



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC
WORKS

Reference: Robertson Barracks redevelopment, Darwin, Northern Territory

WEDNESDAY, 16 APRIL 2008

DARWIN

BY AUTHORITY OF THE PARLIAMENT

INTERNET

Hansard transcripts of public hearings are made available on the internet when authorised by the committee.

The internet address is:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard>

To search the parliamentary database, go to:

<http://parlinfoweb.aph.gov.au>

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Wednesday, 16 April 2008

Members: Mr Butler (*Chair*), Senator Troeth (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Mark Bishop and Forshaw and Mr Champion, Mr Forrest, Mr Hale, Mr Lindsay and Mr Slipper

Members in attendance: Senator Mark Bishop, Mr Butler, Mr Hale, Mr Lindsay and Mr Slipper

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Robertson Barracks redevelopment, Darwin, Northern Territory

WITNESSES

**F AEHSE, Mr Gary, Senior Associate and Project Manager/Contract Administrator, Woods
Bagot..... 2**

**GRICE, Brigadier William, Director General, Infrastructure Asset Development, Department of
Defence 2**

KRAUSE, Brigadier Michael, Commander 1st Brigade, Department of Defence..... 2

MAAS, Captain Ian, Project Officer, Department of Defence..... 2

ZENTELIS, Mr Rick, Director, Heritage and Biodiversity Conservation, Department of Defence 2

WOOD, Mr Gerry MLA, Member for Nelson, Northern Territory Legislative Assembly..... 11

Committee met at 3.32 pm

CHAIR (Mr Butler)—Welcome. I declare open this public hearing of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works inquiry into the proposed redevelopment of Robertson Barracks. In accordance with the standing orders that govern this committee, we earlier passed a resolution permitting the entry of the media into this public hearing. In accordance with those standing orders, if any witness objects to the media covering his or her evidence, they need to indicate that objection to the secretariat and we will deal with it. If we do not hear any objection, witnesses should be aware that media have been granted permission to cover these proceedings.

We will be receiving evidence from a group of witnesses from the Department of Defence and after that, scheduled for 4.15 pm, Mr Gerry Wood, a member of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory and the member for Nelson, is scheduled to give evidence. There have also been 12 written submissions from members of the public which, barring two, have been authorised for publication by this committee and are now on the public record. We have just received written submission No. 11 from Trish Gray and Michael Wright and No. 12 from Tim and Sandy Baldwin. Is it the wish of the committee those submissions be accepted as evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered. So there are now 12 public submissions authorised for publication and on the public record.

At the end of the evidence given by the two scheduled witnesses—the Department of Defence and Mr Wood—there will be an opportunity for members of the local community to have their say on this proposal for redevelopment at the Robertson Barracks. The transcript of today's hearings will be placed on the committee's website, but if members of the public would like some further details about the hearing or the transcript they can ask the committee staff.

[3.35 pm]

GRICE, Brigadier William, Director General, Infrastructure Asset Development, Department of Defence

KRAUSE, Brigadier Michael, Commander 1st Brigade, Department of Defence

MAAS, Captain Ian, Project Officer, Department of Defence

ZENTELIS, Mr Rick, Director, Heritage and Biodiversity Conservation, Department of Defence

FAEHSE, Mr Gary, Senior Associate and Project Manager/Contract Administrator, Woods Bagot

CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. I remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter that may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament.

Brig. Grice—First I would like to make a small amendment to paragraph 102 on page 15 of Defence's submission. You will recall that this project was originally referred to the committee under the previous government in mid-2007 and then, due to the federal election, the referral lapsed. As a result of the re-referral we have to amend the construction period. We would like to amend paragraph 102 on page 15 to read:

Subject to Parliamentary clearance, construction is scheduled to commence in early 2009 with completion by late 2010.

I will now make an opening statement. The Department of Defence is proposing to undertake the construction of facilities at Robertson Barracks in Darwin. The works will include new and refurbished facilities to rectify deficiencies in existing working accommodation across the barracks, to support the introduction of the Abrams tank fleet in Darwin and to support additional personnel and supporting equipment resulting from the Hardened and Networked Army initiative, which was announced by government in December 2005. The scope of works will include office accommodation, vehicle hangars, equipment storage facilities, minor works at the Mt Bunday training area to improve the acoustics of a range control tower, armouries, amenities and car parking. The total estimated out-turned cost of the proposal is \$72.126 million and this includes professional design and management fees and charges; construction; furniture, fittings and equipment; together with appropriate allowances for contingency and escalation. Defence is ready and available to answer any questions that the committee may have of the proposal.

CHAIR—Thank you. Who would like to start?

Mr HALE—Could you give us an idea of the amount of work that will go to local businesses and whether or not we have the capacity in Darwin to be able to have this work completed on time and on budget?

Brig. Grice—Yes. As part of the preparation for this project, Defence engaged consultants to look at the capacity of the construction industry in the Northern Territory last year and the results of that were that there was sufficient capacity within the region to undertake these works and the other ones relating to the hearing earlier this morning within the time frame of 2009 and 2010.

With regard to how much of the work will be performed by local contractors, in our recent experience on a project at RAAF Base Darwin, where there was a project which required 27 subcontracts to be let, all 27 of those subcontracts were let to Darwin based companies. So we expect that the large majority of the out-turned cost of this project would be awarded via subcontracts to locally based subcontractors, large and small. The method of delivery that we are using for this project is the managing contractor approach, which gives us the ability to tailor subcontract packages to better meet the capacity of the market and to give us flexibility in the delivery of the project. We are expecting that there will be appropriate opportunities for large, medium and small contractors within the Darwin area to compete for works.

Mr LINDSAY—Brigadier Grice, I have a few questions. Can you please put on the record why all of these projects are not being delivered under a head contract arrangement?

Brig. Grice—Certainly. The head contract approach is suitable where you have a site which you can excise and give to a contractor for him to complete the construction without interruption. However, we are working in many locations on Robertson Barracks and the units on Robertson Barracks will need to continue to train and prepare for operations. The managing contractor approach gives us the flexibility to schedule works around those activities without financial detriment to the Commonwealth. It is because of this flexibility that we are taking this approach.

