

## Issues and Conclusions

### **Consolidation of RAAF College**

- 3.1 In its written evidence to the inquiry, Defence submitted that a significant factor driving the proposed relocation project is the anticipated cost and operational efficiencies to be derived from partial collocation of RAAF College elements. The Committee noted that while RAAF College units would be removed from Point Cook Base (RAAF Williams), Vic and RAAF Base Edinburgh, SA, some RAAF College elements – namely, the School of Postgraduate Studies, Corporal Promotion Centre – would continue to operate at RAAF Base Richmond, NSW and RAAF Base Amberley, Qld. Given the expected financial and operational benefits of partial collocation, the Committee was interested to know whether Defence had considered the consolidation of all RAAF College elements at a single site.
- 3.2 At the public hearing conducted in Wagga Wagga, Defence explained that the option had been considered, but had been rejected. This decision was based partially upon the findings of studies conducted in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, which recommended against the collocation of recruit and officer training. Further, Defence elaborated on the synergies and opportunities expected to arise from the development of discrete recruit and officer training centres of excellence at established, operational air-bases, which can provide for the development of expertise in differing

areas of specialisation and future career opportunities on-site. In respect of the postgraduate training conducted at RAAF Bases Richmond and Amberley, Defence added that this comprised short courses for junior non-commissioned officers, which were delivered on location by a small number of staff out-posted from the training headquarters at RAAF Base Wagga.<sup>1</sup>

## Planning Considerations

- 3.3 Defence's main submission recorded that neither RAAF Base East Sale, nor RAAF Base Wagga has a current Master Plan, although a Master Plan for the former is in development.<sup>2</sup> The Committee expressed concern that the lack of a Master Plan may result in additional costs, either through the discovery of unexpected conditions at the sites, or through expenditure on infrastructure that may be rendered obsolete by future planning decisions and further rationalisation of Defence properties. Defence assured members that the absence of a consolidated plan did not mean a lack of historical information, stating that detailed infrastructure studies had been undertaken at each base. Defence also reiterated the government's commitment to the development of RAAF Base Wagga and RAAF Base East Sale as long-term centres for RAAF training.<sup>3</sup>

## Environmental Considerations

### Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD)

- 3.4 Defence intends that, where appropriate, all facilities associated with the RAAF College relocation project will be designed in accordance with the Department of Environment and Heritage's *ESD Design Guide*, a copy of which was tabled for the Committee. The Committee welcomed this initiative, and was interested to know what energy use rating the facilities would achieve.<sup>4</sup> Defence informed members that, according to the rating scale outlined in the Department of Environment and Heritage publication, office accommodation at RAAF Base Wagga would meet the

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1 Appendix D, Official Hansard Transcript of Evidence, Wagga Wagga, pages 4 - 5

2 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 11

3 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence - Wagga Wagga, pages 9 and 11

4 *ibid*, page 13

recommended best-practice target of 4.5 stars, while a rating in excess of four stars would be achieved at RAAF Base East Sale.<sup>5</sup>

- 3.5 Defence noted that these ratings were applicable to office facilities only. In terms of living-in accommodation, Defence intends to apply the standard established by Section J of the Building Code of Australia, which Defence asserted

...is similar to the five-star rating mentioned previously.<sup>6</sup>

## Protection of Native Flora

- 3.6 Defence's main submission reported that the Environmental Management Plan for RAAF Base East Sale had recommended minimisation of removal of Red Gum trees, as this species is deemed to be "regionally significant".<sup>7</sup> At the public hearing, Defence explained that it had originally identified 26 Red Gums for removal from the Sale development site, but had subsequently reoriented buildings with the result that only 11 of the trees would be removed. In addition, Defence intends to gather seeds from the remaining trees for future propagation and replanting.<sup>8</sup>

## Protection of Native Avifauna

- 3.7 Defence explained that the RAAF Base Wagga construction site will lie within the flight path of the Superb Parrot. However, a consultant's report has revealed that the impact is not expected to be significant as the site is already considerably developed and the parrot does not nest at the Base. Defence intends to mitigate any deleterious impacts through the retention and planting of Yellow Box trees favoured by the bird.<sup>9</sup>

## Base Population

- 3.8 According to Defence's main submission, the relocation proposal would increase permanent personnel numbers at RAAF Base East Sale and RAAF Base Wagga by 63 and 98 respectively. In addition, RAAF Base East Sale

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5 Appendix E, Official Transcript of Evidence – Sale, page 12

