

From: Julian

To: Committee, Public Works (REPS);

Subject: Submission relating to Public Works Committee regarding proposed Australian Embassy in Qatar

Date: Wednesday, 2 March 2016 10:30:43 AM

I wish to submit this email as a response and for consideration into the proposed new Australian Embassy, and fit out of the Australian Embassy in Doha, Qatar.

I am an Australian citizen who has spent the better part of the last five years in Qatar working for the Al Jazeera News Network. I have no commercial real estate experience but i do have the experience of living in Doha and an understanding of costs of living and operating in this city while also having the experiences and knowledge of colleagues and friends in Qatar.

I was aghast when i read that the proposed Embassy would cost nearly \$7 million and was to be based in the Tornado Tower, within the city centre of Doha; i was further aghast when informed that the \$7 million projected cost was just for the fit out of what are perfectly appropriate, although somewhat high end and luxurious offices in one of the most expensive buildings in Qatar and that the building chosen, the Tornado tower was narrowed down from a list of three of the most expensive buildings in Doha. I should add that those three buildings, The Burj, The Tornado tower and the Gate Mall are relatively empty and have been since completion. The 10 year lease of the 21st floor of the Tornado Tower is \$860000 (AUD) dollars per annum or \$8.6 Million for a ten year lease.

The office will have a workforce/staff of 15 people, 4 Australians including three department officials, one Austrade employee and 11 locally-engaged employees and the size of the floor is 895m2, or just shy of 60m2 per employee, which quite possibly explains the need for proposed installation of the 'public address systems' according to the submission from DFAT's OPO Fit-out of the Australian Embassy in Doha, Qatar Submission 1, 1.3 Description of proposal,1.3.1e.

I'm not sure I can adequately address the issue surrounding the projected cost of fitting out this office, suffice to say I have read DFAT'S proposal which virtually states it has found an office floor that is fully fitted out but wants to remove the current fit out and re fit the office to meet the standards of DFAT and WHS (Work Health and Safety), quality and building compliance.

So, I would like to address the OPO's submission with counter points.

a. securing a ten year lease of 895m2 in the Tornado Tower building;

This building is, like the Burj and the Gate Mall, an up market under-utilised show piece. it is badly located, in the city centre, not very close to the Diplomatic area which is known as the Diplomatic area and although it is close to some municipal offices it is also quite far from other municipal offices. There is limited parking in the area and traffic is horrendous most of the time.

Apart from the Canadian embassy, the majority of Embassies in Qatar are based in the diplomatic area and are housed or contained in stand-alone villas.

Having attended various functions at several of these stand-alone villas i can assure you that they are functional and practical with high standards of safety and security, including compound like high concrete walls and various levels of security gates. The rental/leasing

costs of these villas ranges from 35000-50000 Qar a month, approximately \$20000 AUD per month. For example, this is the Thai embassy in Doha.



Tornado Tower, The Gate Mall or Burj Qatar are 3 of the most expensive office buildings in Qatar, there is plenty of reasonably priced office space in Qatar as it is a country with a penchant for building shiny new offices and not having tenants, a result of its vast oil & gas wealth and small population.

For example, <http://www.mubawab.com.qa/en/a/5402545/the-dancing-towers-of-doha-al-shoumoukh-towers-> is a building that has been completed for 2 years and is still devoid of tenants, its a five star building in a very good area

b. demolition of existing office fitout;

I am not sure as to the need for this, unless it is because the offices are not currently configured to accommodate a mere 15 people in 900m2.

c. a full office fit-out including public areas, multi-purpose/function area, staff offices and kitchenette;

I can't see any need for this either, apparently the building was inspected by OPO, did the inspectors look inside?

In my opinion this is a terrible choice of location and building but it has been built to incredibly high standards and fitted out in luxurious appointments, including, from there own website;

Tornado Tower has been designed to the very highest specifications and constructed to international safety and security standards.