Mr LINDSAY—You have said that the preferred method of delivery is the contract packages. In written evidence you have said that these packages will be tailored to suit the available construction market. How do you know what the available construction market is?

Brig. Grice—During the development of the project we have engaged locally based companies to provide design services, to provide site investigation services and to provide quantity surveying and cost estimation services, as well as consultants from the local market to look at the capacity and the capabilities of the market in the Northern Territory. It is through these local firms that have been employed on the development of the project to this point that we have a good view of the capabilities of the market.

Mr LINDSAY—Robertson Barracks is a relatively new purpose designed army base, as per your evidence. So why are there deficiencies in working accommodation at this early stage?

Brig. Grice—I will ask Brigadier Krause to provide some supplementary remarks on this. The first elements of Robertson Barracks were built in the early nineties. You could say the decade of the nineties was when the facilities were built. Military operations and organisations evolve over time and there have been some changes to the organisational structure of some of the elements of the 1st Brigade over the past decade and a half. This project is like a midlife upgrade of some of those project elements to rectify those deficiencies.

Brig. Krause—I will add to that: yes, it was purpose designed but it was purpose designed for the purpose at the time.

Mr LINDSAY—On the Robertson Replacement Tank Facilities project: the tanks are here but we are now doing work to suit the tanks. Why wasn't the work done before the tanks arrived?

Brig. Grice—Urgent works were completed. In 2006 I wrote to the committee seeking to expedite some of the urgent works that were required to introduce the tank into service at Robertson Barracks and those time-sensitive requirements had been completed. What we have are the residual elements that were not time critical and there are small elements of works that can now be completed and go through the scrutiny of this process.

Mr LINDSAY—On the Troop Emergency Response Squadron: you are going to place some of their vehicles closer to 1 Aviation Regiment. Your submission states that there will be:

... a new ready-response hangar for two vehicles in or near the 1 Avn Regt compound.

This morning I think we saw that it is going to be inside the compound. So you would change that written evidence?

Brig. Grice—Correct. At the time of the publication last year the final site had not been selected. But it is at the location that was shown. Brigadier Krause might want to talk about the use and the purpose of stationing those vehicles adjacent to the flight line for helicopter operations.

Brig. Krause—There is a safety requirement to move those vehicles within two minutes.

Mr LINDSAY—On the right of where we pulled up this morning to look at the compound we are talking about, there were vehicle hangars. Would it have been possible to have used those and to avoid the construction of a new compound inside 1 Avn?

Brig. Grice—No. Those facilities that you are referring to were the vehicle workshops for the 1st Aviation Regiment and are used for the maintenance of the regiment's ground based vehicle fleet.

Brig. Krause—It should be also noted that between those facilities and the flight line, there is a locked gate which, given an emergency, would have to be negotiated.

Mr LINDSAY—On a technical matter, your evidence about the Mount Bunday training area says that it is 150 kilometres south of Darwin. I think it is probably south-east of Darwin.

Brig. Krause—That is correct.

Mr LINDSAY—Thank you. So, you have changed your evidence.

Brig. Krause—And it is 132 kilometres, not 150 kilometres.

Mr LINDSAY—With respect to the 1st Brigade headquarters, you said that examination of the layout showed that underutilised and poorly planned space exists. How did that happen?

Brig. Grice—That was a poor choice of words. Flexibility was built into the initial design to cope with evolving changes in requirements. In this project, there are an additional 11 personnel that will be working in that building. The designers are able to accommodate them within the existing building envelope by changing some existing single offices into open-plan offices. That is how we are able to do that.

Mr LINDSAY—With respect to ecologically sustainable development, the AGO has established the fact that current specific objectives of the policy of energy efficiency in government operations are not readily achievable in the tropical environment in Darwin. Could you explain what is not achievable?

Capt. Maas—At the time we consulted with the Australian Greenhouse Office, they were still in the infancy of developing what the energy efficiency in government operations policy was going to be. At the time of discussing this project with them, they had yet to adapt industry standards like the Australian Building Greenhouse Rating and the green style of ESD measures that were very applicable to south and east coast facilities. The energy efficiency in government operations policy had not yet caught those up and adapted them to the tropical environment. There are definitely ecologically sustainable design initiatives that are incorporated in the works.

Brig. Grice—Specifically, though, to supplement the EEGO policy, Defence green building requirements, parts 1 and 2, specify that for our office areas we are looking to achieve 30 per cent efficiencies above those required by the building code of Australia. We have certainly continued to implement that here in the Northern Territory.

Mr LINDSAY—My memory from reading some of the Tindal evidence is that you treat this issue differently when you are talking about Tindal. I am sorry that I cannot quote it to you, but you do not talk about energy efficiency in government operations; you talk about some other building code. Tindal is really no different from Darwin.

Brig. Grice—There has been a change in the names of some of these organisations since the initial evidence was put in in 2007, and I think you will find that for the project you are referring to the evidence was finalised and submitted in February this year. So there has been a change of name for some of these government organisations. I think that is why there is the change and we can discuss that tomorrow, I am sure.

Senator MARK BISHOP—I have a few questions arising out of some of the later submissions and, whilst the officials from Defence are here, it is probably worthwhile if you put your side of the discussion on the record. The questions are probably best directed to Brigadier Krause, as a CO. Of course, if Brigadier Grice needs to supplement what the CO says, that would be more than welcome. Brigadier Krause, could you give us a brief status report on the issue of the road access and the alleged road congestion that is the cause of so many people making submissions later this afternoon?

Brig. Krause—Thank you, Senator Bishop. I have read the submissions and I welcome them. The issue of the Brandt Road, Stevens Road and Campbell Road intersection is not a new one. It

has been around for at least six years that I am aware of, and it has not reached anywhere near a satisfactory conclusion—not from the residents' point of view and certainly not from Defence's point of view. My biggest concern is that we are not seen as a good citizen, and I want us to be. 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. From our point of view, we have already done what we can in terms of banning our military vehicles from using those roads. They do not use those roads, and they are prohibited from using them. But we do not have—

Senator MARK BISHOP—What do you define as military vehicles? Is that all vehicles or just heavy truck type vehicles?

