



**Hume City Council Submission to the Parliamentary Standing
Committee on Public Works**

**Proposed Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation Project,
Broadmeadows, Victoria**

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Hume City Council is writing this submission to express its concerns regarding the proposed \$29M Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA) Project.
- 1.2 Council's primary concerns which are detailed further in this submission are around the significant change of use of the facility from how it currently operates and the complete lack of consultation with Council and the local community.
- 1.3 Council and the community have not been formally advised of what is being proposed by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, or what the potential impacts of the change will have on the local community.
- 1.4 Given Council's and the local community's long-term and well-publicised position that a Detention Centre should never be built on this site, it is of great concern that the Federal Government has not formally notified Council or the local community of its plans to expand/redevelop the site and change its status to an Immigration Detention Centre to detain high-risk/extreme risk detainees.
- 1.5 Council also questions the timing of the release of the proposal and deadline for submissions. The proposal was released on 1 December and submissions were initially due by 19 January. This is over the holiday period when many people are away and community organisations are closed. This timing coupled with the fact that no consultation has been undertaken with the local community for such a significant change, is not considered fair or appropriate.

- 1.6 While this submission formally outlines Council's concerns with the proposal, given the limited information available on the plans for the site, Council seeks an urgent meeting with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection to understand what the Department considers to be a high-risk/extreme-risk detainee, how many will be detained at the site and for how long, and what measures will be taken to secure such a site.
- 1.7 Council will also write to the members of the Standing Committee on Public Works, expressing its concerns with the proposed development and the lack of consultation, given the significance of the issue and request that a public hearing be held in Broadmeadows to enable the local community's voice to be heard.

2.0 Stated Purpose of the Proposed Work and Suitability

- 2.1 The MITA is located within an industrial/business precinct and only 450m away from local residential areas.
- 2.2 The current MITA currently accommodates low-risk detainees which Council has understood were for short-term stays.
- 2.3 Changing its status to accommodate up to 140 high-risk/extreme-risk detainees raises a number of concerns for Council that may have been better understood if the Department had sought to consult Council and the local community.
- 2.4 In addition, the proposal by the Department leaves a range of key questions unanswered, including:
 - Will the amenity of the local area be impacted as a result of this proposed change?
 - How will the site be managed to ensure the local community (business and residents) is protected?
 - How will the safety of low-risk detainees (some of them women) be managed to ensure their ongoing safety?
 - How will the existing facilities proposed by the Department to be accessed/shared by both low-risk and high-risk detainees be managed to ensure the ongoing safety of all residents?

- Will low-risk detainees still be able to access the services currently being delivered by Council and local community service organisations? For example, Council's maternal and child health nurses provide services to women at the MITA. Will this still continue and how will the Department ensure the safety of Council and local community service organisation staff?
- Will low-risk detainees still be held at the site, or is the intention for the site to ultimately only accommodate high-risk/extreme-risk detainees?

2.5 It is obvious from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection submission that a significant amount of design and planning work has already been completed, without any information or advice to the local community or Council on this significant issue.

2.6 The submission by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection suggests that key stakeholders have been consulted in order to inform the design and development of the MITA, and yet Hume City Council or the local community have not been included in this consultation.

2.7 There has been an ongoing concern expressed, which has been further confirmed, about the failure of the Federal Government to consult with the local community about this site – it seems that nothing has changed.

2.8 Council is also concerned that the submission prepared by the Department is not truly reflective of the voices of the local community.

2.9 The Department of Immigration and Border Protection suggests that "The City of Hume supports the presence of the MITA within its local authority". This statement is NOT reflective of Council's position.

2.10 Council has strongly advocated against a Detention Centre in Broadmeadows which started with the Council's 'links not locks' campaign in 2005.

2.11 Council and the local community have long held the view that:

- the land should be used for economic development and employment opportunities, not detention, given its strategic position; and

- investment by the Federal Government should be spent on community facilities and services to strengthen and link the local community and support those who are being released from detention into the community.

2.12 The location of a detention centre in the municipality is not consistent with Hume City's view that everyone who lives in the municipality should have the opportunity to live life to their full potential.

2.13 The local community strongly believes there are better ways to use this land which could deliver significant employment and social benefits.

3.0 The current and prospective public value of the work

3.1 Hume City Council has long held the view that the land being used for the MITA would provide far greater benefits to the local economy if it was used for business and industry, given the site is located in Melbourne's most significant manufacturing and freight logistics corridors. With links to Melbourne Airport and key freight networks, the location provides an opportunity to strengthen both the local and state economy through the creation of additional jobs.

3.2 While it could be argued that for humanitarian reasons a Detention Centre is inappropriate anywhere, it is certainly inappropriate and a strategically ineffective and inefficient use of this valuable land.

3.3 A previous study commissioned by Hume City Council and prepared by SGS Economics and Planning found that the site has the potential to create 3,950 direct and indirect jobs locally in Hume. The same study found that if the site was developed for hi-tech industry it could lead to a total of approximately 8,000 indirect and direct jobs.

3.4 While it is acknowledged that the proposed Detention Centre will create additional jobs throughout the construction phase and the additional staffing required to manage the new facility, the numbers of jobs created would not equate to what could be realised if the land were used for industry/business.

- 3.5 If the Detention Centre development was to proceed, Council would request that the Government consider what opportunities there are for local businesses and /or residents to be involved in either the construction or ongoing operations of the facility given the need for job creation in the local area.

4.0 Concluding Comments

- 4.1 Hume City Council is not satisfied with the process being undertaken to change the status of the Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation to an Immigration Detention Centre. This use is not consistent with the aspirations of the community and stated position of Council.
- 4.2 As a minimum Council expects the Committee to hold a public hearing in Broadmeadows to enable the local community to have a voice on this significant issue.