conduct of the Defence Estate Audit** – Section 6
 7. **Policy framework for surplus Defence land** – Executive Summary, Sections 2–4
 8. **Other relevant matters** – Sections 3.1–3.6, 5–6
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8. Recommendations

The RAACA(NSW) respectfully recommends that the Committee:

8.1 Exclude Lancer Barracks from the Defence Estate divestment program

Recognise its ongoing operational, heritage, mobilisation and community value.

8.2 Formally recognise Lancer Barracks as a strategic RAAC and Defence asset

Not surplus land.

8.3 Ensure no divestment occurs without a viable, funded, practical alternative

Including for:

- 1/15 RNSWL
- SUR detachment
- 203 RCU
- ADF Recruiting
- The Royal NSW Lancers Museum & Association

No such alternative currently exists.

8.4 Protect RAAC heritage and memorial continuity

Ensure that heritage, memorial and identity elements are preserved **in situ**.

8.5 Require Defence to consult formally with RAACA(NSW)

Alongside the Regiment, the Museum & Association, veterans' groups and local government.

8.6 Recognise that divestment would not represent value for money

The long-term capability, heritage and community losses far outweigh any short-term financial return.

Conclusion

Lancer Barracks is a cornerstone of RAAC identity, capability and heritage in NSW. Its divestment would:

- Degrade Army Reserve armoured capability
- Undermine mobilisation and emergency response capacity
- Sever a 135-year regimental connection
- Displace Cadets, officer trainees and recruits
- Destroy irreplaceable RAAC heritage
- Remove Defence from the geographic centre of Sydney
- Further erode the shrinking Western Sydney Defence footprint

The RAACA(NSW) urges the Committee to recommend that Lancer Barracks be **retained**, protected and recognised as a strategic Defence asset essential to the RAAC, the ADF and the Australian community.