Brig. Krause—No, every military vehicle is banned from those roads. The ones that are not are the civilian vehicles that my soldiers use to get to and from work. I do not have the jurisdiction to ban those. I cannot police on civilian roads. That is a job for the police, and if I were to do that I would actually be breaking the law. On the issue of my soldiers coming to and from work, they will take the easiest route. What I would like to see is a solution that creates an easier route for them. At the moment most of my brigade still live in Palmerston. About 68 per cent of those who live off base live in Palmerston, about 15 per cent live in the city and Larrakeyah and about 17 per cent live in the northern suburbs. So the bulk of the brigade is still in Palmerston, and that will be so even when we get the increased numbers. Those in Palmerston and the city will invariably use the main gate; the back gate looks after that 17 per cent from the northern suburbs.

Senator MARK BISHOP—So we are talking about that 17 per cent of those off the base who are in the northern suburbs?

Brig. Krause—Yes, that is correct.

CHAIR—Those who live off base?

Senator MARK BISHOP—Those who live off base.

Brig. Krause—Those who would live off base, and also those soldiers who live on base and who use the back gate to get to and fro. I want to encourage my soldiers to ride their pushbikes to work, not only from the ecological point of view but also from the fitness point of view, but on that road it is dangerous to do so. We would like to put a bike path along it, but again we do not own the land. The land is beyond the Defence precinct, and therefore the responsibility for any works on that road lies beyond Defence. I think I am right in saying it lies with the local council.

Senator MARK BISHOP—Brigadier, stop there. As I understand the argument, it is a congestion argument from, say, 7.00 or thereabouts to 8.30 in the morning and from around three to five in the afternoon, as people drive to work and leave work. Can you convert that 17 per cent of off-base people in the northern suburbs you referred to to a number who would be likely to use that access route in those two peak times?

Brig. Krause—My honours degree is in language and literature! But I have about 1,800 who live off base, so it would be about 200. I would also note that, while we are talking of figures, although the submission does talk about an increase in numbers that increase is actually coming to 1st Brigade rather than to Robertson Barracks. That is an important distinction because a third of the brigade will relocate to Adelaide in 2011, so in actual fact the net numbers do not increase.

Senator MARK BISHOP—Has there been brought to your attention any increase in the number of accidents or incidents from Army personnel using that access route in the last six or seven years?

Brig. Krause—I have been in command since December of last year but I was also commanding officer 2nd Cavalry 2000-01. Again I thank the public for the submissions, because they brought to my attention some signs that are clearly worrying for the safety of my soldiers. I will look into that, but it certainly has not been raised with me as a specific issue and was certainly not passed on to me as a specific issue in terms of an increase.

Senator MARK BISHOP—Let me ask the question in a slightly different fashion. Have your subordinate officers felt it necessary to bring to your attention in the last few years any increase in the number of incidents at all—even in an anecdotal fashion: ‘Listen, Mike, we’ve got problems on this road’?

Brig. Krause—In fact, they are largely based on my own observations. I use that road. I should point out that I use Stevens Road off MacMillans Road and then turn into Campbell Road. I do not use Brandt. But I have noticed the issue of bicycle riders on Campbell Road, and that is what worries me the most.

Senator MARK BISHOP—Are you aware of any congestion studies done by either the Territory government or the local shire around the roads in issue?

Brig. Krause—Yes, I am. I do not have the exact figures but perhaps Brigadier Grice does. I understand there has been an increase in usage of those roads—something like an increase from 1,300 per day to 1,500 or thereabouts.

Brig. Grice—Over the last 10 years.

Brig. Krause—It should be noted that that is not just Defence traffic. I know myself, going in the back gate, there is a lot of traffic coming the other way in Campbell Road, which clearly is not Defence and is heading, I suspect, from the rural area into the northern suburbs. Therefore it is more than just an issue for Defence.

Senator MARK BISHOP—Within your own jurisdiction, have your own personnel, whether they be enlisted men or officers, brought to your attention the fact that they consider themselves to be in some form of danger as they access the road to get to work?

Brig. Krause—It has not been specifically brought to my attention but I can see it myself. Although, now that I say that, I was certainly made aware of the bicycle problem early on in my command.

Mr HALE—Can you give us a rundown on the personnel levels now with the redevelopment? We have been down at Edinburgh, and we know that there will be parts of 1st Brigade moved down there. Can you give us an update as to where your personnel levels are now and what you envisage going forward?

Brig. Krause—Yes, I would be happy to. At the moment the brigade is at about 3,200. Under this proposal we will go up to about 3,650. That growth is due to occur by 2016. Significantly though, by January 2011, the 7 RAR Battle Group, which is about 1,200, will relocate to Edinburgh in South Australia.

Mr HALE—Are you saying you will lose 1,200 by 2011?

Brig. Grice—No, there is growth in 7 RAR. By the time it is finished they will still be around the 3,200 or 3,300 level. So it is nearly a zero sum gain but not exactly.

Mr HALE—Of those, how many live off base?

Brig. Krause—About two-thirds live off base.

Mr LINDSAY—Brigadier Grice, I want to return to the residents' concerns with three questions. Can you confirm that in 1999-2000 Defence offered a fifty-fifty arrangement with the local council and the NT government in relation to funding upgrades that would ameliorate the problems in the roads concerned but that offer was not taken up and subsequently lapsed even though Defence had put aside the money?

Brig. Grice—Yes. The issue here is that we cannot undertake construction on other than Defence land. It is clearly the responsibility of council to do that. Back in 2000 Defence offered to provide about \$375,000 to supplement and help solve the problem. Since then, and definitely in the last four or five years, we have continued, through the Defence Support Group in the Northern Territory, to consult with the Litchfield Shire Council and the Northern Territory government. We are keen for the matter to be resolved. There was a meeting attended by Northern Territory government representatives, the Litchfield council, I believe some residents and members of the Defence Support Group in February or March 2007—the last meeting on site—where a proposal was discussed to rectify the problem. At that point Defence indicated that it was still keen to assist and be a good citizen and to provide some assistance with this. That funding lapsed. However, in the event that the Litchfield Shire Council comes up with an option which solves the problem, Defence would be keen to assist.

