



November 2017

Mitchell Shire Council Submission

Senate Committee Hearing: Inquiry into the impact of Defence training activities and facilities on rural and regional communities

1. Presenters

- Cr. Rhonda Sanderson, Mayor Mitchell Shire Council
- Chris Cheal, Coordinator Economic Development Unit

2. Introductory Overview

- Mitchell Shire is proud to host Puckapunyal Military Area (PMA).
- There is a long and enduring association between Puckapunyal and our community, particularly the township of Seymour and many Seymour residents are ex-military. Many current employees live in Seymour and the Shire.
- PMA is strategically and attractively located just over an hour north of Melbourne and Melbourne Airport. Nearby is Mangalore Airport.
- It is highly accessible via road and rail; being located at the junction of GV Highway and Hume Freeway and the junction of the North East and Melbourne-Albury-Sydney rail lines.
- PMA supports many positive economic, social and environmental benefits for Mitchell Shire.

3. Existing Social and Economic Context

- Mitchell Shire has a population of 43,000 (2017).
- Situated on Metropolitan Melbourne's northern edge; the Shire's population is forecast to double to approximately 89,000 residents by 2036¹ and ultimately to 220,000.
- This will result in greatly enhanced provision of local services, a significantly enlarged local workforce, and attracting new businesses to the Shire and Region.
- PMA is a significant economic generator for our Shire and for our Region:
 - Largest single employer in the Shire with over 1,000 jobs located on-base in 2016 Census²
 - Includes approximately 640 jobs for non-military personnel³
 - Contributes to a wealth of skills in the local area
 - Estimated to generate \$230+ million of local economic activity in Mitchell Shire⁴
- Puckapunyal adds significantly to the population of 'greater Seymour' – comprised of approximately 10,000 residents⁵.
- However, changes at Puckapunyal over previous years have negatively impacted Seymour and its services, schools, etc. e.g. in 1995 the 1st Armoured Regiment was relocated to Darwin; while in 2007/08 saw the relocation of the 26 Transport Squadron and 150 personnel.
- Seymour is struggling but Council has invested heavily in planning for Seymour's revitalisation and is ramping up its efforts to help Seymour capitalise on the many opportunities that exist
- Seymour is noted as a place of significant change in the Hume Regional Growth Plan 2014
- The Seymour Structure Plan (to be adopted early 2018) will provide a framework for significant growth to a population of 15 – 20,000 and public and private sector investment.

¹ Source: *id. Consulting Population Forecast*: Accessed at: <http://forecast.id.com.au/mitchell>

² Source: ABS Census 2016; Number of 'Defence' sector jobs in Destination Zone 210603585 Seymour Region.

³ Source: Puckapunyal Command input to Seymour Structure Plan; May 2016.

⁴ Source: REMPLAN Analysis, 2017.

⁵ Including Seymour, Puckapunyal, Tallarook, Trawool, Whiteheads Creek and Avenel.

4. Utilisation of local suppliers and service providers to achieve value for money and improving opportunities for rural and regional businesses

- Several local businesses benefit by supplying PMA with goods and/or services:
 - Examples include passenger transport services, automotive repairs, locksmith services, cleaning / dry cleaning services, construction and building maintenance, earthworks and land management services, etc.
- Local companies provide excellent value for money as they are located nearby, have low transport costs, can guarantee quick response times and have an interest in providing high-quality service to ensure repeat business
- However, many businesses don't benefit and feel that the procurement process is extremely onerous and works to effectively exclude them from bidding for contracts:
- Mitchell Shire Council appreciates the objective to achieve value for money
- However, it is considered by Council that more can and should be done to maximise the opportunities for local suppliers to provide goods and services to PMA.

- To this end, Mitchell Shire would like to see various measures implemented:
 - Enhanced communication through local advertising, regular communication, etc., e.g. in The Seymour Telegraph, Mclvor Times, and North Central Review
 - Identification of clear 'contact points' within ADF for local government and local businesses in relation to forthcoming opportunities
 - Regular liaison, e.g. through a quarterly 'commercial opportunities' round-table meeting, with local government, development agency officers (e.g. RDA and RDV), the local chambers of commerce, etc, and including Defence
 - Enhanced local content minimum quotas for contractors / sub-contractor
 - Raising awareness amongst local businesses of, as subcontractors, what they could provide, rather than assuming that they have to fulfil a whole contract
 - Work with local government to investigate opportunities for events or workshops targeted at helping to train and boost capacity in local businesses
 - Simplifying procurement arrangements for local businesses wherever possible
 - Regularly reporting on the value of Defence expenditure on locally sourced goods and services – both directly and through contractor / sub-contractor arrangements, to provide a transparent and trackable account of the benefits accruing to local businesses
 - Adding rural and regional small and medium businesses to the list of exemptions under Appendix A: Exemptions from Division 2 of the Commonwealth Procurement Rules.

- Mitchell also confirms that it strongly supports initiatives and recommendations such as those contained in the Interim Report⁶. In particular, strong support is given to points in paragraphs 3.8; 3.13; 3.21; 3.26 and 3.29 relating to opportunities for enhanced communication; co-sponsored business workshops; encouraging local purchases; and enhancing communication and transparency relating to Defence expenditure in local areas.

