



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC
WORKS

Reference: Multirole helicopter facilities

TUESDAY, 6 MAY 2008

MITCHELTON

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**PARLIAMENTARY STANDING
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS**

Tuesday, 6 May 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: Senators Forshaw and Troeth, Mr Butler, Mr Champion, Mr Lindsay and Mr Slipper

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Multirole helicopter facilities

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Committee met at 2.01 pm

BARRETT, Commodore Timothy, Commander, Australian Navy Aviation Group, Department of Defence

DUDGEON, Brigadier Andrew, Director General, Army Aviation Systems, Department of Defence

GREENAWAY, Mr Martin Charles, Project Officer, Infrastructure Division, Department of Defence

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

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

MOSCHNER, Mr Ken, Project Manager, Sinclair Knight Merz

CHAIR (Mr Butler)—I declare open this public hearing of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works. The committee is inquiring into the proposed multirole helicopter facilities at various locations along the eastern coast. Thank you to members of the public, representatives of the Department of Defence and various other interested parties who are attending today's public hearing. We have had two organisations indicate an intention to give evidence, the first obviously being the Department of Defence and their representatives, and the second a councillor from the Toowoomba Regional Council, from whom we will hear, if he is still willing, after Defence. What I will proceed to do after dealing with some technicalities is ask for the department representatives to make some introductory remarks and then open themselves up to questioning from the committee.

Brigadier and other parties: 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 witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and might be regarded as contempt of parliament.

Brigadier Grice, do you wish to make some introductory remarks?

Brig. Grice—Thank you, Mr Chairman. Firstly, I would like to make a couple of small changes to the statement of evidence which was submitted by Defence initially last year. At the end of paragraph 17 I would like to add the words:

The training needs analysis is now complete and has determined that two simulators are required, one at RAAF Base Townsville and one at the Army Aviation Training Centre at Oakey.

In that instance we could delete elsewhere in the evidence all references to building a simulator at HMAS *Albatross*. We will not be building a simulator at HMAS *Albatross* at Nowra as part of this project.

The second amendment is in paragraph 135, which should be amended to read:

Subject to parliamentary clearance of this project, construction is expected to commence in mid-2008 and be completed late in 2010.

That change is to reflect that this project was referred to the committee prior to the federal election and the referral lapsed and has been re-referred, so there has been a slight delay in the construction period.

The third amendment is at paragraphs 76, 77 and 78 where they refer to a sheet metal workshop to be provided at Oakey. Based on a cost-benefit analysis that has been completed since the project was first referred last year, we have determined that it is more cost effective to build a third aircraft shelter at Oakey in lieu of building a new sheet metal workshop. Hence, we should delete all reference in the evidence to the building of a sheet metal workshop at Oakey—we will not be building one. And elsewhere in the evidence, where we refer to building two new aircraft shelters at Oakey, this should be amended to read that we will build three new aircraft shelters at Oakey.

CHAIR—Thank you, Brigadier. They are noted.

Brig. Grice—I will now present my opening statement. This proposal seeks approval for the multirole helicopter facilities project for the Department of Defence. The Department of Defence is acquiring 34 multirole helicopters—MRH90—under Defence Capability Plan Project Air 9000, phases 4 and 6, to replace the existing Black Hawk and Sea King helicopter fleets. This is in addition to the 12 MRH90 helicopters currently being delivered as the additional troop lift helicopter capability under Defence Capability Plan Project Air 9000, phase 2, which was subject to a separate Public Works Committee hearing in August 2006.

These helicopters will be based at defence establishments along the east coast of Australia. The proposed works in support of this capability will be located at HMAS *Albatross* in Nowra, New South Wales, RAAF Base Townsville in Queensland, the Army Aviation Centre in Oakey, Queensland, and Gallipoli Barracks at Enoggera, Queensland. The scope of works at HMAS *Albatross* includes a new purpose-built facility for Navy's 817 Squadron, a new battery workshop and demolition of two existing buildings. I will note that there will no longer be a simulator facility built at HMAS *Albatross* as part of this project.