Mr LINDSAY—On the basis of the evidence that I have heard today, it would appear that residents ought to put their energies into lobbying their local council, particularly. Is that right?

Brig. Grice—It is not up to me to tell the local residents what to do, but our position is that we would like resolution of this matter for the safety of all concerned and we are prepared to assist.

Brig. Krause—As the commander of the brigade I will certainly be very happy to work with the local residents to get this resolved.

Brig. Grice—At that meeting in February last year, the agreement was that the shire council would take the lead on the resolution of the issue. I am sure that will happen in due course.

Mr LINDSAY—In relation to the proposed solution at the intersection of the three roads and the necessity to acquire some of the Airservices land, is it your understanding that the local council could apply to the federal government for a priority sale of the portion of land that they need to excise, so that they can get the land and not have anybody else getting the land?

Brig. Grice—I am not an expert on the Land Acquisitions Act but I believe there is a process where they could apply for priority sale of that land.

Mr LINDSAY—I have a final question which somewhat summarises the whole issue. Some of the residents in their evidence have requested that this committee do not allow any further development of Robertson Barracks. Is it your evidence to us that that is not something that is going to happen—that Robertson Barracks is very important to the Australian Defence Force and that there is no way that we could give a guarantee that there would not be any further development of Robertson Barracks? What do you have to say about that particular issue?

Brig. Grice—I will let Brigadier Krause talk about the purpose of the units at Robertson Barracks. However, Robertson Barracks has been earmarked for a long-term presence for Defence in the north of Australia. By ‘long-term presence’ we mean 30 to 50 or more years. I am not here to prejudge the requirements that governments may have for Defence in the Northern Territory. In the future there may be further enhancements required to facilities on base. Governments may, in the future, decide to increase or decrease the population or the units that are on the base, but that is for governments to decide.

Brig. Krause—I would also note—as you pointed out, Mr Lindsay—that, in many ways, this particular submission, this particular debate, is about catching up to decisions that have already been made in the case of the tank and the building facilities to house the people we already have, rather than to, in any way, arrest decisions that have already been made.

Brig. Grice—Mr Lindsay, one last point: Defence puts in the order of \$900 million into the economy of the Northern Territory through its operations and the people that are based here, so we are a small but significant part of year-round business for the Northern Territory. I would like to think that we are very beneficial not only for the contribution we make to the defence of the nation but for the contribution we make to the community.

Brig. Krause—I would have to say, having been posted up here now for a number of postings, one of the reasons I would particularly like to get this issue of the road sorted is that it is the only real sense of friction that I see up here. Darwin has been a very welcoming place for 1st Brigade and indeed for the ADF. We enjoy being here. It is good not only for our soldiers to train here but also for our families to be here. Any source of friction like that I would like removed.

CHAIR—Sorry for moving off the issue of the road, Brigadier, but I ask this question in relation to your evidence about RAAF Darwin. It again comes back to the prominence of common user facilities at Edinburgh. I wondered whether you could say something about the

degree to which that was considered as part of and as a feature of the proposals for the redevelopment at Robertson.

Brig. Grice—The scope elements in this proposal are incremental upgrades to individual units. There is no redevelopment of the core or common user facilities which lead to those efficiencies, although within some of the units we have grouped like functions together, with regard to ablutions and that type of facility, in order to gain efficiencies in the location. With this project there is very little scope for that. It is just the nature of the project.

CHAIR—Thank you all for your evidence here today.

[4.10 pm]

WOOD, Mr Gerry MLA, Member for Nelson, Northern Territory Legislative Assembly

CHAIR—I reconvene this public hearing of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works inquiry into the proposed redevelopment of Robertson Barracks. Again, I thank all witnesses and members of the public for attending. Before I call Mr Wood, I acknowledge that Mr James Burke, the member for Brennan in the Northern Territory, is also here today but has indicated that he does not propose to make a verbal submission. Mr Wood, thank you for attending. Do you have any comments on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Wood—I am the Independent member for Nelson, in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, which takes in Robertson Barracks.

CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament and consequently they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the house itself. I remind you that the giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. Would you like to make introductory remarks?

Mr Wood—I should give you a little history, partly my history and partly the history of the concern of residents in relation to this matter—that is, the traffic going through the Knuckey Lagoon area. I served on the Litchfield Shire Council, the council that includes Robertson Barracks, and the barracks are also in the ward that I represented as a councillor. I was also president of the council for five years, and some of these issues we are talking about go back to that time.

At the outset, I will say that one of the problems we have here is that, when the Commonwealth builds something, it is not required to come under the planning laws of the Northern Territory—and I think that probably applies in all states. I think that is a major failing in a lot of what the Commonwealth does. If I were to build a huge supermarket where Robertson Barracks is, under the Northern Territory planning laws I would be required to build the roads to service that particular shopping centre, and those roads would probably be designed in such a way as to take traffic away from residential areas. The problem we have got here is that, when the barracks were established, because there is no planning process as we would have for a shopping centre of some other business, those sorts of things rarely came into consideration. They might have been discussed, but there is nothing to enforce them.

Robertson Barracks started off as Waler Barracks and, at that time, the talk was that people who worked at the barracks would live in Palmerston, Palmerston being to the south of the barracks, and that the road, Thorngate Road, would be upgraded. There was no consideration, really, of any other access into the barracks. As the barracks got more developed, there was a northern gate established, onto Campbell Road, which was really a construction access. My understanding was that that was meant to be shut after the construction phase finished, but obviously things changed. As we found out, about half the population of the barracks does not live in Palmerston; it lives in the northern suburbs or in Darwin.

I occasionally sit near the gates of the barracks and I watch the number of vehicles that travel out of the north gate or the east gate, and certainly a lot of vehicles go through the Knuckey Lagoon residential area. Originally, it was a very quiet area. It would only have been accessed by either people going to the Shoal Bay transmitter station or trucks from the quarries there. It was pretty well a dead end. Most people would not have used that road because it just was not the way to go if you were travelling out of town. So, with the establishment of the barracks, you got an increase in traffic, and the issues about the traffic going through Knuckey Lagoon started then. Those issues have been around for getting on close to 10 years.

