



Australian Government

Defence

**Robertson Barracks Base
Improvements Project**

Robertson Barracks, Darwin (NT)

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE
TO THE
PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON PUBLIC WORKS**

September 2022

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Table of Contents

Robertson Barracks Base Improvements Project	1
Executive Summary	1
Purpose of the Works	2
Aim of the Project	2
Location of the Project	2
Need for the Project	2
Strategic Considerations	3
Proposed Facilities Solution	3
Options Considered	3
Scope of Project Works for the Preferred Option	4
Planning and Design Concepts	5
Relevant Legislation, Codes and Standards	5
Land and Zoning	6
Structures	7
Mechanical Services	7
Hydraulic Services	7
Electrical Services	8
Fire Protection	8
Security Measures	8
Acoustics	8
Work Health and Safety	9
Materials and Furnishings	9
Landscaping	9
Childcare Provisions	9
Provisions for People with Disabilities	10
Environmental Sustainability	10
Potential Impacts	11
Fauna and Flora	11
Heritage	12
Contamination	12
Mitigation Measures for Potential Impacts	13
Consultation with Key Stakeholders	14
Related Projects	15
Cost Effectiveness and Public Value	15
Project Costs	15
Project Delivery System	15
Construction Program	16
Public Value	16
Below the Line Items	17
Revenue	17
Attachments	17

Robertson Barracks Base Improvements Project

1. The purpose of this Statement of Evidence is to provide information to the Australian public to comment on, and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works to enquire into, proposed works under the Robertson Barracks Base Improvements Project (the Project).

Executive Summary

2. The aim of the Project is to address the capacity of supporting infrastructure to support current and projected Defence operations at Robertson Barracks, Northern Territory (NT). The Project will provide essential base upgrades to facilities and infrastructure, replace facilities that are reaching end of useful life, and increase available living-in accommodation.

3. Proposed works include:

- a. engineering services upgrades to the fire water and potable water systems, and high voltage electrical works
- b. additional living-in accommodation with associated covered walkways
- c. new combined Sergeants/Other Ranks Mess, with an upgrade to the capacity of the existing Officers Mess.

4. The estimated total capital out-turned cost is \$389.1 million (excluding Goods and Services Tax). The cost estimate includes management fees, design fees, construction costs, information and communications technology, furniture, fittings, equipment, contingencies and a provision for escalation. No revenue is expected to be generated by these works.

5. Facilities to be delivered under the Project have an expected life of between 15 and 50 years. Future sustainment costs are expected to increase marginally per year, due to the increased capacity of the base, increase in personnel numbers, and subsequent increase in operating costs.

6. Environmental and heritage investigations have been completed during Project development, with mitigation measures identified to manage potential impacts. The Project has not identified any presence of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). Impacts resulting from noise, air quality and construction traffic have been considered, with the successful construction contractor to manage and abate.

7. Public value and economic benefit to the community have been considered with Defence anticipating that, over the life of the Project, around 1,050 personnel could be provided with employment opportunities across both the living-in accommodation and the mess sites for up to three Head Contracts.

Purpose of the Works

Aim of the Project

8. The aim of the Project is to address the capacity of supporting infrastructure to support current and projected Defence operations at Robertson Barracks.

Location of the Project

9. The Project will be delivered at Robertson Barracks, which is a major Defence establishment located approximately 20km east of the Darwin Central Business District.

Need for the Project

10. Robertson Barracks was constructed during the 1990s and is the home of Army's 1st Brigade. It also supports aviation operations and has a working population of approximately 5000 personnel, comprising both military and civilian staff.

11. There is a need to increase and upgrade base facilities and supporting infrastructure at Robertson Barracks, as the existing facilities and infrastructure are becoming limited and unsustainable. The Committee considered major electrical services upgrades, designed to serve the base for 15 years, in 2011. The current electrical services requirements remain consistent with the previous consideration, with electrical services now requiring further remediation, as noted in 2011.

12. The provision of additional living-in accommodation is a key component of the Project with the current stock of living-in accommodation in the Darwin region reaching capacity and end of life.

13. Additionally, the existing messes on the base require an upgrade. Mess staffing and resources are currently split across four locations, with kitchen capability, servery and storage capacities limiting the ability of the kitchens to achieve adequate throughput.

