

Developments at Robertson Barracks, Northern Territory

- 4.1 The following developments at a total estimated out-turn cost of \$72.126 million (excluding GST) are proposed to be undertaken at the Robertson Barracks Army Base in Darwin, Northern Territory:
- Robertson Barracks Redevelopment (estimated \$30.198m);
 - Robertson Replacement Tank Facilities, including minor works at Mount Bundy Training Area (estimated \$6.715m); and
 - Hardened and Networked Army (estimated \$35.213m.)
- 4.2 The proposal was originally referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works (PWC) of the 41st Parliament on 21 June 2007. The inquiry lapsed with the dissolution of the 41st Parliament on 17 October 2007. The proposal was referred to the PWC of the 42nd Parliament for inquiry on 13 March 2008.

Conduct of the inquiry

- 4.3 The inquiry was initially advertised in the *Northern Territory News* on 30 June 2007 and in *The Australian* on 4 July 2007. The inquiry was readvertised in the *Northern Territory News* on 29 March 2008. The Committee received 13 submissions and two supplementary submissions, including a confidential supplementary submission regarding the project costs. A list of submissions can be found at Appendix A.

- 4.4 The Committee undertook a site inspection, in-camera hearing and public hearing (including a community statement session) on 16 April 2008 in Darwin. A list of witnesses can be found at Appendix B.
- 4.5 The transcript of the public hearing as well as all submissions to the inquiry are available on the Committee's website¹. Plans for the proposed works are detailed in Submission 1, Department of Defence (Defence) also available on the Committee's website.

Need for works

- 4.6 The Committee was advised that the proposed works support the operations of units based at Robertson Barracks and will:
- rectify deficiencies in working accommodation as part of the Robertson Barracks Redevelopment;
 - provide facilities to support the operation and maintenance of new tank capability as part of the Robertson Replacement Tank Facilities; and
 - provide the required facilities to support the Army's Hardened and Networked Army (HNA) initiative as outlined in Chapter 2 of this report.²
- 4.7 In assessing existing facilities, the Committee finds that there is need for the proposed redevelopment at Robertson Barracks and the Robertson Replacement Tank Facilities.
- 4.8 Further, and as stated previously in the report, the Committee supports the HNA initiative as part of the Army's response enhancing the nation's defensive capabilities in response to developments in the global security situation. The Committee finds that there is need for the proposed works to support this initiative at Robertson Barracks.

Scope of works

- 4.9 The proposed scope of works is detailed in Submission 1, Department of Defence.³ In short, the works propose the following:

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

2 Submission 1, Department of Defence, pp 1-2.

3 The submission is available on the Committee's website or by contacting the Committee Secretariat.

- Robertson Barracks Redevelopment: expansion of existing office and operational facilities to support the 1st Combat Signal Regiment, 1st Combat Service Support Battalion, 1st Troop Emergency Response Squadron Land Warfare Centre and the Australian Army Band – Darwin comprising office accommodation, vehicle and equipment storage, teaching and music rehearsal facilities, additional car parking, civil and services works and alteration to existing buildings;
- Robertson Replacement Tank Facilities at various sites within the base: three repair bays, ‘new vehicle shelter, office, ablutions and hardstand for parking and turning circles’ and upgrade of the range control tower at the Mount Bundy Training Area; and
- Hardened and Networked Army initiative: ablutions, working accommodation and offices, equipment storage facilities, vehicle hangars and car parking across the base to service six regiments and battalions and an upgrade of headquarters buildings for 1st Brigade.⁴

4.10 The Committee has assessed the scope of works and finds them suitable to provide the facilities necessary to meet the needs of Robertson Barracks and to implement the HNA initiative.

Cost of works

4.11 The total out-turn cost of this work is scheduled to be \$72.126 million (excluding GST) which includes construction costs, management and design fees and contingency allowance. Overall net personnel and operating costs are expected to increase by \$1.8m per annum.⁵

4.12 Costs for the three projects separately are:

- Robertson Barracks Redevelopment - \$30.198m (excl GST);
- Robertson Replacement Tank Facilities - \$6.715m (excl GST); and
- Hardened and Networked Army - \$35.213m (excl GST).