I know some comments were made about the council's involvement. The idea of turning Campbell Road away from Brandt Road and on to Stevens Road was one of the ideas I thought of during my time as president of the council as an alternative to take the traffic away from that area. It took a long time for the council to find out whether it could acquire land from Air Services Australia, who own that land on the corner. That took an enormous amount of time, and then discussions were held, I believe—I cannot recall exactly what happened because our shire manager would have carried out those discussions—with the Department of Defence in relation to some contribution to paying for the road.

My understanding is that, although the Army might have said that it would contribute to that road, there were some legal issues in relation to changing the alignment of Stevens Road because one of the landowners in that area is a trucking company and, if the alignment of the road were changed, there were some doubts as to whether that person could use that particular block—in other words, could exit that block onto the new alignment with large trucks carrying sand and gravel. To complicate the issue more, there was some concern about whether that person whom we are talking about who ran the extractive mining business from that block was actually legal. So the council was in two binds. One was that if they supported the road, which would not allow that person to come out of their road and run their business, they could be sued. At the same time they were asking the government to make a ruling as to whether the operation of that business was legal. It took quite some time before the government actually came back. In the meantime, what happened was basically that that whole project just fell away, and that happened after I had left the council.

But there were some other complications. Although it might sound simple on the surface, Litchfield is a small council which has a budget of around \$7 million to \$8 million. I know someone said that the Department of Defence puts \$900 million into the economy, but it does not pay rates. You have got a very large shire of about 3,100 square kilometres and about 17,000 people, all of whom pay a flat rate. The shire would have to find the money—to fork out \$375,000 out of ratepayers' funds—to build a road for a Commonwealth facility that pays no rates. So it is not quite as simple as people might think it is, because the council has other priorities: where people actually live and need roads to be upgraded.

In some ways, if you ask me what I think should have happened, I think simply that the whole issue of access out of the barracks should have been handled by the Commonwealth at the beginning. They should have built off-road facilities to make sure that local people were not affected by the change. But that does not appear to have happened, and there is at least some sort of agreement that is still out there that says the council would pay a third, the Northern Territory government would pay a third and the Department of Defence would pay a third.

We had quite a few meetings last year with local residents looking at that. What threw that back into the clouds, you might say, was that we were told that there was a master plan being developed for the barracks and that we should really wait and see what that master plan was going to come up with. So we decided to wait for a master plan. Now I have heard about this master plan for so long that I wonder whether it actually exists, but I am told it does, and I would hope that in that master plan there is something about access out of the barracks, because there has been a lot of talk about an extra exit point from the barracks. Then someone told me that that will not be in the master plan; there is going to be a strategic plan, and that is where it will deal with exit out of the barracks.

So I am a little confused as to what the long-term arrangement for exit out of the barracks will be. It would be no good for the council to spend \$375,000—probably a lot more than that today because that is an old figure, and the Northern Territory government is not going to spend money on it—if they know that that the Department of Defence has decided there will be another exit from the barracks. So I think that that needs to be made clear by the Department of Defence—is it really seriously considering an access and has that been discussed with the NT government and the councils?—because it would be stupid of anyone to go spending all this money if they know that is not what is going to happen in the future. So that would be something, I would hope, that would come out today.

In relation to traffic problems, I have some traffic count figures here today from the council and I am happy to table those documents. These traffic counts are not something you would hang your hat on statistically, because when I asked whether the figures were taken at the same time every year, I was told that they were not. I think you will find that some of the residents will tell you that some of the figures were taken, for instance, over the Christmas period or when there was a large movement of troops to Iraq. So it is difficult to say that they are accurate from that point of view. What they do show is that there has been a steady increase in the number of cars going through that area.

I have also got some figures from the police. I think you have to be someone with inside knowledge. I have a list of all traffic incidents on roads around Robertson Barracks, which are Brandt Road, Farrar Road, Campbell Road, Tulagi Road, Stevens Road and Thorngate Road. They have not distinguished between the roads to Palmerston and the roads in the Knuckey Lagoon area. I can table that document as well. Certainly there have been a number of accidents and quite a few traffic offences. Again, when I spoke to the police who issued me with this, even they could not quite explain it fully. It comes off a computer. It would need more investigation as to what these figures actually mean. If you look at them in general, you can see that there certainly have been a number of accidents in the area. Speeding has been one of the issues. I know there have been at least two fatalities on Campbell Road.

Senator MARK BISHOP—Mr Wood, let me interrupt you. My understanding is that the issue in dispute is the congestion arising around the access times in the morning and in the afternoon—say, 7.30 am to 9 am and 3 pm to 5 pm—when people are going to work and leaving work. Are the figures you have given here in terms of usage rate, accident rate and reportage rate germane to those times or are they generalised figures?

Mr Wood—It does not say that. I put that as a rider on it. We have not got that statistical analysis; I could not get that. They have just given us the number of accidents and the number of

offences that occurred on those roads. At least it gives you some idea that the police are working in that area. I think residents have concerns not only about congestion but certainly about speed. Anyone that lives on Brandt and Farrar roads will know that a lot of vehicles do not travel at 60 kilometres an hour, and that 60 kilometres an hour is there specifically because it is a rural residential area. A lot of people take their dogs for walks and ride horses. There is a lot of horse activity in the Knuckey Lagoon area. There are several pony clubs on Secrett Road, which is closer to the Berrimah area. So it is an area that people expect to be able to use safely.

Here is an example of a car that ran off Campbell Road into the residence at the end of Campbell Road. That is on the corner of Brandt and Farrar roads. That vehicle mounted a large barrier that the resident has put there for sound purposes and also to protect their property, because the house is just on the other side of that. When I sit there on a weekday afternoon, I see that some people certainly travel far in excess of the speed limit—not all.