14. When completed, the Project will provide Robertson Barracks with additional living-in accommodation, increased messing capacity, and upgraded water and electrical infrastructure.

Strategic Considerations

15. The White Paper on Developing Northern Australia¹ outlined the Australian Government's commitment to a strengthened Defence's presence in northern Australia. The subsequent 2016 Defence White Paper, 2020 Defence Strategic Update and the United States Force Postures Initiatives confirmed the importance of enabling force posture and projection for the Australian Defence Force (ADF) in northern Australia.

Proposed Facilities Solution

16. The Department of Defence undertook comprehensive master planning, site investigations, stakeholder consultation, whole-of-life cost analysis and design development to establish the capital facilities and infrastructure works required for the Project.

17. The essential requirements of the Project include:

- a. additional living-in accommodation, as validated through the analysis of living-in accommodation supply and demand at the base and in the Darwin region
- b. new combined messing facilities, providing additional capacity, realising operational cost efficiencies and relieving pressure on existing facilities that are coming to the end of their useful life
- c. engineering services upgrades to base-wide water infrastructure and high voltage electrical works.

Options Considered

18. Defence assessed a Do Nothing option and three distinct scope options to address the requirements of the Project:

- a. **Option 1 – Do nothing.** This option does not include any scope and does not maintain the base at current Australian Standards or Defence requirements and

¹ Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia (2015).

guidelines required to meet Australia’s commitments under the Force Posture Agreement. This is not a viable option and is not recommended.

- b. **Option 2 – Reduced living-in accommodation.** This option does not provide the required amount of living-in accommodation to meet user requirements and does not meet the required upgrades to base support and service infrastructure.
 - c. **Option 3 – Minimum capability requirement.** This option provides the required living-in accommodation, messing facilities and engineering services upgrades to meet Defence’s needs, and is therefore the preferred option.
 - d. **Option 4: Expanded engineering services scope.** This option includes the same amount of living-in accommodation and messing facilities as Option 3, however it also includes a new site-wide dedicated potable water reticulation main and outdoor gymnasium infrastructure. This option provides the full user requirements, including low priority items, however, the separation of the fire water and potable water infrastructure is considered an unacceptably high financial and scheduling risk and not necessary. This option is therefore assessed as not representing value for money and is not recommended.
19. **Preferred option.** Option 3 is the preferred option as it represents the best value for money for the Commonwealth. Option 3 addresses the Project needs and strategic considerations; including construction, fit-out, and ongoing sustainment costs. Option 3 represents a significantly reduced risk to base sustainment compared to Options 1 and 2 whilst meeting essential user requirements for living-in accommodation, messing and engineering services.

Scope of Project Works for the Preferred Option

20. The recommended Option 3 includes the scope required to meet additional living-in accommodation requirements, with essential services upgrades for the base. Option 3 includes eight scope elements, which are categorised into three packages:
- a. living-in accommodation and associated works, including covered walkways, and the replacement of Hughes playing field
 - b. increased messing, including a new Combined Sergeants/Other Ranks Mess and capacity upgrades to the existing Officers Mess
 - c. water and electrical services upgrades.

Planning and Design Concepts

21. The general philosophy for the design of the proposed works is based on:
- a. providing cost-effective, functional, low maintenance, energy efficient design options compatible with proposed functions and existing aesthetics
 - b. adopting where possible, conventional construction techniques and materials commonly used by the local construction industry and consistent with those already used on the base
 - c. promoting, where possible, a sustainable solution responding to local climate, considering the full life cycle of the facilities and infrastructure
 - d. applying appropriate durability measures to reduce ongoing maintenance and achieve the proposed design life within the local climatic conditions
 - e. recognising and applying the site constraints, security requirements and the planning guidance in the Estate Base Plan for Robertson Barracks
 - f. providing flexible services and infrastructure to accommodate an appropriate level of growth
 - g. meeting the functional requirements for facilities and infrastructure being provided.

