



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# Official Committee Hansard

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC  
WORKS

**Reference: RAAF Base Tindal redevelopment stage 5, Northern Territory**

THURSDAY, 17 APRIL 2008

KATHERINE

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**PARLIAMENTARY STANDING  
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS**

**Thursday, 17 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 and Mr Butler, Mr Lindsay and Mr Slipper

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

RAAF Base Tindal redevelopment stage 5, Northern Territory

**WITNESSES**

**GASKILL, Wing Commander Rohan, Commanding Officer, No. 322 Expeditionary Combat Support Squadron, RAAF Base Commander, RAAF Base Tindal, Department of Defence..... 1**

**GRICE, Brigadier William, Director General, Infrastructure Asset Development, Department of Defence ..... 1**

**HARPER, Mr Chris, Project Director, Northern Territory 2, Project Development and Delivery (North West), Department of Defence..... 1**

**MACKEY, Mr Ben, General Manager and Project Manager, Thinc Projects..... 1**

**PALMER, Mr Mike, Northern Territory Manager and Design Manager, Connell Wagner ..... 1**

**ZENTELIS, Mr Rick, Director, Heritage and Biodiversity Conservation, Department of Defence ..... 1**



**Committee met at 1.51 pm****PALMER, Mr Mike, Northern Territory Manager and Design Manager, Connell Wagner****GASKILL, Wing Commander Rohan, Commanding Officer, No. 322 Expeditionary Combat Support Squadron, RAAF Base Commander, RAAF Base Tindal, Department of Defence****GRICE, Brigadier William, Director General, Infrastructure Asset Development, Department of Defence****HARPER, Mr Chris, Project Director, Northern Territory 2, Project Development and Delivery (North West), Department of Defence****ZENTELIS, Mr Rick, Director, Heritage and Biodiversity Conservation, Department of Defence****MACKEY, Mr Ben, General Manager and Project Manager, Thinc Projects**

**CHAIR (Mr Butler)**—I declare open this public hearing of the parliamentary standing committee inquiry into the proposed redevelopment of RAAF Base Tindal stage 5.

I call the scheduled witnesses, the representatives of the Department of Defence. I think all of you have given your names and the capacity in which you appear in the private hearing, so Hansard does not require us to ask you to do that again. I think everyone has heard the warnings about the nature of these proceedings and the evidence given before us, so I will not repeat that. I will just hand over to you, Brigadier.

**Brig. Grice**—Thank you. As we discussed in the break, Defence would like to make two amendments to the evidence that it submitted. Firstly, regarding paragraph 20 of the evidence, regarding property issues, we would like to delete that paragraph and replace it with a paragraph that reads as follows: ‘The property is owned by the Commonwealth and controlled by the Department of Defence, with the exception of Northern Territory portion 4323, which is understood to be Northern Territory vacant crown land. On survey plans, it is marked as the disused Northern Territory railway. The Northern Territory portion 4323 bisects RAAF Base Tindal. Defence will comply with all national, Territory and municipal requirements.’

Secondly, I would like to delete paragraph 21 and replace it with a new paragraph 21, which states as follows: ‘Defence is currently liaising with the Northern Territory government and is seeking to acquire freehold tenure for the former rail corridor.’ Could I also add that we do not see this as a risk to the project. The land has been under effective Defence control since the early eighties and many of the existing features on the base have been built across that slender portion of land.

**CHAIR**—There was a significant discussion about this issue during the public hearing for the inquiry into the AEWFC facility project. Are there any questions?

**Mr LINDSAY**—Brigadier, I am sorry I was not here for the confidential briefing. This matter is out of the confidential part but it is not a matter that cannot go public, because I will not talk about dollars. The fire station and the supply services warehouse both have amounts for temporary accommodation. Can you explain why you need temporary accommodation?

**Brig. Grice**—Both of those project elements include refurbishment and reconfiguration of existing facilities that are currently occupied, so people will move into demountables for the duration of the refurbishment and reconfiguration and then move into the refurbished facilities.

**Mr LINDSAY**—In relation to the central emergency power station, where you are proposing to add an additional generator—and there are currently three there—will the new unit be the same as the other three and, if not, does that create maintenance issues for you?

**Brig. Grice**—I will pass to Mr Mike Palmer from the design team to give a response to that question.

**Mr Palmer**—The new generator will be the same as the third generator, which was the latest generator installed in that facility.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Good answer. I do not understand these things. Is it better to have four generators, or is it better to have two generators that are two megawatts each? Do you get any efficiencies by having just two, or is it better to have four so that you can bring on one, two, three or four together?