I should say that this is not about having a go at the Army; it is simply that there are people in the residential area that find that the amount of traffic has caused some major problems. I am a great supporter of the Army. I spent today watching the 1st Signals Regiment catching crocodiles down at Crocodylus Park. They are out in the community all the time. They work with the community. We are playing cricket with them on Anzac Day. But that does not set aside the fact that there are some issues that need to be solved. I agree with Brigadier Krause that if there is one little sore point that the community has it is this point here, and if it can be solved I do not think residents will have much problem at all with the barracks being where they are. But it is something that should have been sorted out way back when the barracks was first started, and then we would not be here complaining about it today.

So that is roughly the history. The residents are here today and they will tell you more about the issues relating specifically to them, because they live on these roads. This problem has been around for an awful long time. It has been very hard to make it move anywhere. Sometimes it is a little unfair to say, 'This is the council's responsibility.' It is a small council. The government is an almighty big council spending an awful lot of money. A small amount of that money spent on fixing this problem would be a good contribution to the people who live in the area without putting a burden on a council that does not take any rates from this establishment.

Mr LINDSAY—We received evidence earlier today that, in fact, 68 per cent of the soldiers who leave the barracks live in Palmerston. That is not the figure that you quoted, as I understand it. That was evidence the committee received. Can you confirm that where they live in Palmerston they pay rates?

Mr Wood—They do but Palmerston Council is in Litchfield Council.

Mr LINDSAY—I see.

Mr Wood—Robertson Barracks is in Litchfield Shire Council.

Mr LINDSAY—Thank you. My lack of local knowledge is showing. I was surprised that you said that back in 1999-2000 your council had trouble determining the ownership of the land. Normally councils know who the owners of the land in their council areas are.

Mr Wood—I may have put that the wrong way round. What I meant was they had trouble negotiating with the owners of the land to purchase the land. You are dealing with Canberra all the time from a little place in the north. It is like dealing with the Department of Defence. You can ring them up this week, and next week there is a new person in charge who does not know anything about what you are doing except he has a piece of paper on his desk. My understanding from the CEO of the Litchfield Council at that time was that that was one of the major problems in dealing with government, who own this land—both air safety and the barracks. It is very hard to know and to get a regular person to contact in Canberra.

Mr LINDSAY—I understand. A member of parliament could have fixed that instantly because it would have been through the minister for transport at the time. If the minister had known, a priority sale could have been organised and the problem would have been fixed. In relation to fixing the problem, I thought that the brigadier, Commander 1 Brigade, was certainly very genuine in his wish to get the thing fixed, and I find great hope and take great comfort that if we can get the three groups talking together—the NT government, the council and Defence—we will get an outcome, but it needs to move quickly. It has gone on for far too long and residents have a right to be concerned. Certainly the army is a good corporate citizen.

In relation to compliance with the town plan, it is my understanding—and Brigadier Grice might be able to give me a nod if necessary—that where Defence does a development of any sort within its property, it complies with whatever the relevant town plan issues and building codes are, as much as it can. Is that right?

Brig. Grice—Yes.

Mr LINDSAY—I saw that at Jezzine Barracks. I am not sure about how we go externally—whether we are involved in external works and whether we pay head works charges or whatever. Do we do that?

Brig. Grice—The Army did make contributions to roads in the Northern Territory. I am not sure how they were used. I was not around at the time.

Mr LINDSAY—Mr Wood, I think that there is some evidence that Defence will comply, although we are not required to.

Mr Wood—I think they should. They have to give building board approval for their buildings, so I think planning is an important thing. The classic example for many people in Darwin would be where Bunnings is. It sits on the RAAF base, but did it get planning approval? No, I do not think so. It got planning approval to get access to Bagot Road. So when you start to deal with the commercial operations of Commonwealth land, that is not the way we should be going. Councils in the Northern Territory do not have planning control either, whereas they do in other states. The Territory government has that control.

Mr LINDSAY—Will you give us an undertaking that you will work with our Defence Support Group manager and the NT government to get this problem resolved as quickly as possible?

Mr Wood—We were working last year. I was working through the brigadiers—not just Michael Krause but other brigadiers—and I was told last year that that was not the person I should be going through. I should be going through the Department of Defence, so I have spent a fair bit of my time going through the wrong person.

Mr LINDSAY—The person who you need to go through is sitting behind you.

Mr Wood—Knowing the right channels to go through is also something that would have helped.

Mr LINDSAY—Of course.

Mr Wood—So what the residents and I are here for today is to raise the fact that this is a priority for people and to get a solution, because I do not want this going on any longer. I think we can fix it and move on.

Mr LINDSAY—Thank you.

Senator MARK BISHOP—Mr Wood, as far as your constituents and the people you represent go, is the issue the congestion, usage and growth for the people who use the road and those who are concerned about the people who use the road, or is the issue the base's location and its likely planned expansion in future years?

Mr Wood—I will start with the expansion. We have a problem based on excessive traffic going through a rural residential area, although we have tried to do something about it—whether or not we have gone about it the right way is another matter. We now see an application to expand the number of people on the barracks. So people are wondering, 'Where is this going to end? No-one's solving our problem with excessive traffic. You're going to put more soldiers into the barracks, therefore we are likely to have more traffic.' Something has to be done now. We are not against the barracks being there, we are not against the barracks expanding. I think every fair-minded Australian realises the defence forces are really important not only to the economy of the Territory but also to the defence of the nation. I do not think anyone would deny that. But the reality is that it is expanding and this problem will only get worse if we do not say, 'Hang on; let's do something about it now.' I think that is what people are saying.

The congestion is only part of it. Speeding is certainly an issue. We have had the police come to a number of our meetings in that area—I think we had three or four meetings last year; I did not bring my diary to check that. They do still patrol that area, but they cannot patrol it all the time. They will tell you, 'Yes, we certainly get people going well over the speed limit.' So there are issues of road safety and congestion, and I suppose there are issues of noise. The expectation of the residents was that they had moved into basically a fairly quiet rural residential area, and it might have led off to the local cemetery or even just Shoal Bay transmitter station, but with time the traffic has increased to make that lifestyle change.