The scope of works at RAAF Base Townsville includes modification of B Squadron, 5th Aviation Regiment, aircraft shelters; extension of the mission planning facility for B Squadron; a new simulator building; extension and reconfiguration of the technical support troop facility; upgrade of the aircraft life support equipment workshop; and a new forward repair troop and draft priority 1 store building.

The scope of works at the Army Aviation Centre, Oakey, includes a new aircraft maintenance facility, three new aircraft shelters, new MRH90 aircraft parking pads, a new simulator building, reconfiguration of the School of Army Aviation facility, a new aircraft life support equipment workshop, reconfiguration and extension of the Aviation Trade Wing building, extension of the Rotary Wing Aircraft Maintenance School, and upgrades to the electricity supply capacity to the base.

The scope of works at Gallipoli Barracks includes a new office building for the headquarters of the 16th Aviation Brigade and elements of the Defence Materiel Organisation.

The combination of reuse, new construction and extension to existing facilities provides the best value for money solution for the Commonwealth whilst minimising the impact to operations during the transition of aircraft. The outturn cost for this project is \$168.7 million. This includes professional design and management fees and charges, construction, furniture, fittings and equipment, together with appropriate allowances for contingency and escalation.

Subject to parliamentary clearance, it is intended to commence construction works in mid-2008, with the works being complete by late 2010. Defence is ready to answer any questions the committee members may have.

CHAIR—Thank you, Brigadier. We will go to questions, starting with Mr Lindsay.

Mr LINDSAY—Brigadier, you told us earlier today that you were going to manage the MRH90s as a common fleet. Where is that going to be managed from? Are the Navy units going to be managed from 16 Aviation Brigade, from DMO? What is going to happen?

Brig. Grice—I will pass to Brigadier Dudgeon to answer that question.

Brig. Dudgeon—All 46 helicopters being acquired under Air 9000 will be managed by Army as a common fleet for Army and Navy: 40 helicopters for Army and six for Navy. They will be managed here at Enoggera at the new Headquarters, 16 Brigade, and Defence Materiel office building, where my headquarters will be. Elements of the Army Aviation Systems Project Office will manage that common fleet. To ensure that we correctly look after our naval counterparts, we will be in a very close association with the Navy Aviation Systems Project Office at Nowra. However, it will be managed here in Brisbane.

Mr LINDSAY—Thank you.

Mr SLIPPER—Through you, Mr Chairman, if Mr Lindsay will allow me to follow up on one aspect of that question—

Mr LINDSAY—Go ahead.

Mr SLIPPER—I can see the efficiencies of having Army manage for both services. Do you internally have some sort of cost adjustment? Does Navy notionally pay Army to do that? Does Navy have to pay for the proportion of use that it makes of those aircraft?

Brig. Dudgeon—Yes, we do. We had a materiel sustainment agreement between Army and Navy. Sitting behind me you can see a mix of Army and Navy personnel. That is Navy. You can see the breakdown: 40 helicopters for Army and six for the Navy. Navy has to supply personnel to assist in that.

Mr SLIPPER—We can see more khaki than white.

Brig. Dudgeon—Exactly. As part of the facility here in Brisbane there will be naval staff working with Director General Army Aviation Systems and Commander 16 Brigade to assist with that management. Overall, just in terms of savings, as we were discussing just before the break, this project is delivering an additional flight at sea, an additional air mobile squadron to defence and the Army, two simulators, and bringing everything to a single sustainment organisation, so it will definitely bring efficiencies and savings.

Mr LINDSAY—You told us earlier today that the Seasprite building at HMAS *Albatross* will be available in 12 months time. If it were available now, could that have changed the economics of this project?

Brig. Grice—No, is the short answer.

Mr LINDSAY—Thank you—a very wise way to answer.

