

Issues and Conclusions

Occupational Health and Safety

- 3.1 Having inspected the facilities to be addressed under the works proposal, Committee members were concerned to ensure that OH&S requirements would be met across the entire base.
- 3.2 At the public hearing, Defence assured the Committee that, although the current project would address only those areas identified in the works proposal,

“Other issues within the base will be handled by ongoing management initiatives and by the use of other funding streams, such as the facilities operations funding stream which is used for funding minor internal works specific to individual buildings.”¹
- 3.3 The Base Commander explained further that RAAF Base Richmond has an extensive OH&S network through which funds are allocated to ensure that OH&S and BCA requirements are met across the base.²
- 3.4 The Committee inquired whether there had been any workplace injuries at the base resulting from deterioration of the working environment.

1 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 3

2 ib id

- 3.5 Defence replied that, while industrial accidents do occur at the base, none of these has resulted from overcrowding or poor standards.³

Fire Safety

- 3.6 The Committee wished to ensure that fire safety measures of an appropriate standard were established throughout the base, and not only in the areas to be addressed under the reinvestment project.
- 3.7 Defence reiterated that safety was of paramount importance at all RAAF bases. The Base Commander stated that RAAF Base Richmond has a sound fire safety record, and that the base has its own fire service.⁴

Comfort and Amenity

- 3.8 In considering the proposed facilities, the Committee noted that, in some instances, work areas and associated ablutions/meal areas are to be located in separate buildings. Members were concerned that the requirement to move between buildings may have negative implications for both the amenity and safety of personnel.
- 3.9 Defence responded that separate ablution blocks were common throughout the base. Defence added that in some cases, collocation of office and ablution facilities may pose a contamination risk, as the nature of the work requires that personnel wash down before entering office areas.⁵

3 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 5

4 *ib id*, p. 4

5 *ib id*, p. 9

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that, in order to improve the comfort and amenity of personnel, a covered walkway be provided between the existing Mechanical Equipment Operation and Maintenance Section fuel testing laboratory and the office building to be constructed under the reinvestment proposal.

Services Infrastructure

- 3.10 Considering that facilities at RAAF Base Richmond are ageing, the Committee wished to know whether existing services infrastructure, such as water, sewerage, electricity and communications, would have the capacity to support the proposed development. As the condition of much of the infrastructure is unknown, the Committee was concerned that additional expenditure may be required to adapt existing services to the requirements of the new facilities.
- 3.11 Defence replied that, as the proposed work is intended only to support current capability and to replace or refurbish existing facilities, the base working population will not increase. Therefore, no additional load on existing services is anticipated.⁶
- 3.12 Furthermore, Defence stated that:
- the design of the new facilities will incorporate the latest principles in ecologically sustainable development and will therefore reduce overall loads on essential service; and
 - in addressing some elements of services infrastructure, the proposed works will provide a clearer picture of the condition of utilities across the base.⁷

6 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 11

7 ib id, pp. 11 - 12

Environmental Issues

Asbestos

- 3.13 The Defence main submission mentioned that some structures at RAAF Base Richmond contain asbestos; specifically, the current MEOMS workshop facilities.⁸ The Committee asked Defence whether the condition of the workshop building was such that occupants might be at risk of inhaling asbestos particles.⁹
- 3.14 Defence witnesses explained that the asbestos building material does not present a health problem if undisturbed. They added that a survey of RAAF bases conducted in the mid 1990s had identified areas of asbestos contamination and that such areas had subsequently been remediated, or provided with cautionary signage.¹⁰
- 3.15 The Committee inquired whether there was any ongoing monitoring of asbestos-affected areas, to which defence responded that a two-yearly audit is carried out by the National Operations Division of the Corporate Services and Infrastructure Group. Defence added that the last audit of RAAF Base Richmond had taken place earlier in 2003.¹¹

Stormwater

- 3.16 Written and verbal evidence provided by the Hawkesbury City Council outlined the importance of stormwater management to the local community and welcomed the works proposed by Defence to improve stormwater drainage at RAAF Base Richmond.¹² This issue is of particular relevance given the base's location in the Hawkesbury water catchment area.¹³
- 3.17 The Committee was interested to know whether there had been any spillages or pollution leakages at the base that had threatened local water quality. Defence stated that environmental incidents had occurred, but that these had been contained by management systems and existing emergency procedures.¹⁴

8 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraphs 27 and 28

9 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 5

10 *ib id*, p. 6

11 *ib id*, p. 28

12 Submission No. 5, pp. 5 – 6 and Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 19

13 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p.19

14 *ib id*, p. 29

- 3.18 Defence added that it was aware of the importance of stormwater to local government and would seek to address the issue in a proactive manner under the proposed works.¹⁵

