

RAAF Base Tindal Redevelopment Stage 5, Northern Territory

- 5.1 The RAAF Base Tindal Redevelopment Stage 5, Northern Territory (Tindal Stage 5) proposes to improve the facilities which support the overall capability of the base. The estimated cost of the project is \$58.7 million (excluding GST.)
- 5.2 The Tindal Stage 5 works proposal was referred to the Committee for inquiry on 19 March 2008.

Conduct of the inquiry

- 5.3 The inquiry was initially advertised in the *Northern Territory News* on 28 June 2007. The inquiry was readvertised in the *Katherine Times* on 26 March 2008 and the *Northern Territory News* on 29 March 2008. The Committee received one submission to the inquiry and one confidential supplementary submission detailing the project cost estimates. A list of submissions can be found at Appendix A.
- 5.4 The Committee undertook a site inspection, in-camera hearing and public hearing on 17 April 2008 in Katherine. A list of witnesses can be found at Appendix B.
- 5.5 The transcript of the public hearing as well as the submission to the inquiry are on the Committee's website.¹ Plans for the proposed works are detailed in Submission 1, Department of Defence (Defence).

1 <www.aph.gov.au/pwc>

Need for works

- 5.6 The Committee was advised that the proposed works would address existing limitations and deficiencies in base facilities following an increase in use of the Base. The project elements aim to improve quality to current industry standards, address occupational and health and safety risks, develop more usable facilities with appropriate security protection.²
- 5.7 The Committee recognises the need to maintain defence establishments to current industry and occupational regulatory requirements and ensure that facilities continue to be fit for their purpose and are safe and effective for Australian defence force personnel. The Committee finds that there is need for the proposed works and supports this redevelopment initiative.

Scope of works

- 5.8 The proposed scope of works are detailed in Submission 1, Department of Defence. The works consist of the following 12 project elements:³
- Security fence extension: extend the existing base security fence to enclose the explosive ordnance storage and preparation areas. approximately 7.2km of fencing is to be constructed;
 - Central emergency power station: supply and install an additional 1MW diesel generator in the emergency power station;
 - Ordnance loading apron water supply: reticulate mains water to the 75 Squadron aprons to replace the current reliance on tank water;
 - Liquid dry breathing oxygen facility: construct a covered area for two 7000L storage tanks, a drive through facility for off-loading liquid oxygen from road trains and a covered parking area for the trolleys and tow motors which handle the transfer of oxygen to the flightlines. Construct an evaporation pit, security fencing, security lighting, lightning protection and a light vehicle access road to connect the facility to the 75 Squadron precinct;

2 Submission 1, Department of Defence, p 3.

3 Submission 1, Department of Defence, p 3-6.

- Aircraft maintenance annexes: extend each annex, to rearrange some internal spaces and to construct new toilet, shower and locker facilities adjacent to each annex;
- Inflight and surge catering: construct a new facility for the preparation of meals for crew and passengers, operational sites personnel and a sit down dining area for operational staff. This element includes a central, common stores area, and separated kitchen areas for domestic and inflight preparation and distribution operations;
- Ordnance loading apron security: construct a security system comprising one fixed and two pan tilt zoom CCTV cameras with motion detection fitted to the roof of each of the ten ordnance loading aprons;
- Tanker maintenance and refuelling facilities: construct a tanker maintenance and tanker drivers' facility providing four fire separated maintenance bays, a small parts repair workshop, a store and a vehicle wash bay. A separate building will provide offices, training, amenities and change facilities;
- Fire station: upgrade fire facilities including two additional fire fighting vehicle bays, a stores area and a new change/toilets/laundry area. Construct a two metre wide awning on both sides of the existing vehicle bays to accommodate the new, larger fire trucks;
- Supply services warehouse: extend the existing warehouse to increase pallet racking space and to provide additional receipt and dispatch floor area. Refurbish office space, replace the carousel and refurbish and augment the warehouse fire protection system;
- Messing improvement: replace worn and obsolete equipment and undertake a general refurbishment of all finishes in the Airmen's, Sergeants' and Officers' messes; and
- Passenger terminal: expand both indoor and outdoor spaces in the current terminal. Enclose existing baggage collection space and relocate baggage collection to an outside, partially covered area.⁴

5.9 The Committee has assessed the scope of works and finds them suitable to improve the overall capability at RAAF Base Tindal.