Mr SLIPPER—What is the long answer?

Brig. Grice—We can continue on that if you would like more explanation.

Mr LINDSAY—No; that is fine. You said in your evidence that helicopters will be based at several locations along the east coast of Australia and then you mention Gallipoli Barracks, but there are no helicopters being based at Gallipoli—is that correct?

Brig. Dudgeon—That is correct. There will be no helicopters based here.

Mr LINDSAY—Will the modifications to B Squadron's 10 aircraft shelters in Townsville be the same modifications that were done to A Squadron?

Brig. Grice—That is correct.

Mr LINDSAY—Is having a simulator contractor deliver the simulator facilities as well as the simulator, in your view, best value for the Commonwealth or is it lowest risk for the Commonwealth, or both?

Brig. Grice—In this instance, where these are a first of type in Australia simulator, it is a combination of both. Having the simulator equipment provider provide the facilities removes the risk of integration of the simulator into the building, and the onus for the fitness for purpose of the facility is on the simulator operator, the simulator provider, which means that there is a reduction of risk for the Commonwealth because any delays on the completion of the facilities are at the simulator provider's risk. It also provides value for money in that it centralises the provision of the facilities and the simulators in one entity.

Mr LINDSAY—In relation to Townsville aircraft shelters, in paragraph 41 you said:

These shelters will provide protection for the aircraft from the elements of the weather, particularly cyclonic winds.

Do you agree that another purpose for the shelters is to provide protection against salt corrosion of the aircraft frame?

Brig. Dudgeon—Yes; that is correct. As we have with the Black Hawk facilities in Townsville at the moment, the dehumidifying equipment that is put inside each and every one of those individual shelters is to reduce the impact of salt. There is evidence that has been gained over the last 15 years of operation in Townsville that it has in fact benefited the aircraft based there.

Mr LINDSAY—You said in relation to Oakey that the proposed work consists of two stand-alone aircraft shelters, which you have changed to three. Why do you call them stand-alone?

Brig. Grice—You are familiar with the shelters in Townsville. They have a common internal wall which provides fire separation. At Oakey, to minimise costs so that no firewall is required, there is a single aircraft in a stand-alone building with an offset between the buildings. This is for efficiencies in that site.

Mr LINDSAY—In relation to increased electricity supply at Oakey, in paragraph 79 it says:

To mitigate this risk, this proposal contains a provision for an alternative, temporary source of power.

You are saying that Ergon have indicated that they might not be able to meet the simulator building delivery time frame. What is the delivery time frame on the simulator building? If it is two years, are you surprised that Ergon could not meet a customer's demand for power in that time?

Brig. Grice—What I can add is that, since the evidence was written, there have been recent discussions with Ergon and they have provided us with some comfort. They are almost complete with the upgrade of their Oakey town substation and they have advised that the remaining scope of work to provide the required power is the reconductoring of the 11-kVA transmission lines, about three kilometres worth, from the main 33-kVA lines running through Oakey township to the base. We are advised that this activity takes about six months and, as such, this meets our required time frames. That risk has been mitigated through close consultation between the project and Ergon. I would say that at this stage, however, Ergon have not commenced that work, so we are continuing to preserve a modest allowance of temporary supply at Oakey at this stage.

Mr LINDSAY—I could not find a reference to that modest allowance. Where was that?

Brig. Grice—It was included in the cost plan as a subelement in the HV supply. We can talk about that later.

Mr LINDSAY—No, that is fine. In relation to demolishing hangar G at *Albatross*, I assume, you said in your evidence 'demolition subject to appropriate approval being granted'. Who grants that approval and is that a risk to this project?

Brig. Grice—I will pass to Mr Zentelis.

Mr Zentelis—Basically at the time when the project was first commenced a full heritage assessment of *Albatross* and of hangar G had not been completed. We have now undertaken that and the site does not, in our view, warrant listing on the Commonwealth Heritage List under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. We have commissioned a study

which validates that there will be no impact on the local heritage values at *Albatross* with the demolition of hangar G.