⁶ Interim Report: Impact of Defence training activities and facilities on rural and regional communities (14 Aug 2017); Accessed on 14th Nov 2017; Accessed at: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/Defencetraining/Interim%20Report/c03

5. Consultation and communication with local community organisations.

- Puckapunyal township, with a permanent population of ca. 1,100 and with an average occupancy of as many as 3,000 to 4,000 people⁷, is effectively a suburb of Seymour
- Puckapunyal faces challenges as it contains a town within it and operates under the 'safe base Charlie' security level. The high level of security combined with the distance between the base and Seymour means that interaction between the base and Seymour can be challenging.
- Recent security changes have meant that getting on base is difficult – e.g. sporting teams now struggle to visit Puckapunyal for sports matches; the Cinema is no longer accessible; and it is difficult for children to play at their friend's houses on base.
- Although Puckapunyal is difficult for residents from other towns to access, Puckapunyal Primary continues to attract students from Seymour and surrounding towns.
- Access to Seymour and neighbouring towns is also difficult for Puckapunyal residents and especially trainees, many of whom do not have a car while training at Puckapunyal; despite the provision of a bus service 6 days per week.
- As a result, both communities suffer – despite the opportunities that exist.
- Mitchell Shire would like to see various measures investigated and pursued:
 - The ways in which Puckapunyal can assist and benefit from Seymour's revitalisation.
 - The potential for future community facilities on base to be provided at the fence line so that these facilities are accessible by the wider community living outside the fence.
 - Better communication between Puckapunyal and the Shire regarding opportunities for mutually-beneficial service and facility arrangements.
 - Tangible efforts to bolster consultation and communication between the two communities.
 - The opportunity to liaise with Base Command and Defence Community Organisation to further participate in their annual Welcome Day. Council would also like to investigate hosting a Welcome to Seymour orientation tour that would aim to familiarise new residents at Puckapunyal with the retail, food and dining opportunities; government services; medical facilities; visitor attractions; recreational facilities; etc., in Seymour and the wider region.
 - Continued participation in celebrating and commemorating the local area's and Australia's military history. For example, local events commemorating the 100th anniversary of World War I campaigns or Vietnam War commemorative events.

6. Investments in new facilities, infrastructure and operations

- Puckapunyal hosts the Royal Australian Armoured Corps Memorial and Army Tank Museum (or the '*Tank Museum*'). It formerly hosted the Army Transport Museum now at Bandiana.
- Together with Seymour's Vietnam Veterans Commemorative Walk and Australian Light Horse Memorial Park, the Tank Museum forms the core of an array of military heritage attractions.
- However, the tank's location within the PMA means that it is often difficult for visitors to access, with limited opening hours and restrictive visitor access arrangements.
- This is extremely limiting for both the Tank Museum and for Seymour.
- The solution is constructing a new Tank Museum at the front fence line of the PMA.
- No firm date has been provided for design and construction other than by 2022; but Mitchell Shire is extremely keen that a new museum be delivered as soon as possible.

⁷ Puckapunyal Command input to Seymour Structure Plan; May 2016.



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- The new museum would:
 - Provide Seymour and the surrounding area with an engaging military heritage visitor attraction to strongly complement the Vietnam Veterans Walk and the Australian Light Horse Memorial Park.
 - Greatly enhance and strengthen the combined offer of Seymour, and the Heart of Victoria tourism region, around military heritage attractions.
 - Boost tourism, visitor numbers, jobs and other tourism businesses in Seymour, Mitchell Shire and the wider *Heart of Victoria* region.

7. Environmental Impacts

- Mitchell Shire Council is committed to the ongoing protection and enhancement of our natural environment and integrating innovative and sustainable practices into our operations to reduce energy and water usage and costs.
- Council considers PMA is generally well managed in terms of environmental impacts.
- Council understands that PMA actively manages environmental issues including weeds, pest animals and bio-security threats, such as the management of *Johne's disease* in the base's wild goat population, etc.
- The collaboration of the MPA is vital to the success of any local environmental or plant /animal disease management.
- Many years ago, the PMA hosted regional training for community members titled *Box Ironbark Ecology Courses* on base, however this hasn't happened for a long time – and although regrettable, Council understands it is unlikely to resume given current security arrangements.
- Council considers that, despite the use of the site for military training activities, the large area of the site including newly forested land, accommodates a variety of flora and fauna and is likely to be a significant reservoir and bio-link for a wide range of species in central Victoria.
- Council is also committed to raising community awareness and involvement in their local environment and is happy to provide MPA with information about the local environment to provide to their residents and/or through the Puckapunyal Primary school.

8. Consultation and communication with local government and community organisations – Emergency Services, Preparedness and Prevention

- A PMA representative is a member of the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee.
- Communication between PMA, Council and Emergency Services has not always been good, and changes in base command can lead to periods of minimal communication and dialogue.
- However, communications and the relationship between PMA, Country Fire Authority and Council have improved dramatically. Joint emergency management exercises with PMA have improved the lines of communication and understanding about capacity and capability.
- Relief and recovery arrangements are being reviewed to reflect PMA's management of civilian staff and residents living on the base during and after an emergency event. PMA are developing arrangements to look after civilian staff and residents without the need to send them to Seymour where they may overwhelm existing facilities and services.
- An emergency services multi-agency welcome is being considered for the new base commander early 2018; it is planned to bring together agency representation from emergency services, Council and support agencies to meet the new base commander.