Senator MARK BISHOP—So, as far as the residents are concerned, it is really a matter of congestion, usage, access and ancillary issues that you are bringing to our attention?

Mr Wood—Yes, and, as I said right at the beginning, it would be no different if Myer or somebody put a huge big shopping centre there; you will get traffic going to and from a development, and I think that kind of development should look at the off-development effects. That was never done, I reckon, accurately at the beginning, and now we are in catch-up mode.

CHAIR—I might say that Mr Lindsay's suggestions about moving this matter forward are very useful and I might just add that the local federal member of parliament is obviously an important player in this. Mr Hale is on record as having extracted a commitment from the incoming government for funding on this, and his ongoing communication with the minister for transport is also, I think, going to be an important part of being able to find the money to move it forward. I have a question. I have heard, while people were shooting the breeze, that there either might be or is a council amalgamation in progress, involving this council—as if this matter is not already complicated enough. Is that right? And, if so, do we know what the amalgamated council is that is actually going to encompass this area?

Mr Wood—I could be here for a week talking about it, but the short answer is: thank God residents stuck together and opposed the reform amalgamation for Litchfield council. It was going to be amalgamated with three other community government councils and expanded to about eight times its size. The government decided that was not a good idea at the moment, so that is off the table at the present time.

CHAIR—So it is still Litchfield council and foreseeably so?

Mr Wood—I think it will be for a while, yes.

CHAIR—Thank you. Are there any more questions for Mr Wood?

Mr Wood—Can I ask you one question? Can you find out for me the status of the master plan for the barracks?

CHAIR—We will take that on notice. Thank you again for attending our committee hearing.

Mr Wood—Thanks for allowing me to come. Here is that photo to be tabled.

[4.34 pm]

CHAIR—The purpose of the committee is to ensure that public funds are spent in an effective and transparent way. Part of that process involves a discussion with parts of the community that are impacted by public works proposals. So to that end the committee will now take short three-minute statements from any members of the community who would like to comment on this development. As I have indicated, we have already received a number of written submissions which the committee members have all read, and I think you can probably tell, from the toing and froing over this evidence, committee members are across the traffic management issues that have particularly led people to make written submissions. Having said that, if there are any members of the public here who wish to address the committee, can you indicate to one of the committee staff who is standing up that you wish to make a statement. I have got five people on the list so far and I will come to that list.

For this section of proceedings, we only ask that you state your first name for the *Hansard* record. You can state your full name if you want to, but we only require a first name. Your comments will be recorded in the transcript of the public hearing along with other evidence given today. To give everyone a fair chance, those wishing to speak will be limited to giving a three-minute statement, and will sound a warning chime when you have 30 seconds left. I have Steve as the first speaker. There is a roving microphone, so feel free stand and give your statement where you are.

Steve—I wish to thank the committee members for this opportunity to address them today. In particular, I wish to thank Mr Damian Hale, our local member and also a member of this committee, and his office staff for the help they have given to local residents to allow us to be here today to speak. As residents of Brandt Road we, along with other residents, have been suffering the effects of excessive traffic along our street for a number of years. It is plain to even the casual observer that the vast majority of this traffic is generated by the activities of the nearby Robertson Barracks. Along with the volume of traffic and the resultant noise, we also have to endure excessive rubbish and constant speeding. The NT Police try their best but they cannot be there all the time. There are signs at both ends stating that Brandt and Farrar roads are not through-traffic but these signs appear to invisible to most drivers.

I note that Mr Woods has already tabled a list of traffic counts for me. Amongst those counts, I wish to point out that there is a direct relationship, even though from year to year the numbers do not seem to mean a lot, between the volume of traffic that goes down Farrar and Brandt roads versus the volume of traffic that actually goes down Stevens Road, which is the preferred road for access to the barracks. You will see that it is approximately double the amount of traffic that uses the non-preferred route. There have been numerous road accidents in this area over recent years, as Mr Wood alluded to, with the corner of Brandt, Stevens and Campbell roads being particularly bad. I have attended three night-time incidents on this corner in the last 12 months, all involving defence personnel who have been speeding and driving under the influence.

We have been trying to engage with all the stakeholders via our hardworking MLA Gerry Wood for a number of years but all we seem to get is a constant merry-go-round. As soon as we

get one level of government on board, then we have to start over with another because their priorities or personnel have changed, which I think we have spoken about already.

We believe that Defence's current proposal before this committee fails to adequately address these issues. It even goes as far as implying in paragraph 92 that traffic is a nonissue. Defence keep telling us via Gerry Wood to wait for the master plan. I wish to table some random correspondence that quotes amongst other points a spokesperson from Defence stating that the master plan does not include roads; they come under the strategic planning review. No-one can tell us when or if this review will happen.

We believe that Defence have a duty of care both to the local residents and to their own personnel to ensure that public roads that access Defence facilities are adequate and safe for the volume of traffic these facilities generate. In conclusion, I seek your permission to table a petition from the residents of Brandt and Farrar roads, Knuckey Lagoon, stating that they object to any further development of Robertson Barracks that does not include measures to alleviate the traffic problems currently being experienced by the residents of these roads. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you, Steve. Could you pass the petition to Mark next to you. Thank you for your statement and for coming.

Leslie—I live at 16 Grant Road, which is on the corner of Stevens, Campbell and Brandt roads. I have had two vehicles come through my yard and roll into my property. My main concern is the same as Steve's and the rest of the residents: the speed and the rubbish. The sooner we can fix this problem, the better. I also would like to comment on the fact that it was stated that 200 vehicles go down that road. I would say it was more like 2,000. If I were the brigadier I would be discouraging my staff from riding their pushbikes down that road because it is definitely not safe. I would also like to state that as I left today a Defence vehicle followed me down the road as I was coming to this very meeting. I know it was Defence because it was marked as such. The only other thing I would like to say is that for years and years we have been going round in a circle between the council, the government and the barracks and really all we want to do is solve the problem. Like we said, we do not have an issue with the barracks being there; we just want to stop the traffic and the speed and the rubbish. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you for your statement, Leslie. Phil?

