

Introduction

Referral of Work

- 1.1 On 11 May 2005 the proposal to upgrade patrol boat facilities at Darwin Naval Base (DNB), Darwin, NT, was referred to the Public Works Committee for consideration and report to the Parliament 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 estimated outturn cost of the proposed works was \$19.17 million. She reported that, subject to parliamentary approval, construction could commence in early 2006 and be completed by December 2006.

Background

- 1.3 The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) currently operates 15 FREMANTLE Class Patrol Boats, ten of which are homeported in Darwin. These vessels

¹ Extract from the *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives*, No. 28, Wednesday 11 May 2005

have exceeded their design life by six years and are to be phased out of service from April 2005.

- 1.4 In October 2002 the Government approved the acquisition of a replacement patrol boat capability. A contract for the supply of 12 ARMIDALE Class Patrol Boats (ACPBs) was signed in December 2003, and the purchase of two additional ACPBs was announced in September 2004. It is proposed that eight of the 14 new vessels will be homeported in Darwin.²
- 1.5 At the public hearing of 19 July, a spokesperson for Defence informed the Committee that Darwin Naval Base was renamed HMAS *Coonawarra* in May 2005.³

Location

- 1.6 The site of the proposed works is HMAS *Coonawarra*, which is located within Larrakeyah Barracks, some two kilometres west of the Darwin CBD.⁴

Inquiry Process

- 1.7 The Committee is required by the Act to consider public works over \$6 million⁵ 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.⁶
- 1.8 The Committee called for submissions by advertising the inquiry in the *Northern Territory News* on Monday, 30 May 2005. The Committee also

2 Appendix C, Submission No. 1 from the Department of Defence, paragraphs 4 - 6 and 11

3 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 2

4 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 28

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

6 *ibid*, Section 17

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.

Public Hearing

- 1.9 On Tuesday, 19 July 2005 the Committee visited HMAS Coonawarra and inspected at first hand the scope and environs of the proposed works. Later that day, the Committee received a commercial-in-confidence briefing on project costs from Defence, and held a public hearing at the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, Darwin.⁷

⁷ See Appendix D for the official Hansard transcript of the evidence taken by the Committee at the public hearing held on Tuesday, 19 July 2005 in Darwin

