

DEFENCE NEIGHBOURS ASSOCIATION



30 July 2024

The Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Members

Submission re EO Facilities Northern NSW Redevelopment Project

We write to request the Committee intervene to ensure that communities neighbouring Defence Bases are treated fairly with:

- Re-exhibition of the proposal to the community after full and detailed analysis of expansion of GWEO Storage on neighbouring communities has been re-submitted by Defence; and
- A Public Hearing on the Project be held before it is determined by the Committee.

DEFENCE NEIGHBOURS ASSOCIATION INC. (DNA)

DNA is an association representing Defence neighbours in Australia. We invite Defence and the wider Defence industry to co-operate with us so both neighbours, communities, Defence and Defence Industry can achieve their objectives. We will however stand with neighbours and communities against Defence or Defence Industry bullying.

Defence needs to appreciate legitimate interests of its neighbours and ensure any expansion involves a proper consideration of its neighbour's interests and the long-term viability of its bases.

Given Defence bullying is counterproductive to the long-term interests of Defence, it will benefit both Defence and neighbours to identify and end such bullying early. DNA can help Defence and Defence industry communicate with and understand the perspectives of neighbours and local communities.

THE DSR AND COMMUNITIES

Success of the DSR and wider Defence industry requires:

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- community support;
- workplace expansion; and
- base / footprint expansion.

However, neighbours and communities don't feature in the DSR. Beyond stating there will be a review of the Defence Estate, the DSR makes no mention of its impacts on communities and neighbours.

DEFENCE BULLYING NEIGHBOURS WEAKENS THE NATION

There is the potential for billions of wasted dollars and significant delays in DSR projects if Defence's bullying approach is counterproductive. The Committee can be of high value to both Defence and the community given the Committee comprises elected MPs who have much more experience in dealing with the public than Defence.

Examples of Defence bullying of neighbours includes:

- Inadequately consulting neighbours of its GWEO facilities as it has expanded them. It is a denial of procedural fairness and fake consultation for Defence not to fully provide the information it seeks to consult on. Inadequate information is provided to assess Orchard Hills. If neighbours are not alerted to potential issues they are not being properly consulted. Defence needs to provide full disclosure in relation to these issues as Defence neighbours are also investing in their businesses and homes.
- Defence seeking to sterilise its neighbour's land by using planning objections to restrict the use of land neighbouring its bases. It does this while simultaneously growing the intensity of activities on its own bases which is fundamentally unfair. With the DSR there will be pressure to grow the intensity of bases further – doing this will be harder without community support.
- The Courts are being used by Defence, with its significant resources, to bully its neighbours. Whether it be PFAS or planning objections, Defence hides behind the Court process. Clearly, the neighbour will always have less legal resources and capacity to pay legal fees than Defence. Rather than warfare, Defence is specialising in lawfare!
- Defence has threatened neighbours with compulsory acquisitions, the ultimate restriction on land use. Compulsory acquisitions of farms and homes in and around Orchard Hills in the future is possible if Defence is allowed to expand without proper future planning and consideration of impacts on neighbours.

GWEO is an example of an area where DSR will require bigger bases in locations where Defence wants to grow its activity.

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Squashing more activity into existing bases will simply spread risks outward onto neighbouring properties. Defence needs to be upfront with communities around Orchard Hills that its expansion may result in future restrictions on their own land use rather than sneaking this reality under the radar.

FULL AND DETAILED INFORMATION TO BE PROVIDED PRIOR TO RE-EXHIBITION OF PROPOSAL

Inadequate detail has been publicly provided for a \$359 million project which is located in between numerous growth centres and Western Sydney Airport. This is a Public Exhibition/Community Consultation in name only as no information is provided in relation to fundamental areas such as:

1. Public safety including:
 - a. Safeguarding distances/explosives risk in relation to surrounding schools, hospitals, and communities; and
 - b. Risks re Western Sydney Airport.
2. Emergency services capacity - Defence has argued in Court that incidents at its EO bases have the potential to overwhelm local emergency services. Local communities will not allow Defence to monopolise local emergency services. A likely outcome is that Defence may be required to provide a dedicated Emergency Services for all its bases. For Orchard Hills there is no discussion of Emergency Services impacts.
3. Traffic including traffic safety – a Traffic Report that is made public would be required for much smaller developments and should be required here.
4. Bushfire risks – while Defence submits that a Bushfire Assessment has been completed, the community is unable to consider it and it should be made public (if necessary in a redacted form) with the re-exhibition.

Defence gives no information on public safety issues at Orchard Hills but when it has suited Defence it has raised public safety concerns associated with its EO operations to seek to sterilise neighbouring properties. Defence should not be granted approval without a thorough consideration of the above issues.

WRONG PLACE FOR AN EO DEPOT?

Massive Commonwealth investments in Orchard Hills should not occur without consideration of the planning of neighbouring areas and wider Sydney.

Prior to approving the Project Defence should be required to Report on the planning and economic risks and opportunities associated with Orchard Hills including:

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- Will Orchard Hills become a stranded asset?
- Potential for the Orchard Hills site to contribute to solving Sydney's housing shortage. The property could be worth multiple billions if developed for housing and the Base could be relocated to cheaper land without the same potential for land use conflict.
- Opportunity to consider Western Sydney community/airport paths/traffic etc.

Defence GEWO storage should be positioned away from neighbours and avoid a long-term takeover of neighbourhoods. Inadequate information is provided to assess the Project, but Committee should require this information as there is a real risk these funds will be wasted.

SHOULD BE A PUBLIC HEARING

After Defence has updated their Submission there should be a Public Hearing to allow the community to make Submissions in response. DNA seeks to give evidence orally to the Committee and are willing to give public evidence at a Committee Meeting.

Yours sincerely



Bob Wheeldon
Chair