6 *ibid*, page 13

7 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 61

8 Appendix E, Official Transcript of Evidence – Sale, page 15

9 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 61 and Appendix E, Official Transcript of Evidence – Sale, page 16

would provide training to some 690 officer cadets, while RAAF Base Wagga would train approximately 1,200 new recruits.<sup>10</sup> In order to understand the impact of the proposal upon existing base services and infrastructure, the Committee asked for an estimate of the anticipated maximum population of each base following completion of the works. Defence stated that RAAF Base Wagga currently has 510 permanent staff and an average student population of 640, totalling 1,150 personnel. RAAF Base East Sale currently has a population of 800, comprising 710 permanent staff and 90 students. It is estimated that, following the completion of the relocation project, the population at RAAF Base Wagga will increase by a magnitude of almost 50 per cent, and RAAF Base East Sale will accommodate a 25 per cent population increase.<sup>11</sup>

## Accommodation Standards

- 3.9 It is proposed that new living-in accommodation for recruit trainees at RAAF Base Wagga and officer cadets at RAAF Base East Sale would be provided in accordance with Defence standards.<sup>12</sup> The Committee sought further information as to the specifications of these standards. Defence explained that recruit training accommodation comprised quadruple occupancy rooms measuring about 36 square metres, while officer trainees would have single rooms and shared ablutions. Due to the tight schedule under which recruits operate, ablutions will be provided at a ratio of one shower per four recruits.<sup>13</sup>

## Messing Arrangements

- 3.10 Defence intends to construct a new combined all-ranks mess at RAAF Base East Sale, while RAAF Base Wagga will retain separate messing facilities for officers, sergeants and airmen.<sup>14</sup> Defence reported that the consolidation of three messes into one at RAAF Base East Sale will produce annual cost savings in the order of \$1 million. In view of the demonstrable cost effectiveness of combined messing, the Committee was

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10 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraphs 66 - 67

11 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence - Wagga Wagga, pages 6 and 14

12 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraphs 23.b and 38.b

13 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence - Wagga Wagga, pages 7, 8 and 9

14 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraphs 26.a and 41.a

interested to know why a similar arrangement would not be pursued at RAAF Base Wagga. Defence explained that combined messing was being investigated at a number of bases, but a comparison of capital costs versus whole-of-life costs had revealed that it would not be the most economic or efficient option for RAAF Base Wagga.<sup>15</sup>

## Traffic Management

- 3.11 Considering the magnitude of the expected population increases at RAAF Bases Wagga and East Sale, the Committee wished to ensure that due consideration had been given to traffic management and parking issues. Defence replied that it had considered these issues in terms of both future personnel numbers and construction traffic and was confident that the wide roads at the bases had ample capacity for additional on-street parking, while management solutions would be put in place to manage peak construction traffic.<sup>16</sup>

## Occupational Health and Safety

- 3.12 The inadequacy of current training facilities and accommodation at RAAF Base Edinburgh and Point Cook Base in respect of amenity and OH&S was cited by Defence as a primary motivator for the proposed relocation project.<sup>17</sup> At the public hearing, the Committee asked Defence to elaborate on the specific nature of the current OH&S deficiencies. In response, Defence explained that the officer training infrastructure at Point Cook had not been built for its current purpose and has exceeded its economic life, while the demountables and World War II-vintage warehouses occupied by recruits at Point Cook represent the worst accommodation in the Air Force. Defence added that kitchen facilities at RAAF Base Wagga were also urgently in need of an upgrade.<sup>18</sup> Defence was able to assure the Committee that, despite these shortcomings, the OH&S situation on each

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15 Appendix E, Official Transcript of Evidence – Sale, page 18

16 *ibid*

17 See Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 4 and Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence – Wagga Wagga, pages 4 - 5

18 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence – Wagga Wagga, pages 4 - 5, pages 4 - 5

base continued to be closely regulated and there had been no safety incidents.<sup>19</sup>

## Demolition Works

- 3.13 Defence submitted that, following the proposed relocation, a number of facilities at RAAF Base Edinburgh would become surplus to requirements and may be demolished, pending the results of a comprehensive heritage study and an asbestos survey. Should asbestos be discovered in any buildings identified for demolition, Defence intends to engage a suitably qualified removal contractor.<sup>20</sup> The confidential project cost estimate supplied to the Committee included separate figures for the demolition works at RAAF Base Edinburgh and the removal of asbestos at RAAF Bases Wagga and Sale.
- 3.14 At the public hearing, the Committee asked if Defence had established the number and condition of the buildings to be demolished at RAAF Base Edinburgh; whether Defence had determined the amount of hazardous materials to be removed from each base; and what impact the results of these investigations may have upon the project budget.
- 3.15 Defence reported that comprehensive asbestos registers are maintained for both RAAF Base Wagga and RAAF Base Sale, and it is anticipated that both sites will be asbestos-free by 2007. Defence was unable to provide a figure for the number of buildings to be demolished at RAAF Base Edinburgh as the heritage survey has not been completed and it is expected that a sample of each building type will need to be retained for heritage purposes.
- 3.16 The Committee expressed concern that the uncertainty surrounding the scope of the demolition works may lead to unforeseen costs. Defence assured the Committee that the allocated demolition budget would be sufficient, as it had been calculated on the basis of full demolition of all redundant facilities. The Committee requested that Defence supply it with a comprehensive list of all buildings to be demolished at RAAF Base Edinburgh, and associated costs, as soon as the information becomes available.