The tower has been fire rated to National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) criteria by an independent party and offers the latest security systems including card access control and CCTV in addition to a visible security presence allowing access 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Tenants will benefit from the following superior, Class A performance specifications:

- Flexible, column free floor plates.
- 100 mm raised floor.
- 2.8 metre finished floor to ceiling height.
- Design criteria of one person per 15 sq m.
- Two pipe fan coil air conditioning system.

- An emergency escape helipad on the roof.
- External advertising display.
- Separate electricity sub metres per floor.
- An NFPA (international fire safety standard) fire rating.
- The latest building management systems (BMS) from Siemens.
- 16 high speed latest technology, destination control, elevators from a renowned German supplier (ThyssenKrupp) travelling at 7.5 metres/second.
- An additional services/goods lift travelling at 3.5 metres/second
- High quality finishes to the central areas including lobby, lift lobbies and WC's.
- Ethernet Cabling is installed throughout the common parts of the building with connection facilities available to all tenants at each floor
- External building facade lighting system using LED technology
- Extensive security, monitoring and access control into the building and parking.
- Additional TV monitors in the elevators for announcements and advertisements.







d. reconfiguration and supplementation of the base building air conditioning mechanical systems;

As the DFAT OPO submission states, it gets hot in Qatar, they know how to install air-conditioning everywhere, it runs 24/7, there is no chance that this would need reconfiguring or supplementing.

e. installation of IT infrastructure including communications, electrical and public address systems;

I assume this means DFAT specific technology for visa's, passports, communications.

f. installation of physical and electronic security systems including access control, CCTV and duress alarms to meet DFAT security requirements;
g. upgrade of fire services including sprinklers, and exit and emergency lighting;

Again, this building has in fact been built with these items -

"Tornado Tower has been designed to the very highest specifications and constructed to international safety and security standards.

The tower has been fire rated to National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) criteria by an independent party and offers the latest security systems including card access control and CCTV in addition to a visible security presence allowing access 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Extensive security, monitoring and access control into the building and parking."

The DFAT OPO submission states;

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Two-way trade between Australia and Qatar was worth \$1.75 billion in 2014-15 and is growing strongly – exports increased by over 20% from the previous year.

Where have the trade figures come from to justify this expenditure, I understand that the actual figure is closer to \$500 million odd which will be significantly reduced by motor vehicles of \$58 million. My experience in Qatar is that we, Australia send a lot of live animal exports, sheep & cows.

Exports may have increased by 20% from the previous year but might they be exports from Qatar?

Australia is also seeking to increase the number of Qataris studying (in tertiary and vocational education) in Australia.

I imagine there might be 4 or 5 now and it's not likely to increase anytime soon as Qataris are a small population that shares in the states wealth.

1.2.2 Qatar's sovereign wealth fund is a valued source of foreign direct investment in Australia and Qatar has invested significantly in Australia's wheat, barley and other grain-producing farms, and sheep properties, to support its food security strategy.

Given the recent fall in oil & gas commodity prices and with Qatar about to run it's first ever deficit i don't imagine this will continue much longer

1.2.4 Consular demands in Qatar are growing, with an estimated 5,000 Australians residing there and visitors increasing at an annual growth rate

I have no idea what this statement is based upon, we have managed without a consular so far as there are not many of us here. like most other nationalities in Qatar, an embassy can offer no help in getting an exit permit from the relevant employer for an Australian to leave the country. A little known fact in Qatar is that it is a country that does not take peoples passports away from them to stop them leaving, Qatar has the Kafala system which means no one (except GCC nationalities) can leave unless they have an exit permit from their employer. I managed to help a friend apply for an Australian visa via www.vfs-au-gcc.com, which is a private company, not in the city centre that for a small fee acts on behalf of the Australian embassy in Dubai.

The majority of Australians coming through Qatar are transiting through the Airport, and never leave the airport.

I would strongly advise a practical tour of Qatar by the key stake holders to liaise with more appropriate buildings, leasing agents and furniture suppliers.

‘Sincerely,

Julian
(address supplied)