Heritage Issues

- 3.19 Written evidence supplied by Defence and the Australian Heritage Commission¹⁶ indicated that RAAF Base Richmond has been placed on the Interim List of the Register of the National Estate. This formal recognition of the base's heritage importance affords the site protection under the provisions of the *Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975*. Specifically, Ministers and Commonwealth Agencies may
- “not take any action likely to have an adverse effect on a place entered in the RNE or Interim List, unless there is no feasible and prudent alternative”.¹⁷
- 3.20 According to the submission of the Heritage Commission, construction of the proposed new MEOMS facility at RAAF Base Richmond will require the demolition of structures of individual heritage significance, namely three of the base's five Bellman hangars.¹⁸
- 3.21 Defence informed the Committee that it intends to continue consultation with the Australian Heritage Commission on this issue. The heritage values of the base will also be taken into consideration during the design phase of the proposed works.¹⁹

15 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p.29

16 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 7 and Submission No. 6

17 Submission No. 6, paragraph 2

18 ib id, paragraph 6

19 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 8

Consultation and Approvals

- 3.22 Defence's main submission listed a number of federal, state and local government bodies that may be consulted during the development of the RAAF Base Richmond reinvestment works.²⁰
- 3.23 The Committee wished to know whether the approval requirements of any of the authorities consulted might impact upon the project schedule. Defence responded that the only approval yet to be acquired was that of the federal parliament, through the processes of the Public Works Committee.²¹

Involvement of Local Businesses

- 3.24 Submissions forwarded to the Committee by Mr Kerry Bartlett MP, the Hawkesbury Economic Development Advisory Committee, the GROW Employment Council Incorporated and the Hawkesbury City Council acknowledged the potentially positive economic impact of the proposed works on the Hawkesbury region and emphasised the need to involve local small to medium enterprises in order to maximise these benefits.²²

Opportunity to Tender for Works

- 3.25 In written submissions, Defence expressed its commitment to promoting opportunities for local businesses, by dividing the project into several small works packages.²³ Further, Defence proposes to conduct briefings on the tendering process to assist local enterprises in bidding successfully for the works packages.²⁴

20 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 84

21 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 7

22 See Submissions No. 2, 3, 4 and 5

23 Submission No. 1, paragraph 85 and Submissions No. 7, 8, 10 and 11

24 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, pp. 17 and 28

Capacity of Local Industry

- 3.26 A witness from the Hawkesbury Economic Development Advisory Committee assured the Committee that the local construction industry has sufficient capacity to support the proposed works.²⁵

Living-in Accommodation

- 3.27 In his submission to the inquiry, Mr Kerry Bartlett MP described the transit and living-in accommodation at RAAF Base Richmond as being in need of refurbishment.²⁶

- 3.28 Although no accommodation element was included in the reinvestment proposal, the Committee concurred with Mr Bartlett's view that:

“...defence men and women give tremendous service to this country and they ought not be required to live or work in conditions that are below the standard of their civilian peers.”²⁷

- 3.29 The Committee was, therefore, interested to learn more about the state of on-base accommodation at Richmond and Defence's plans to address deficiencies in this area.

- 3.30 Defence explained that, while there was no immediate plan to construct or refurbish on-base accommodation at Richmond, a study is currently investigating priorities and requirements for Defence accommodation Australia-wide. Defence noted that related budget decisions would be a matter for Government.²⁸

Future of RAAF Base Richmond

- 3.31 As reported in Defence's main submission, the future of RAAF Base Richmond is not guaranteed beyond 2010. Although the long-term outlook of the base lies beyond the scope of the present works inquiry, the issue was raised by a number of witnesses.

25 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 23

26 Submission No. 2, section 4

27 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 30

28 ib id

- 3.32 Evidence supplied by Mr Kerry Bartlett MP, the Hawkesbury Economic Development Advisory Committee, the GROW Employment Council Incorporated and the Hawkesbury City Council highlighted the importance of RAAF Base Richmond, both economically and socially, to the Hawkesbury community.²⁹
- 3.33 In response to questions regarding the future of the base and the longevity of the proposed facilities, Defence stated that the works would have a design life of 25 years. Defence witnesses estimated that decommissioning of the base, including relocation of services and personnel, could take up to five years beyond the guaranteed date of 2010.³⁰
- 3.34 Whilst acknowledging the need for an upgrade of facilities at RAAF Base Richmond, the Committee was concerned to ensure that the proposed expenditure of \$35 million was appropriate in view of the uncertain future of the base. Defence stressed that the reinvestment was necessary to maintain operational capability at current levels at least until 2010, and to provide an acceptable working environment for personnel.³¹
- 3.35 Taking cognisance of the deteriorating state of base facilities and the importance of the base to the local community, the Committee formed the view that it would be preferable, from a public expenditure perspective, if a decision on the long-term future of the base could be reached soon.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that a decision on the long-term future of RAAF Base Richmond be made as soon as possible, to ensure the most effective use of public funds.

29 See Submission No. 2, sections 4 – 5 and Submissions No. 3, 4 and 5

30 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 4

31 *ib id*, p. 6

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the proposed RAAF Base Richmond reinvestment project at Richmond, NSW, proceed at the estimated cost of \$35 million.

Hon Judi Moylan MP

Chair

15 October 2003