Phil—I live on the corner of Farrar and Brandt roads in Knuckey Lagoon. I have been there for approximately 20 years. I purchased my property before there were any plans for the Army base or anything like that. It was a quiet little area and it has been for a long time. I am not against the Defence base being there. I will just give you a rundown: my father was in the Army for 20 years, I am ex-Navy, my son-in-law is ex-Army and my son is currently in the Army. We do have quite a few Army boys that come around to my place. What I am against, just to back up everyone else, is the volume of traffic down that road at all hours of the day and night, the current rate of accidents and the speed at which vehicles travel through the area. I am all in support of the expansion of the base but, to back up the other people, I want to see something done about that road. It has been going on for way too long and everyone seems to do a lot of buck passing with it. That is all I have to say. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you, Phil. Enid is next.

Enid—I did not come here with the design of speaking today but I took offence at some of the things that had been said. To suggest that there are only 200 cars is ridiculous. Why would any of us put in a complaint about 200 cars? It is just beyond belief. I would like to know when the order was given out for any military vehicles to stop going along Stevens Road as this week we have had trucks go down there and all types of military vehicles. When there are movement of brigades over to Iraq and what have you, I have tanks go down Stevens Road—all types of vehicles. I suggest that some of the evidence that has been given here is slightly lacking in reality. That is all I have to say.

CHAIR—Thank you, Enid. Trevor?

Trevor—I live at 110 Farrar Road. I came in partway through Gerry's presentation and fully support everything he has said. He has given a good history of what has happened there. I feel that the Army has not treated us very well in dismissing, fobbing off and ignoring our concerns for a long time. They have dismissed our representations back as far as 2005. There was a condescending letter from Teresa Gambaro, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence, to Senator Scullion, which stated, 'You may be aware that Brandt and Farrar roads are public roads and therefore open to use by all members of the community.' That is correct, but it is really dismissing our concerns. She went on to state, 'Defence have committed funds to upgrade roads and the construction of bike paths to Robertson Barracks.' That may be true but none of that has been spent down in the Knuckey Lagoon area.

We have been fobbed off again by Teresa Gambaro. She claimed in July 2005 that Defence would be undertaking a full review of the long-term plans for Robertson Barracks, including alternative access roads. We have seen nothing of that. More recently, the master plan, as you heard before, seems to have gone missing. That fobbed us off, kept us quiet, for a little while. We have been ignored. I think that is evidenced by the statement in the Army's submission that traffic is not an issue. They seem to think that all the traffic comes in via Palmerston. I submit that it is time for the Army to acknowledge that there is a problem in that area and to undertake to include alleviating that problem as part of any further development of Robertson Barracks. Otherwise, I, along with most other residents, fully support the development of Robertson Barracks. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you, Trevor. Would any other member of the public like to make a short statement? Mr Wood, Senator Bishop has a couple of questions about one of your exhibits. Would you be willing to take them?

Mr Wood—Yes.

Senator MARK BISHOP—Mr Wood, I have the document you tabled headed 'Traffic counts'. I think the first member of the public who gave a short statement indicated that the key road was Brandt Road, south of Farrar Road. Is that correct?

Mr Wood—Yes.

Senator MARK BISHOP—I am addressing the issue of usage because this document tabled by you shows that between 2002 and 2007 the increase in the traffic counts went from 1,447 up to 1,617—an increase of only 150, which is, in any of the years, well within the parameters of

increased usage suggested by Defence. Is that the correct interpretation or am I wrong on that interpretation?

Mr Wood—I am not on the council anymore.

Senator MARK BISHOP—You tabled the document.

Mr Wood—I know, but it is a council document and my rider to what I said at the beginning was that a number of residents say that there is an indication of an increase in traffic but the council counts are not taken at the same time every year, which is unfortunate. If you are going to do statistics you need to have the same baseline. I rang the council back when they faxed that document to me and said, ‘Were the counts done at the same time every year?’ They said no, they were just done when the council felt like putting them out. Residents have told me that the counting mechanisms were put on the road at Christmas time, when a lot of the troops were on leave. Therefore, the numbers were down. They have also been put on the roads when a large number of troops have headed off for Iraq. The reason I gave you those figures was that they are the only figures that are available. They do show a general increase in the amount of traffic, but they cannot be relied on from the point of view of either the Army saying that there has only been a slight increase or me saying that there has been a huge increase, because the baseline is not the same.

But if you want to get an indication, talk to the people who live there. They will tell you that the traffic has increased. I visit that area quite regularly. I sometimes sit on the corner of Farrar and MacMillans roads. I have a little mobile office. Even on Saturday morning a considerable amount of traffic uses those roads and most of the people—not all of them—are in Army uniform. This is not about knocking the Army; I have a good relationship with the Army. I think it just happens to be a fact that has been brought on by the development. It is not about the Army at all.

Senator MARK BISHOP—I was only addressing the issue that has been addressed particularly by Defence, about increased usage, and the last lady said the figure was not 200 a day but 2,000 a day. The figures that you have provided in the table do not confirm either.

Mr Wood—I know that Thorngate Road—that is a different direction—takes an enormous amount of traffic too, but at least it is not going through a residential area.

Senator MARK BISHOP—Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Wood, for coming back. Thank you again to everyone who has come to this hearing. This is obviously a very significant proposal for redevelopment of a very significant part of the Australian Defence Force’s apparatus; but much of the evidence that we have heard over the last half hour or 45 minutes has concerned a particular aspect of that, and that is related to the traffic management around Knuckey Lagoon. I thank all of the witnesses and all of the members of the public for the spirit in which that evidence was given. It seems to me, as someone from far away—from the Northern Territory—that there is a significant resolve from Defence and from political leaders and the community to move this forward, and that is very pleasing from the committee’s point of view.

The committee is likely to publish and table its report in relation to this development in June. I will let everyone know when the report will be on the committee's website as soon as it is tabled. Those who have made written submissions to the committee will receive a copy of the report in the post. This matter will be dealt with by the committee in a fairly short time and I am sure, from what I have heard from different witnesses and political leaders in this area, it is a matter that is going to be the subject of further discussion in the community.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Lindsay**):

That this committee authorises publication of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 4.52 pm