Senator FORSHAW—Could I just pick up on that point. At paragraph 30 it says that a heritage scoping study has been undertaken at four sites. Then there is a reference to Nowra and then a reference to an Aboriginal heritage assessment that will be undertaken for the Enoggera site. Are those studies, whether it is heritage or environmental, only in relation to the sites within the entire base that are to be affected?

Brig. Grice—That is correct.

Senator FORSHAW—Defence has a lot of projects coming along and that have come along over the last few years. Has it ever been considered that you would try and find a way to do a study of the whole base for Aboriginal sites and/or heritage listing? I thought that might be what you were saying about *Albatross*.

Mr Zentelis—It is really a matter of the level of detail and when you actually collect that detail. So we have a fair handle on the heritage, Indigenous and environmental values on all our assets, our bases. When it comes down to where we know the exact footprint of a development occurs we go to a greater level of scrutiny. For example, at Enoggera, which is what paragraph 39 refers to, to make sure that we are not impacting on any potential Indigenous sites—scatters, chert or what have you—we will commission a more detailed survey that will go over the site to make sure that we do not disturb any items that are of importance to the Indigenous community. It is just a value for money assessment. If we did that for all our facilities, the costs of such surveys are quite dear, so we have got a fair—

Senator FORSHAW—Would that be a legislative requirement too, that you cannot necessarily just rely upon some examination that was done some years earlier?

Mr Zentelis—It is.

Senator FORSHAW—I know that this is what happens often with EISs. You have to update them.

Mr Zentelis—We do, and we have an obligation that we cannot have a significant impact on the environment.

Senator FORSHAW—There is a note in your submission—and it was indicated to us during our inspection—about some minor modification requirements that are expected at Holsworthy in relation to the relocation of the Black Hawk aircraft there, and the facilities that were approved by this committee some couple of years ago. I was on that inquiry; I am just interested as to how that has come about. Even if it is minor, those facilities were intended for—as I understand—and assessed on the basis of both the Black Hawk and the MRH90 choppers coming into service. What might be a concern is that you go ahead with this and then you find that you will have to do further minor modification at the other bases down the track.

Brig. Grice—There is no modification required to the structures. The footprint, the building fabric, was planned so that there was a facility able to support the GMMS and the mission

planning facility that would be installed in there. The small amount of money that has been put aside for that is for the actual installation of the communications backbone to support the installation of those in pre-ducted areas. So it is not that we did not know about it; it is just that at the time the decision had not been made, so it would have been imprudent to install additional computer cabling and equipment that might not have been required.

Senator FORSHAW—So it relates to services installation, as distinct from building modifications or modifications to the tarmacs or any of that?

Brig. Grice—That is correct.

Mr CHAMPION—I just noticed in some of the correspondence about HMAS *Albatross* that one of the councils, Shoalhaven City Council, is helpfully going to construct, perhaps, a residential housing estate near one of the bases. In the correspondence it says that, if one of these housing estates is going to be opened within nine kilometres of the base, the council is required to come and engage with Defence. How much engagement does Defence have with local councils on that issue? Is that likely to become a problem, or is it a problem, with councils authorising developments on the edge of defence bases and then you guys getting lots of complaints about noise subsequently?

Brig. Grice—Encroachment is an ongoing issue across the estate, and the Assistant Secretary of Estate Planning in Infrastructure Division is charged with keeping abreast of those developments across the estate. There is a regulatory framework out there that controls the submission of development applications, and Defence, as a landowner, a landholder and a neighbour, has, upon occasion, made comment on development applications where Defence felt that they were inconsistent and would encroach on the uses of the Defence property. From time to time Defence has made those sorts of comments. I know that the estate planning has been very active in the Shoalhaven area, looking at several proposed developments that were adjacent to Nowra. I do not want to go into all of those, because it is slightly outside my area, but we are engaged. The Defence Support Group regional representatives are engaged—that is, those people from the Defence Support Group who work at Nowra—with the capability users on the base to determine whether any of these developments will have any input on the capability. Commodore, maybe you would like to add a little bit about the consultation in the Nowra area.