4 Submission 1, Department of Defence, pp 8-10.

Cost of works

- 5.10 The total out-turn cost of this work is estimated to be \$58.7 million (excluding GST) which includes construction costs, management and design fees, internal fit-out, information and communication technology and contingency allowance.⁵
- 5.11 The Committee received detailed cost plans for the project and held an in-camera hearing with Defence on the full project costs.
- 5.12 The Committee is satisfied that the costings for the project are adequate and that suitable contingency planning is in place (including deferring non-essential works should there be budget over-runs in any area) to ensure the overall budget is not compromised.

Project issues

Consultations on the project

- 5.13 In addition to the local construction industry briefings for the four Northern Territory Defence referrals discussed in Chapter 6, Defence informed the Committee that they have ongoing consultations with the following bodies in relation to Tindal Stage 5:
- Northern Territory Department of Defence Support;
 - Northern Territory Department of Planning and Lands;
 - The Chamber of Commerce Northern Territory;
 - The Australian Industry and Defence Network in the Northern Territory;
 - The Member for Lingiari, the Hon Warren Snowdon MP;
 - The Member for Katherine (Northern Territory); and
 - The Katherine Town Council.⁶
- 5.14 The Committee notes that consultations have not taken place with the Northern Territory Departments of Business and Economic Development and Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage despite efforts to arrange a meeting by Defence.

5 Submission 1, Department of Defence, p 27.

6 Brig W Grice, Department of Defence, Proof Transcript of Evidence, 17 April 2008, p 5. A more expansive list of external authorities consulted by Defence for this project is located at Submission 1, Department of Defence, p 7.

- 5.15 The Committee considers that it is important for Defence to consult with all relevant external authorities, particularly Northern Territory Government Departments, and Defence should continue to ensure that necessary consultations are undertaken.

Local wallaby population

- 5.16 Recent environmental conditions in Northern Australia have led to a rapid increase in the wallaby population creating a hazard for both civilian and military aircraft at Tindal. In 2007, Defence were forced to cease all night flights due to the risk of aircraft hitting the animal. Medical rescue planes were also diverted following two collisions with wallabies.
- 5.17 Defence considers that media reports have exaggerated claims that the existing fence at RAAF Base Tindal was responsible for increasing the risk of aircraft collision with wallabies by trapping them on the base.⁷
- 5.18 Wing Commander Rohan Gaskill, RAAF Base Commander, advised the Committee:
- Last year on four occasions aircraft operating at Tindal did strike wallabies. A wallaby management program has been developed and is being implemented. That was in consultation with the RSPCA, a local vet and all the appropriate organisations. This has seen the removal of over 700 wallabies from inside the security fence using both lethal and nonlethal means.⁸
- 5.19 The Committee was concerned that the proposed security fence extension would be of the same design as the existing fence and may not adequately prevent the entry of wallabies.
- 5.20 The Committee heard that there had always been a population of wallabies at the Base and the fence did function to both restrict the entry of wallabies and trap wallabies held within. The Committee acknowledges that it is very difficult to eliminate the wallaby population within the Base because of the size of the property and the

7 M Cunningham, 'Mob of wallabies grounds RAAF Fighters', *Northern Territory News*, 25 January 2008. A Barker, 'Wallaby cull at NT Air Force base', *AM (Radio National)*, 29 March 2008.

8 Wing Cmdr Gaskill, Department of Defence, Proof Transcript of Evidence, 17 April 2008, p 8.

variety of locations for the animal to hide, such as spear grass and limestone caves.

- 5.21 The Committee is satisfied with the wallaby management plan at the Base and considers that the wallaby population does not pose a significant issue for the proposed extension of the perimeter fence. Further, Defence considers that it is now safe for the Northern Territory Department of Health to resume emergency medical evacuation flights to and from the Base.

Committee comment

- 5.22 Overall, the Committee is satisfied that this project has merit in terms of need, scope and cost. No other submissions were received raising issues with the proposed works. The Committee is therefore satisfied that there are no reasons to object to the work proceeding.
- 5.23 Having examined the purpose, need, use, revenue and public value of the work, the Committee considers that it is expedient that the proposed redevelopment at RAAF Base Tindal proceed.

Recommendation 7

- 5.24 **The Committee recommends that the House of Representatives, pursuant to Section 18 (7) of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, resolve that it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work: RAAF Base Tindal redevelopment Stage 5, Northern Territory.**