

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee

Parliamentary inquiry – Impact of Defence Activities and Training Areas on Rural and Regional Communities

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: SSCFADT - Impact of Defence training activities and facilities on rural and regional communities – 21 March – Q5 - Reynolds

Question reference number: 5

Senator: Linda Reynolds

Type of question: Spoken, Hansard pages 8-9

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 13 April 2018

Question:

Senator REYNOLDS: Good afternoon. I've got some questions specifically in relation to some Western Australian bases. My apologies if these issues have been covered previously. I have just come onto this committee for this inquiry. The first is something that I have raised before at estimates—access to military museums. I want to raise the Army Museum of WA in Fremantle. In my experience it's probably the second best after the War Memorial here. It is an outstanding museum. Unfortunately, it's in artillery barracks that are Safe Base Charlie. The Army History Unit runs it. They rely on arts for tour guides and to maintain it. It's been a little challenging to get it opened up. Artillery Barracks would be a fantastic facility for tourism because it's in the heart of Fremantle. We could get the foreign tourists who come through on the ships and we could get the locals. People can't get in and see this amazing museum we've got because it is at Safe Base Charlie. Nobody has looked into arrangements. My understanding is that it is Safe Base Charlie for convenience, because I don't think there are any units in there that would warrant that. The feedback I've had is that it's a bit more convenient to keep it at Safe Base Charlie. That way they can keep the facility closed and it's easier to manage. That might be a bit of an exaggeration. I know that the committee has discussed access to other military museums around the country. You might need to take this on notice, but we have had this discussion before, last year.

CHAIR: It's something the committee will be putting to you. We had the same evidence in Victoria—if people could access those museum facilities, it would be an economic benefit, plus it ties into the community.

Senator REYNOLDS: And there's some brilliant Army history. Just the way it's laid out and the material they've got there—Western Australians and tourists would like to see it.

Mr Grzeskowiak: And so would I. I've got close but never found the time to actually get there. I'll try and do that on my next visit to Western Australia.

Senator REYNOLDS: We'll have to remedy that.

Mr Grzeskowiak: If we were in Senate estimates, I would have a two-page brief on this and give you chapter and verse. But, regrettably, we're not. From memory, the Artillery Barracks

is open five days a week at the moment, manned by volunteers and reservists. Five days a week is a reasonable opening period for a museum, you'd think. It's at Safe Base Charlie because it's a Defence establishment—it's an iconic Defence establishment—and that is our current security posture across the board.

Senator REYNOLDS: I understand that, but that's what we're having a look at. It's a bit of a catch 22. While it might be open, it's not open all hours. School groups and things have to book so that they can get a Reserve guide in, someone on arts. And, again, they're very arts constrained, as I understand. While you've got the security people who open the gate, it doesn't mean that the museum itself is open and able to take visitors through. The biggest tourist days down in Fremantle are on the weekends, with people on walking tours and experiencing other things in Fremantle. Again, I'm not being critical, because I understand the policy, but we're trying to look at whether there's a way we can open it up in a more sensible way, maybe with the community—the Fremantle council or others. I know the chair has talked about the grey nomads who go around the country and like to visit facilities. That's what I'm looking at—how do we make it far more accessible? At the moment, it's not.

Mr Grzeskowiak: We are, internally, looking at museums in the broad, for a range of reasons. I'll take your question on notice and get you some more detail.

Answer:

The Department of Defence acknowledges the significant historical importance of the Museum at the Barracks, with approximately 11,000 visitors to the Museum per annum.

The Museum is currently open five days a week, from Wednesday to Sunday, and is staffed by three Army Reserve personnel and approximately 130 volunteers. It is a requirement that at least one uniformed member be present during Museum opening hours.

The Museum's operating hours are governed by a number of factors, including visitor frequency (traditionally Mondays and Tuesdays are the two days with the lowest visitor numbers) and the availability of the part-time, volunteer workforce. This is sufficient to meet the needs of most visitors, and a directed increase in the opening hours is likely to have a significant impact on the availability of the staff and volunteers.

Guided tours of the Museum can be arranged on any day of the week (including Monday and Tuesday) with prior booking. A prior booking is necessary so that the volunteer workforce can be coordinated and also so that any specific requirements of the visiting group can be met.