Cdre Barrett—From the legislative view, as the brigadier has said, DSG within the department runs that. At the operational level the commanding officer of the base has very regular contact with the Shoalhaven council, not just in answering noise complaints, but proactively showing where various projects are and the likely development of *Albatross* in the forthcoming period. So there has been a significant amount of engagement with local council. This local council is keen to develop in the area, both from an industrial and residential side, which was raised in their submission. I can state that there is significant and ongoing engagement with council over the future prospects for the base and letting them know the consequences of that sort of development in terms of aircraft noise activity, not just at the base but in the region as well.

Mr CHAMPION—Can Defence veto new housing estates that are close to bases?

Brig. Grice—We can make representations to the planning committee, as can any other organisation.

Mr CHAMPION—So, no, in other words.

Mr SLIPPER—I do not think you would have a veto right, would you, over land you do not own? It would be a pretty scary precedent.

Brig. Grice—It would be, but it would be nice!

Mr CHAMPION—I just ask because if it is an ongoing problem—

Brig. Grice—It is a consultation issue. We have ongoing consultation with all of the local councils in the areas where we have bases. Some of them are more proactive than others and some of them are more pro development than pro Defence. We are a member of the community like everybody else, and the councils have to take a broad view of these matters and in the end do the right thing by their constituents.

Specifically in relation to this project we have had quite a history of consultation: the federal member for Herbert on 12 September 2007; the federal member for Brisbane on 19 March 2008; the federal member for Groom on 17 March 2008; the federal member for Gilmore in March 2008; the Queensland state government member for Townsville in October 2007; the Queensland state government member for the Darling Downs on 11 October 2007; the Queensland state government member for Ashgrove on 3 April 2008; Townsville City Council on 17 September 2007; Thuringowa City Council on 17 September 2007; Jondaryan Shire Council in the Darling Downs on 22 November 2007; Shoalhaven City Council in Nowra on 16 April 2008; Queensland Environmental Protection Agency, Townsville, concerning the national estate wetlands adjacent to the flight aviation regiment, and Townsville Airport Pty Ltd on 20 September 2007. For this project we have had engagement with a whole range of federal, state, local and council members.

Senator FORSHAW—Except the Senate, but that is okay. Sorry, I just had to put that in! Carry on.

Brig. Grice—We will have to change our procedures.

Senator FORSHAW—No; you are doing well.

Mr CHAMPION—Don't include them! I missed this, but apparently on the site tour Defence indicated that one of the helicopters would be based in Adelaide in 2011. I was just wondering if you could elaborate a bit more on that plan and where it might be?

Brig. Dudgeon—Mr Champion, you are well aware of the AOSG, the Aerospace Operational Support Group, in your electorate. Currently we have a range of different aircraft there for flight test and evaluation. The Black Hawk that is there now for our air mobile capability will be replaced with an MRH90 in 2011 to do all the test evaluation to bring this new aircraft into service and one aircraft will be based there at AOSG.

Mr CHAMPION—It will probably fly over my house.

Brig. Dudgeon—Could be. It will be a little quieter than a Black Hawk as well.

Senator TROETH—You told us this morning that the Black Hawk and the Sea King aircraft are retired from service because you will be buying the MRH90. Will the introduction of the new planes result in a net increase or decrease in defence helicopters?

Brig. Dudgeon—In line with the helicopter master plan, I will give the exact numbers. The MRH90 is replacing the UH1H Huey aircraft, the S70 Black Hawk and the Sea King. We are going down from 68 helicopters—25 Hueys, 37 Black Hawks and six Sea Kings—to 46 MRH90s. So it will reduce the number of medium—

Senator TROETH—In that category of able to do lifting?