Relevant Legislation, Codes and Standards

22. The following legislation, standards, codes and guidelines are applicable:
- a. *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth)*
 - b. *Fair Work (Building Industry) Act 2012 (Cth)*
 - c. *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Cth)*
 - d. *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*
 - e. *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)*
 - f. *Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Act 2016 (Cth)*
 - g. *Building Act 1993 (NT)*
 - h. National Construction Code – Building Code of Australia
 - i. Safe Work Australia Codes of Practice
 - j. Australian/New Zealand Design Standards (AS/NZS)
 - k. Austroads Guides

- l. Defence Estate Quality Management System
- m. Defence Smart Infrastructure Manual
- n. Defence Manual for Infrastructure Engineering – Electrical
- o. Defence Manual of Fire Protection Engineering
- p. Defence Pollution Prevention Management Manual
- q. Defence Living-in Accommodation Standards
- r. Defence Security Manual
- s. Defence Security Principles Framework
- t. Defence HVAC Systems Policy
- u. Defence Communications Cabling Standards
- v. Defence Communications Room Standard
- w. Building Energy Performance Manual
- x. Australian Government Information Security Manual
- y. Northern Territory Building Regulations
- z. Northern Territory Codes of Practice.

23. Works will be designed and documented in accordance with the relevant codes, standards and Defence publications listed above. The compliance of the design will be certified by appropriately accredited consultants in a range of disciplines.

24. Construction compliance with the design will be assured using approved quality management systems, which will implement processes such as inspections, audits and independent testing.

Land and Zoning

25. The proposed works are consistent with uses prescribed in relevant Defence zoning instruments, including the Zone and Precinct Plans incorporated into the draft Estate Base Plan for Robertson Barracks (2022), and the Defence Estate Principles of Development.

26. A Site Selection Board was conducted on 20 July 2021 with the recommended site for each Project element approved on 02 September 2021.

Structures

27. The structures have been designed in compliance with all relevant Australian Standards, Defence design guidelines and the National Construction Code. The structural design has regard to:

- a. the local geotechnical profile
- b. selection of materials and construction methods which are economic and readily available in the local Darwin market
- c. speed and efficiency of construction
- d. cyclone resilience.

28. The proposed new facilities will be reinforced concrete framed structures with reinforced concrete upper-level floor slabs and a steel roof appropriate to the environment. Internal walls are non-load bearing frames, lined with plasterboard to provide maximum flexibility in future layout. External façades will be a combination of precast panels with lightweight framing or glazing with lightweight framing.

Mechanical Services

29. The mechanical services have been designed according to the function and specific requirements of each building. The proposed mechanical services will meet specific user needs, relevant ventilation, thermal comfort and air quality requirements and the mandatory requirements of the National Construction Code. Where required dehumidification has been incorporated in buildings to reduce the risk to facilities from mould due to tropical conditions.

Hydraulic Services

30. The Project will deliver upgrades to the site-wide fire water and potable water systems through replacement of critical infrastructure items and upgrades to key areas in the existing combined water mains. Sections of the mains that are in good serviceable condition will be retained. Existing sewerage and storm water services are proposed to be extended to each new facility to suit design requirements. Potable water will be connected to the existing supply via sub-metering to each new building.

31. The site-wide potable water system will be upgraded to ensure ongoing reliability and improved water quality. Hot water is provided to the facilities by a combination of solar and gas storage systems.

Electrical Services

32. Lighting, power and lightning protection will be provided in accordance with Australian Standards and Defence engineering requirements. Sub-metering will be included to each re-used and new building. The meters will be monitored through a new building management system which will support an active energy management program on the site.

Fire Protection

33. Fire Protection has been addressed through compliance with the Manual of Fire Protection Engineering, and the National Construction Code. The Project has assessed the asset classification and contribution factors in order to determine the fire protection systems to be implemented in each facility. General upgrades to the fire systems within existing facilities have been included, where required. Fire water to the facilities will be provided by a site wide upgrade to the fire water service.

Security Measures

34. The security arrangements are a suite of measures based on the Defence-in-Depth principles. Security measures are compliant with statutory requirements and address all requirements identified by the Protective Security Working Group. The security design of the site will ensure that any new facilities conform to the existing security system employed by the base.

35. The Project will also deliver a Defence engineering service network to the new facilities being delivered. This will allow for the connection to centralised security monitoring in the future.

Acoustics

36. The new facilities will comply with the National Construction Code and Australian Standards for noise and acoustics. Acoustic separation has been considered in construction elements, while surface finishes are being designed to meet user requirements.

