

Seaward decision this week

By LINDA CALLAGHAN

The man reviewing plans to sell part of the SAS Seaward Village at Swanbourne said he and his family once lived in army housing.

Retired Lieutenant General Mark Evans said he would make his decision about the redevelopment plan by the weekend, but it would take him time to write a report for the Minister.

"I will have made a decision by the end of the week," he said in Swanbourne on Monday.

"I have already had about 35 submissions from organisations and individuals."

Lieutenant General Evans was appointed by Assistant Defence Minister Darren Chester to a review the plan by the government business unit, Defence Housing Australia, because of increasing concern about security if part of the village next to Campbell Barracks were sold for private housing.

Liberal MP Andrew Hastie, a former SAS officer, met Lieutenant General Evans on Monday.

He said the plan could affect national security.

Lieutenant General Evans said he was familiar with the area.

"I lived in Kelmscott when I first moved to Australia," he said.

Curtin MP and Foreign Affairs Minister Julie Bishop met Lieutenant General Evans at the entrance to the village but refused to go farther in or be photographed with him near one of the houses because she said it would be an invasion of residents' privacy.

A former Sandhurst-trained member of the British Army, Lieutenant General Evans worked on counter-terrorism in Northern Ireland before moving to Australia and joining the army here.

"I tried out for the SAS but failed the test to get in," he said.

His review coincides with a second investigation ordered by the Senate into how DHA works.

Stephen Conroy, Deputy Leader of the Opposition in



Terrorism specialist Lieutenant General Mark Evans who is reviewing plans to redevelop Seaward Village at Swanbourne was in the area on Monday and said he knows the area from living in Perth.

the Senate, said a committee should be set up to look into the management and board of DHA.

The former managing director left at the end of last year and was replaced temporarily by a member of staff from the Treasury.

The former managing director was one of only two of the nine members with previous military service.

Senator Conroy wants the committee to examine if the operations comply with the DHA Act that handed the land and housing from Defence to the business unit DHA.

Lieutenant General Evans has until February 29 to report to Mr Chester.

The committee has until April 30 to report to the Senate.

A public meeting for Swanbourne residents was being held on Thursday evening.

Nedlands mayor Max Hipkins wrote to Lieutenant General Evans to tell him a group set up by the council said the plans had major flaws.

Mr Hastie told ABC presenter

Jane Marwick that he was throwing his weight behind the opposition to the plan.

He said Campbell Barracks had sensitive electronic and physical facilities that could be at risk.

He linked a land sale to the 99-year lease for Darwin port to a Chinese company.

"Who are we going to sell it [Seaward Village] to, are we going to have any controls in place?" he said.

He said he had spent six months away from his wife and family while serving overseas.

"One comfort you take is that they are being cared for and there is minimal disruption," he said.

He said the plan would mean children had to change schools.

Terry Nolan, a retired SAS brigadier and commander who is now president of the regimental association said: "The review was only called because of the public outrage.

"It is important people in Canberra know just how much opposition there is."