Brig. Dudgeon—Yes, in that category.

Senator TROETH—Suppose that in the future you did acquire, let us say, 10 more MRH90s. Given the extra facilities that will need to be built for them, as in the introduction of a concrete pad on the tarmac to save the aircraft from settling into the tarmac, do you anticipate that these facilities that we are looking at today will be enough, or will you be able to extend their proposed building?

Brig. Dudgeon—There is no plan to acquire any more MRH90s in the future. There is the Air 9000 phase 8, which is the naval combat helicopter, which will be looked at in the future, and any facilities requirements for that will either be encompassed within the extant Seasprite facility at Nowra or a new facility project. Under this project we are looking at today, for phases 4 and 6 of Air 9000, the 46 helicopters, there are no plans whatsoever to acquire additional MRH90s. Brigadier Grice has just mentioned that perhaps when we talk about the reduction in numbers of helicopters down to 46 there is in fact an overall increase in troop lift capability because the MRH90 can carry more soldiers and more equipment further and faster. So there is not a reduction in capability to defence.

Cdre Barrett—Can I add something from this morning's briefing. Some of the site positioning that we discussed would allow for future expansion and further building should it be required under a new project, as the brigadier just mentioned. So whilst not specifically built for, in siting the existing new facilities it was taken in mind that future space could be used should new facilities be required.

Brig. Grice—That is something we do with all of our projects so that we have flexibility for the future. These facilities are there to support the capability through the life of the capability. I am not going to presuppose decisions that may be made by government 40 years from now.

Mr SLIPPER—Just going a little bit further into the process of consultation: I accept that you have undertaken the consultations that you have said you have, but what is the template you use? Do you have a checklist? Do you see the local authority, or any state and federal member? What do you do to consult the broader community which might be affected by your proposal? Do you

assume that the elected representatives represent those groups or do you advertise a public consultation process?

Brig. Grice—It is both. On our infrastructure management system, which is our business process, there is a specific list of all of those utilities and the federal, state, local and other members that we should consult with. But then on a project-by-project basis we will look at the implications of the projects for the regions in which they are going to be constructed. We may, depending on what the project is, undertake specific community consultation periods, as we did with the Hardened and Networked Army project in Edinburgh, where we undertook a series of public consultations where we advertised in the newspaper and members of the public were invited to come along to a couple of evenings where we gave details on the project. That is normally for those where there are large bodies of troops or large increases, or those in a sensitive area. Another one was the Joint Combined Training Centre, which was a very small urban operations training facility built on Shoalwater Bay, which is a very tender spot. We conducted a series of public consultations in the Livingstone shire and within Rockhampton during the development of that project to educate our neighbours about what it was we were proposing to do. In this project, since we were replacing basically like for like and there were no tremendous increases on any of the bases that we were doing any work on, we did not go to that step.

Mr SLIPPER—And you have had no serious expression of concern, other than possibly Shoalhaven?

Brig. Grice—Everyone that we have spoken to has been generally supportive of the project.

CHAIR—Taking up that point, I noticed that the lord mayor of Brisbane has written a submission, which is available on the website, in which, after saying that the helicopters are extremely noisy, he says that he expects that the volume of flights will increase substantially over existing volumes at Enoggera. Is that a reasonable expectation?

Brig. Dudgeon—I can answer that question. As I mentioned earlier, there will be no helicopters based here in Enoggera, so we can allay the lord mayor's fears.

CHAIR—Can we infer from that that there will not be?

Brig. Dudgeon—No. Occasionally helicopters do come to Gallipoli Barracks from Oakey or from Townsville or Sydney, but it is very rare. There will certainly be no increase in what occurs now, and the aircrews are briefed extensively on flying neighbourly—flying friendly—in set routes to avoid built-up areas and housing et cetera and to land on the oval. Further down in his letter, the lord mayor talks about the vegetation. It is nowhere near that. It lands on the oval, and aircraft come, I would say, once or twice a month and very rarely into the base.

