+EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
2003-2004 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome: 3
Output Group: 3.2 – Assistance for science collaboration and innovation

DEST Question No. E148_04

Senator Allison asked on 4 June 2003, EWRE Hansard page 383

Question:

The other, which is another issue which keeps being raised, is the one about the firing pads. I think you have indicated in the past that no fairly heavily contaminated firing pads, by all accounts, had been missed but, according to the report, they are not recorded in the project reports either.

Answer:

Contamination on Firing Pads

There is no evidence that the firing pads were significantly contaminated; in fact the reverse is true. Accordingly the firing pads were treated as a minor issue in the Maralinga Rehabilitation Technical Advisory Committee (MARTAC) report. Figures 3.7 and 3.8 of the MARTAC report show that the firing pads were almost totally (eg Vixen B1) or predominantly (eg Vixen B3) shielded from contamination by the feather bed structure.

The contamination on general debris from the pits, which included the firing pads, was measured during the Maralinga Rehabilitation Project (see Figure 3.11 and Table 4.17 of the MARTAC report), as was the contaminated soil in the excavated pits (see Table 4.17 of the MARTAC report). Any plutonium contamination on the large debris was included in the total for the plutonium contamination disposed of in the debris disposal trench.

Part 2 of the Hercules Report (referenced in Chapter 3 of the MARTAC report) describes the handling and burial of the firing pads in the Taranaki pits. Attachment 4.4 of the MARTAC report states that the Taranaki pits contained 63 cubic metres of large debris, sufficient to account for the approximately 32 cubic metres of firing pads after allowing for the 26 cubic metres of barytes bricks included in the 63 cubic metres total. Thiess describe the large debris wastes as “concrete footing” – a good functional description of the firing pads.