Work Health and Safety

37. The Project will comply with the *Work Health and Safety (WHS) Act 2011 (Cth)*, Work Health and Safety (Commonwealth Employment – National Standards) Regulations, and relevant Defence policies. In accordance with Section 35 (4) of the *Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Act 2016 (Cth)*, contractors will also be required to hold full work health and safety accreditation from the Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner under the Australian Government Building and Construction Work Health and Safety Accreditation Scheme.

38. Safety aspects of the Project have been addressed during the design development process and have been documented in a safety-in-design report. A work health and safety plan will be developed for the construction phase prior to the commencement of any construction activities.

Materials and Furnishings

39. External walls for new buildings will be a mixture of overclad concrete panels and metal cladding with curtain wall glazing. A metal louvre sun screening system will be installed to improve environmental performance of the buildings. Pre-finished steel roofing and where required, rainwater fittings have been selected for their resilience to a tropical environment.

Landscaping

40. The proposed new landscape works will complement and enhance the character of the site. The landscape design will focus on a functional, low maintenance, water sensitive approach with the use of Indigenous plants. Precautions will be taken to adhere to environmental requirements by adopting landscaping practices in accordance with local environmental conditions and the Construction Environmental Management Plan.

Childcare Provisions

41. There is no requirement for childcare facilities under the Project.

Provisions for People with Disabilities

42. Access for people with disabilities will be provided in accordance with the National Construction Code, Australia Standard 1428 and the *Disability and Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*.

43. Spatial usage has been defined by stakeholder consultation, e.g. ambulant usage requirements informing the design considerations.

Environmental Sustainability

44. Defence is committed to ecologically sustainable development and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The Project has adopted cost effective ecologically sustainable development measures as key objectives in the design and development of the proposed works. These include:

- a. developed daylight simulation modelling to determine optimal thermal comfort levels within living-in accommodation building designs
- b. living-in accommodation incorporates natural ventilation into communal spaces
- c. the combined mess and the living-in accommodation are designed with optimised facades for solar access and insulation, with shading shrouds on living-in accommodation and on the western façade of the mess
- d. connectivity of all buildings to Defence’s existing integrated Resource Data Management System to facilitate energy and water usage improvements
- e. living-in accommodation car parking is minimised
- f. general power outlets are incorporated for charging of e-scooters and e-bikes
- g. landscaping incorporates canopy cover and shading throughout key corridors
- h. building design efficiency provides further refuge from heat
- i. dehumidification equipment nominated in mechanical schedule, and mould reducing finishes specified
- j. water based cooling for the combined mess
- k. National Construction Code 2019 Section J compliance
- l. energy efficient appliances and equipment within the living-in accommodation and combined mess
- m. provision of energy efficient heat pump dryers in the living-in accommodation and installation of clothes lines in laundry rooms
- n. key kitchen equipment electrification to significantly reduce gas demand

- o. solar hot water to meet 75% of demand replacing gas in the living-in accommodation, with heat pumps used for 50% of the hot water load for the combined mess
- p. organic waste separation and disposal facilities incorporated into kitchen areas within the combined mess
- q. diversion from landfill targets to be incorporated into construction contracts
- r. reuse of materials on site, and incorporation of recycled content in concrete, road surfaces and backfill applications, as far as practicable.

Potential Impacts

45. Defence has conducted rigorous assessments to identify potential environmental and local community impacts, proposing suitable mitigation measures. Engagement with the Defence Directorate of Environmental Planning, Assessment and Compliance confirmed that the ecological impacts of the Project are likely to be negligible with the current proposed siting and management measures.

Fauna and Flora

46. Ecological surveys undertaken during design identified foraging habitat suitable to support the Black-footed Tree-rat (*Mesembriomys gouldii gouldii*), which is listed as endangered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Surveys also identified a number of individuals of *Cycas armstrongii* flora, which is listed as vulnerable under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Act 1976* (TPW Act) within Robertson Barracks. Potential impacts and the response action taken by the Project include:

- a. **Black-footed Tree-rat (*Mesembriomys gouldii gouldii*).** The Project footprint only impacts low quality foraging habitat. Response measures are focussed on:
 - (1) avoidance, limiting impacts to already cleared land and avoids medium or high-quality foraging habitat
 - (2) weed control; actively applying weed control to Gamba Grass within the potential habitat to maintain and improve habitat values for the Black-footed Tree-rat.