CHAIR—As there are no further questions, we thank you, Brigadier, and the other Defence witnesses.

[2.36 pm]

STROHFELD, Mr Noel Leslie, Councillor and Strategic Services Spokesperson, Toowoomba Regional Council

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you wish to comment on the capacity in which you appear?

Councillor Strohfeld—Thank you. I am the Councillor for Strategic Services at the new Toowoomba Regional Council and I am representing the mayor, Councillor Peter Taylor.

CHAIR—If you were in the room you probably heard the warnings that I gave the Defence witnesses about the nature of these proceedings and the evidence given before the committee. I do not propose to give it again, but just bear that in mind while you make some introductory remarks to the committee.

Councillor Strohfeld—I have been in local government for a long time and that rule applies all the way. The new Toowoomba Regional Council has come here today basically to offer their support to the multirole helicopter facilities to be built at the Oakey Army Aviation Centre. As you would know, there has been a quite a change up in the Darling Downs. You heard Jondaryan Shire Council mentioned before in relation to the communiques in November. Since then, the mayor of Jondaryan Shire Council has become the mayor of the regional council, which encompasses Toowoomba city and quite a few other areas as well. It is a very large regional council and all the different shire councils and the city council are now all in one council.

We are very happy as a regional council to support the development at Oakey. The development has very good social and economic impacts on the region. I should say right from the start that that region has lived with the Army Aviation Centre for quite some considerable time and they have a very positive relationship with that centre. We do not have any problem to speak of anywhere that cannot be managed. Helicopters travel over the area quite regularly and land in various areas. The community is supportive. They are the biggest employer in the region, which is in our submission. As an individual employer, they are bigger than the regional council itself. A lot of the people who work there own their own homes in the area. I think homeownership is one of the highest in the country in the services. We are very happy to have these people integrate into our community. As I said, it has been very positive, and the economic impacts of Oakey being in the region and being such a large employer are worth about \$280 million to the economy of the region. This is where my portfolio sits. There are 140 extra jobs up there during construction. It will certainly be worth while and it is certainly something we are very happy about.

Mr LINDSAY—Did Brigadier Grice write your evidence, Councillor!

Councillor Strohfeld—Actually, it was a short introduction, and I write my own!

Mr LINDSAY—Councillor, this committee has to recommend, or otherwise, a development at the Army Aviation Centre. Can you give us an assurance on behalf of your council that your

council will do everything that it can to protect the Army Aviation Centre from things like urban encroachment?

Councillor Strohfeld—I think if you were familiar with the Oakey facility, you would realise there is not a problem. This has been most probably already handled at the Jondaryan Shire Council level, and it certainly will not be a problem that I can see in the future. This is not my portfolio, but I can certainly tell you I do not see that as a problem.

Mr LINDSAY—But you cannot give us an assurance?

Councillor Strohfeld—I think I possibly could, but I think my mayor is the person who should give assurances.

Mr LINDSAY—You are representing the mayor, though.

Councillor Strohfeld—There are no problems I can see. I cannot see any problem whatsoever in Oakey.

CHAIR—As there are no further questions, we thank you very much for taking the time to come to our hearing. Please pass on our gratitude to the mayor and the rest of your council for making a submission.

Councillor Strohfeld—Thank you, and we look forward to seeing further developments with the MRH90.

CHAIR—Members of the public may have noticed that on the table near the entrance to this hearing room there are pamphlets which give you some information about the website of our committee. On that website you will be able to obtain the written submissions that have been made by the department and by other witnesses. If any member of the public wishes to make a written submission about this inquiry and the evidence heard today, you should feel free to do so in the way that is indicated on that pamphlet, over the next fortnight.

Resolved (on motion by **Senator Troeth**):

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

Committee adjourned at 2.42 pm