4.13 Defence stated that by combining all three projects, efficiencies are expected in project management and administration costs and through packaging similar works together.⁶

4 Submission 1, Department of Defence, p 9-12 outlines the scope of works in greater detail.

5 Submission 1, Department of Defence, p 19.

6 Submission 1, Department of Defence, p 19.

- 4.14 The Committee notes the foresight in undertaking the project this way, particularly as the Robertson Replacement Tank Facilities as a standalone project falls beneath the PWC threshold for inquiry.
- 4.15 The Committee received detailed cost plans for the project and held an in-camera hearing with Defence on the full project costs.
- 4.16 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

Community impact

- 4.17 The Committee received twelve submissions and heard from five individuals at a community statement session held as part of the public hearing on 16 April 2008 in Darwin. Residents were also represented at the public hearing by a member of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, Mr Gerry Wood MLA. The submissions and individuals all raised concerns about the impact of base-related traffic on local residential roads.⁷
- 4.18 Concerns include:
- increased traffic resulting in a reduction in pedestrian safety, particularly at peak hours;
 - an increase in traffic accidents, including one fatality resulting in some residents redefining property boundaries at some expense as a safety measure;
 - antisocial attitudes of drivers, including littering and inappropriate language towards young women; and
 - general disturbance of the peace by the volume, speed and noise of through traffic.⁸
- 4.19 The Committee heard that official military vehicles are banned from using the roads concerned but the base had no jurisdiction to prevent soldiers using the roads in their private vehicles. Residents claimed

7 Namely: Brandt, Stevens and Campbell Roads, Knuckey Lagoon, Northern Territory

8 Submissions 2-13; Community Statement Session, Transcript of Evidence, 16 April 2008, pp 11-22.

that the majority of the antisocial behaviour was from young men in uniform in private cars.⁹

- 4.20 The Committee acknowledges that the concerns of residents are serious. It also notes that the Robertson Barracks Base Commander, Brigadier Krause, shares the safety concerns of residents. At the hearing he stated:

There are also the safety aspects for my soldiers coming to and from work. I believe the situation at the moment is suboptimal for that as well – the safety not only of my own soldiers but also of the residents, as is evident through those submissions.¹⁰

- 4.21 Some residents objected to the base redevelopment citing concerns that an increase in personnel will lead to an increase in traffic. However, while base growth is expected under this proposal, with the relocation of 1 200 personnel of the 7 RAR Battle Group to South Australia in 2011, there will be no overall base population increase.¹¹

- 4.22 The Committee heard conflicting evidence and could not determine whether traffic increases were directly base related or not. While acknowledging the serious concerns of residents, the Committee does not believe there is sufficient evidence or justification for a cessation of growth at the base particularly in light of the significant contribution the Defence Force makes to the local economy.

- 4.23 Being local roads, the local council (at present Litchfield Shire¹²) has the responsibility for any upgrades. This Committee has no jurisdiction to compel action by the council. However, Defence indicated that it is keen for the matter to be resolved and to work with local residents to this end. Further, Defence informed the Committee that an offer of funding had been made in 2007 but no action was taken by the council and subsequently the funding lapsed.¹³

- 4.24 Clearly residents are frustrated about a perceived lack of communication and the seeming ‘fobbing off’¹⁴ of their concerns at

9 Submissions 2-13; Community Statement Session, Transcript of Evidence, 16 April 2008, pp 11-22; Brig M Krause, Proof Transcript of Evidence, 16 April 2008, p 6.

10 Brig M Krause, Proof Transcript of Evidence, 16 April 2008, p 6.

11 Brig M Krause, Proof Transcript of Evidence, 16 April 2008, p 8.

12 The Council is undergoing amalgamation and as such chose not to comment on this issue.

13 Brig W Grice, Proof Transcript of Evidence, 16 April 2008, p 8.

14 Trevor, Community Statement Session, Transcript of Evidence, 16 April 2008, p 20.

various levels of government. To this end, the Committee is recommending that Defence engage the relevant local council on this issue and actively inform residents of these negotiations.

Recommendation 5

- 4.25 **The Committee recommends that the Department of Defence facilitate discussions with the relevant local council and local government authorities to resolve the issue of traffic control in Knuckey Lagoon and actively engage local residents in this process.**

Committee comment

- 4.26 Overall, the Committee is satisfied that this project has merit in terms of need, scope and cost and it supports the capacity of the Defence Force to meet the growing needs of the Army.
- 4.27 Other than the community impact as detailed above, no significant concerns were raised in the Committee's examination of the proposed works.
- 4.28 Therefore, having examined the purpose, need, use, revenue and public value of the works, the Committee considers that it is expedient that the proposed works proceed.

Recommendation 6

- 4.29 **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 works: Robertson Barracks Redevelopment, Robertson Replacement Tank Facilities and Hardened and Networked Army Projects, Darwin, Northern Territory.**