- b. **Armstrong’s Cycas flora (*Cycas armstrongii*)**. Whilst the investigation area supports numerous Armstrong’s Cycad, none are impacted by the Project footprint and therefore any potential impacts are avoided.

47. An assessment of the outcomes of desktop/field investigations and surveys, against the proposed Project footprint and *EPBC Act* permit requirements indicated that there is unlikely to be a significant impact on Matters of National Environmental Significance.

Heritage

48. During the Site Selection process, the Defence Directorate of Environmental Planning, Assessment and Compliance advised that there has been no comprehensive heritage assessment undertaken for Robertson Barracks. To address potential heritage risks relating to the presence of Indigenous and natural heritage values, a standalone Heritage Impact Assessment was developed by the Project. This included an assessment of any heritage values in consultation with traditional owners, and potential impacts against the *EPBC Act*.

Contamination

49. Contaminated land investigations, including historical studies and geotechnical investigations, did not identify the presence of PFAS within the Project footprint. Further investigations identified concentrations of other contaminants (chromium) of potential concern in soil within the Project footprint. Concentrations of this contaminant exceeded generic ecological investigation levels, however the majority of concentrations did not exceed the adopted assessment criteria for human health or ecological impacts.

50. Contaminated soils are unlikely to significantly impact the Project. Contaminants will be managed through a Construction Environmental Management Plan.

51. Based on the findings of the assessments undertaken by the Project, Defence has determined that existing environmental and heritage values will not be significantly impacted by the Project. Therefore, the Project is not required to be referred to the Minister for the Environment and Water under the *EBPC Act*.

Mitigation Measures for Potential Impacts

52. To ensure that the impact of the Project on the environment and local community is minimised, a comprehensive Construction Environmental Management Plan will be developed. This plan will include measures to address:

- a. **Spoil and bulk earthworks.** A soil management plan will be developed to determine how to handle, store and dispose of any excess spoil generated during construction. Where possible, bulk earthwork activities will be scheduled outside the wet season to minimise the levels of surface water and associated potential impacts of erosion. Where clearing is required, opportunities will be sought to utilise excess topsoil and vegetation. All imported materials will be purchased from a reputable supplier who can supply materials that are weed, pathogen and contaminant free. Plant and equipment will be washed down before entering and leaving work sites to further reduce the potential introduction or spread of pest weed species during construction.
- b. **Noise and air quality.** Procedures will be required to reduce the potential impact of noise, vibration and dust generated by construction activities and the transport of materials to on-base working and domestic precincts. These procedures will include measures such as limiting work hours in proximity to residential areas and the watering of civil works for dust suppression.
- c. **Heritage values.** The proposed works will not impact any known Indigenous archaeological or historic sites. An Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority Certificate for the Project was received on 15 November 2021. The Certificate identifies Restricted Work Areas to protect known sacred sites on the base. Site inductions will address these ‘no go’ areas. A ‘chance finds protocol’ will be implemented if material of suspected heritage value is encountered.
- d. **Contamination.** Appropriate control measures to manage contamination will be implemented in accordance with Defence’s Pollution Prevention Management Manual. Where possible, soils excavated during construction are to be beneficially re-used on site. If offsite disposal of contaminated fill is required, waste classification sampling will be undertaken by a qualified environmental consultant to determine the level of contamination and an approved waste transporter to dispose at an appropriately licensed facility.

- e. **Traffic, transportation and road impacts.** The Head Contractor/s will prepare traffic management plans to manage the expected impact of increased construction related traffic that will use the nearby highway, local and on-base roads.
- f. **Existing local facilities.** Local contractors will be sought to undertake the works. Living accommodation for construction workers not will be required under the Project.

Consultation with Key Stakeholders

53. Defence has developed a community consultation and communications strategy that recognises the importance of providing local residents and other interested stakeholders an opportunity to provide input to, or raise concerns relating to, the proposed works.