**Mr Palmer**—No. The only benefit you would have with having two rather than four would be having fewer controls. You would be required to operate two rather than four.

**Mr LINDSAY**—So big is not better?

**Mr Palmer**—In our estimates we already have the three and, to get the additional loading, we only need the fourth.

**Brig. Grice**—Correct.

**Mr LINDSAY**—On in-flight catering, you currently have that old kitchen facility close to the runway apron, which is what you are proposing to replace, and you also have the airmen's mess—is it?—where you can also produce in-flight catering. Is that correct?

**Brig. Grice**—Where they currently produce—

**Mr LINDSAY**—Yes.

**Brig. Grice**—That is correct.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Why not expand the current facility? You are going to say, 'Well, it's away from the flight line,' but why not expand the current facility? What has been your thinking behind providing a completely new—

**Brig. Grice**—I will pass to the design team to give a response to that one as well.

**Mr Palmer**—RAAF Base Tindal in fact does not have a current facility that complies fully with the hygiene requirements for in-flight catering. In-flight catering requires a higher level of hygiene due to the meals being consumed by aircrew. They are using the airmen's mess as a matter of necessity at the moment. The new facility will have the increased hygiene requirements built into it.

**Mr LINDSAY**—But part of this proposal is also to attend to improvements in the existing messes. Why are you not putting both of those projects together and having one catering facility? Where, of course, I am coming from is value for the Commonwealth of Australia. That is where I am coming from.

**Brig. Grice**—There are actually two requirements at that kitchen that we are talking about. One is the provision of in-flight rations. The second is to replace the existing demountable kitchen which services the bare base accommodation camp there as well as those people who may be deployed to the visiting fighter OLA areas. So what we are doing is combining two elements to give us economies of scale in a location which is very close to the air movements' terminal. The kitchen there can be used for dual purposes. So we are actually increasing the efficiencies by doing this rather than creating a new facility outside the perimeter in the existing airmen's mess.

**Mr LINDSAY**—On improved security in the OLAs, we saw that you are putting in some cameras, but there was also evidence that you were putting in a single motion detector. Can you cover that whole area with a single motion detector?

**Mr Palmer**—I am not attempting to be an expert on security, but I believe it would not be a single motion detector but motion detection for the facility that activates the camera system.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Mr Harper, you gave evidence that it was a single motion detector.

**Mr Harper**—Yes. I possibly got a little bit caught out on the site visit.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Did you mislead the committee?

**Mr Harper**—No, I certainly did not mislead the committee. I believe what I should have said was that it is a motion detection system.

**Mr SLIPPER**—So you did mislead it!

**Mr LINDSAY**—Yes, he did!

**Mr Harper**—I plead guilty.

**Mr LINDSAY**—We forgive you; thank you.

**Brig. Grice**—I can confirm that it is a motion detection system monitored by a type 1 security alarm system, and the CCTV imagery will be accessible to the visiting fighter squadron OPTECH facility and the front guardhouse.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Have you thought about using the latest technology? You are going to have cameras there. You can actually use the video off the cameras as a motion detector. Are you aware of that? Have you thought about that?

**Wing Cmdr Gaskill**—Yes, the current security fence actually uses that to cue in which camera is coming up on the screen. So, if it does pick up motion on the camera, that will bring that camera up rather than just scrolling through it.

**Mr LINDSAY**—You have it already, so why aren't you using it with OLAs?

**Brig. Grice**—We are.

**Wing Cmdr Gaskill**—I think we are after type 1, recognised as ASIO approved. I do not know that the cameras meet those requirements.

**Mr LINDSAY**—That is a good answer. The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority has been approached to undertake site investigations and you have said 'which will include further examination of those sites and implications for the proposed facilities'. What are the risks to this project of finding some Indigenous concern?

**Mr Zentelis**—We have done initial surveys around RAAF Tindal and we have identified areas which are likely to have Indigenous artefacts or scatters. The areas of the development are unlikely to have any such scatters. As part of our normal process we will have a traditional owner walk the area prior to any, development and we will also ensure that training is provided to the contractors so that, if an artefact is found, all work stops and it gets reported to the regional environmental officer and up the chain, and the traditional owners are engaged as necessary.

**Mr LINDSAY**—This question is not a criticism, so do not misread it, but the base has now been there for quite a long time. I would have thought you might have already identified all of the potential problems. Why would that not be the case?

**Mr Zentelis**—We have identified the big-ticket items, so to speak, so we know where the sacred sites are. They are marked and we provide protection and exclude any development from them. But with regard to individual scatters or artefacts that may be in the undergrowth—things like that—you cannot survey the area in its totality for that.