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19 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence – Wagga Wagga, page 6

20 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 47

## Recommendation 1

**The Committee recommends that the Department of Defence supply it with a comprehensive list of all buildings to be demolished at RAAF Base Edinburgh, together with all associated demolition and asbestos removal costs, as soon as practicable following completion of the necessary surveys.**

## Consultation

- 3.17 Defence's main submission included a list of 64 authorities with whom Defence has consulted or intends to consult in respect of the proposed works. The Committee requested that Defence provide it with an update of the status of consultation undertaken to date, with both government bodies and the wider community. Defence explained that public consultative meetings had been conducted in both Wagga Wagga and Sale in April and September 2004. These meetings had generated considerable community interest and were well-attended. In addition, Defence furnished the Committee with a list of organisations that it had nominated to be invited to make a submission to the inquiry, and two sets of fact sheets relating to proposed forward community consultation and consultation conducted in respect of Indigenous heritage.<sup>21</sup>
- 3.18 During their inspection of RAAF Base Wagga, Committee members observed that some of the proposed new 1RTU outdoor training facilities, including the dry-firing area, were very close to private homes. Members wished to know what consultation had been undertaken with the neighbouring home-owners. Defence replied that specific consultation with landowners would commence subject to parliamentary approval of the proposal. The erection of an acoustic barrier between the facility and the adjoining properties is also planned.<sup>22</sup>

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21 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence – Wagga Wagga, page 7 and Appendix E, Official Transcript of Evidence – Sale, page 11

22 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence – Wagga Wagga, page 8

## Community Impacts

3.19 The inquiry into the RAAF College relocation project generated 14 submissions from organisations and individuals in Wagga Wagga and Sale, all of which were strongly supportive of the proposed works. At the public hearings, the Committee was pleased to hear further evidence from Mrs Kay Hull MP, Member for Riverina; the Wellington Shire Council and the Rotary Club of Sale, attesting that the works would be enthusiastically welcomed by the respective local communities.

## Economic Impacts

3.20 Submissions received from both Wagga Wagga and Sale emphasised the economic benefits expected to be derived from the project.<sup>23</sup> An analysis undertaken by the Wellington Shire Council, for example, estimated that the relocation would add some \$7.44 million to the local economy, including over 60 additional jobs<sup>24</sup>, while Mrs Kay Hull MP stated that the proposal would

...provide a significant boost to the economy through greater confidence in our future viability.<sup>25</sup>

3.21 In view of the enthusiasm with which the communities of Wagga Wagga and Sale had greeted the proposal, the Committee wished to confirm that the works would provide opportunities for local businesses. Defence stated that forms upon which businesses could register interest in the works packages had been distributed at public meetings held in Wagga Wagga and Sale, and advertisements had been placed in local newspapers. Defence anticipates that while some local firms may not have the capacity to take on a total works package, they could certainly undertake partial packages. Defence added that local businesses had some competitive advantage as they did not incur additional accommodation and transport costs.<sup>26</sup>

3.22 The Wellington Shire Council stated that it was pleased with the work undertaken by Defence in respect of providing opportunities for local businesses and confirmed that public meetings about the project had been very well-attended. The Council added that, while the local community may not be able to provide a prime contractor, local tradespeople had in

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23 See *Volume of Submissions* for the inquiry

24 Appendix E, Official Transcript of Evidence – Sale, page 15

25 *Volume of Submissions*, Submission No. 11 from Mrs Kay Hull MP, Member for Riverina

26 Appendix E, Official Transcript of Evidence – Sale, page 14



the past successfully participated in a prison construction project valued at over \$80 million.<sup>27</sup>

## Social Impacts

3.23 Submissions received by the Committee highlighted the social benefits of the proposed RAAF College relocation for both the incoming Defence personnel and the wider community. All submission confirmed the close and long-standing ties between the communities of Wagga Wagga and Sale and Defence, and many stressed the lifestyle advantages of these regional centres. All public submissions were unanimous in their appreciation of the role played by Defence personnel in the wider community and the much-needed boost that the additional population would bring to the respective regions. The representative of the Rotary Club of Sale expressed the view that the social importance of the RAAF Base may outweigh its economic importance as it

...puts people into the community who start to set the benchmarks and standards that we really need to grow in a social sense.<sup>28</sup>

### Recommendation 2

**The Committee recommends that the proposed works associated with the relocation of selected RAAF College Units to RAAF Base East Sale, Victoria and RAAF Base Wagga, New South Wales proceed at the estimated cost of \$133.4 million.**

**Hon Judi Moylan MP**

Chair

2 November 2005

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<sup>27</sup> Appendix E, Official Transcript of Evidence – Sale, page 7

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, page 9