54. Defence has, and continues to, engage with a variety of external and internal stakeholders during Project development to date. These include:

- a. the Federal Member for Lingiari, Hon Marion Scrymgour, MP
- b. the Federal Member for Solomon, Mr Luke Gosling, MP
- c. the Northern Territory Member for Nelson, Mr Gerard Maley, MLA
- d. the Northern Territory Member for Drysdale, Hon Eva Lawler, TL
- e. the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
- f. the following Northern Territory Government authorities:
 - (1) Chief Minister's Department
 - (2) Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics
 - (3) Department of Trade, Business and Innovation
- g. Litchfield Council representatives, including the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Councillors
- h. Darwin Council representatives, including the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Councillors
- i. Northern Land Council
- j. Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority
- k. Local Indigenous groups
- l. Power and Water Corporation
- m. Local industry and business associations including:
 - (1) Master Builders Association

- (2) Northern Territory Chamber of Commerce
- (3) Industry Capability Network (Northern Territory)
- (4) Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network
- (5) Northern Territory Chamber of Commerce.

Related Projects

55. United States Force Posture Initiatives Northern Territory Training Areas and Ranges Upgrades Project was approved by Parliament on 5 August 2021 and includes the delivery of training facilities at Robertson Barracks.

56. The Northern Territory Solar Power Purchase Agreement between the Northern Territory Government Power and Water Corporation and Defence, planned for RAAF Base Darwin and Robertson Barracks, is to be commissioned at Robertson Barracks in October 2023.

Cost Effectiveness and Public Value

Project Costs

57. The estimated total capital out-turned cost of the Project is \$389.1 million (excluding Goods and Services Tax). This includes management and design fees, construction costs, information and communications technology, furniture, fittings, equipment, contingencies and a provision for escalation.

58. There will be ongoing operating and sustainment costs resulting from the proposed works. This is due to the additional maintenance, cleaning and utilities expenses that will be required to operate and maintain the proposed new, increased capacity facilities and infrastructure.

Project Delivery System

59. A Head Contract model is planned to deliver the works at Robertson Barracks. The Head Contract/s will be let through a two-stage procurement approach, comprising an Invitation to Register and a Request for Tender. Market testing of the local Northern Territory construction industry to gauge its capacity to deliver the works will be done by conducting an Invitation to Register process. The intent is to split the works into three

packages and allow industry to respond, advising whether they can complete all three packages, two packages, or just one package.

60. Defence proposes to retain the incumbent Project Manager / Contract Administrator and Design Services Consultant for the delivery phase of the works.

61. The selected delivery method is deemed most appropriate in the current construction market and is most likely to provide the greatest value for money to the Commonwealth.

Construction Program

62. Subject to Parliamentary approval, design activities are expected to be completed by early 2023. Construction is expected to commence in mid-2023 and be completed by mid-2026.

Public Value

63. Defence has comprehensively assessed public value, opportunities and benefit to the community as a result of the proposed works:

- a. **Economic impacts.** The Project expenditure will support the Australian economy, in particular in the construction and professional services sectors in the NT.
- b. **Employment opportunities.** The Project will employ a diverse range of consultants, contractors and construction workers, and is expected to generate opportunities for up-skilling and job training to improve individual skills and employability on future projects. Defence anticipates that, over the life of the Project, around 1,050 personnel could be provided with employment opportunities across the living in accommodation and mess sites.
- c. **Local industry and Indigenous business involvement opportunities.** Defence anticipates providing local businesses with opportunities to supply construction materials and labour. Defence, the Managing Contractor and Head Contactor will actively promote opportunities for small to medium local enterprises through construction trade packages. There will be opportunities for Indigenous business involvement in accordance with the Indigenous Procurement Policy. Works to be undertaken must comply with the Government Policy for Local Industry Participation, which requires successful tenderers to provide detailed commitments

on how they will utilise and develop Australian industry. These commitments will become contract deliverables and successful tenderers will be required to report on their performance against them. While the policy does not mandate local suppliers, there are opportunities to engage local industry associated with the Project sites.

Below the Line Items

64. In the event that the Project experiences trade savings during tendering, or retirement of risk provision during delivery, the following additional works may be delivered with these savings:

- a. outdoor gymnasiums
- b. landscaping
- c. additional engineering services.

Revenue

65. No revenue is expected to be derived from the Project.

Attachments

1. Living-in Accommodation
2. Mess

Attachment 1: Living-in Accommodation



Figure 1: External Perspective – Living-in Accommodation



Figure 2: Internal Perspective – Living-in Accommodation

Attachment 2: Mess



Figure 3: External Perspective – Mess



Figure 4: Internal Perspective – Mess (Other Rank's Dining)



Figure 5: Internal Perspective – Mess (Sergeants' Lounge)