**Mr SLIPPER**—What is an individual scatter?

**Mr Zentelis**—It could be some chert—tools, basically—that the traditional owners have used. It could be axe heads, grinding stones, grinding grooves, anything like that.

**Mr LINDSAY**—In terms of consultation, your evidence says, ‘The following external authorities have been or will be consulted about the project.’ It is on page 7. Who has been and who will be consulted, and why haven’t you consulted them all before this particular hearing?

**Brig. Grice**—I can go through a consolidated list of who we have consulted with and when we have consulted with them. A couple of people from the Northern Territory department of business and economic development were invited to a meeting on 19 March this year but they did not attend, so we will get back to them following the hearing. Also people from the Northern Territory department of natural resources, environment and heritage were unable to attend a meeting on 19 March, and we will get back to them. However, we have had consultations, and provided four separate industry briefings from August 2006 through to September 2007, in Darwin and in Katherine. We have consulted with the Northern Territory department of regional development on two occasions: in February 2007 and March 2008. We have had ongoing consultations with the Northern Territory Department of Defence Support, the Northern Territory department of planning and lands, the Northern Territory Treasury, the Chamber of Commerce, the Australian Industry and Defence Network in the Northern Territory and the Territory Construction Association.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Has the member for Lingiari been consulted? I assume he would be supportive.

**Brig. Grice**—Yes, he was, on 2 April, and the member for Katherine in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly was briefed on 9 April and the Katherine Town Council was briefed in February 2007 and June 2007.

**Mr LINDSAY**—On the two NT departments that were unavailable—very significant departments: business and economic development, and natural resources, environment and heritage—did you find it odd that they did not come?

**Brig. Grice**—No; they are very, very busy. On the scale of things they had to get done on that occasion, this was not one of them. We are not concerned and we will be speaking to them as we go forward.

**Mr SLIPPER**—Did they stand you up or did they say that they were unavailable?

**Mr Harper**—Stood up.

**Mr SLIPPER**—Quite seriously, you talk about how important their work is. It would seem to me that your work is at least as important. There is a world of difference between someone ringing up and saying, ‘Brigadier, I can’t make the meeting’—giving their reason—and then saying, ‘Please reschedule,’ and being a no-show. My view is that a person who is a no-show has forfeited the right to be consulted. I do not know whether my fellow committee members agree with me, but I say that you cannot be running after people who simply make arrangements and who treat you with such gross discourtesy as to just not front.

**Brig. Grice**—Thank you.

**Mr LINDSAY**—I have no further questions.

**CHAIR**—Mr Slipper?

**Mr SLIPPER**—No.

**CHAIR**—In relation to the security fence extension, why didn't the original fence take in the explosive storage and preparations' facilities. Are they new facilities? I guess what I am coming to is: are there going to be other progressive extensions of this fence or, foreseeably, is this likely to be the only change?

**Brig. Grice**—These are the final sections that we will be putting inside that security fence. When the security fence was initially constructed, we had budgetary constraints. In addition, the fact that there have been some slight changes to the types of weapons being stored in those facilities has necessitated a change. It was a combination. It was 'nice to have but not essential' when the initial fence went in, but now it has moved more to 'essential' and that is why we are doing it. But that will be the end of the matter, we believe.

**CHAIR**—This is stage 5 for consideration. Is there a stage 6 under consideration or is this it at Tindal, at least for a while?

**Brig. Grice**—As I have indicated, the major capital facilities program currently has unapproved projects out to 2018. At the moment, no stage 6 has been identified by Air Force, the sponsor; it has not come up with any requirements on this base at the moment. However, we are undertaking a review of living-in accommodation across Air Force bases. It could be that, as we go forward, there is an increase in temporary living accommodation on the base to support surges. But there is no project that is under development and, if there were, it would be several years into the future.

**CHAIR**—Is that the LEAP project?

**Brig. Grice**—No. Project Single LEAP is not delivering any LIA on the base. There are two requirements. We have a project that unfortunately is named Project SMILE. For the life of me, I cannot remember what that acronym stands for, but it looks at level 3 accommodation to be used in supporting training and other requirements. There is an indicative program in the MCF, from about 2013 to about 2017, to provide some accommodation rooms across the estate. However, it is an unapproved project and the services, requirements and priorities have not yet been identified. That may be one area in the future, but, as yet, there are no firm plans or requirements.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, Brigadier, for the work done today and for the work of all of your departments and consultants.

**Brig. Grice**—Thank you.

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

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Committee adjourned at 2.09 pm**