

Paul Adam
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20th March 2003

Chair
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Madam

Please find attached a submission to the Inquiry into Site Remediation and Construction of Infrastructure for the Defence Site and Randwick Barracks.

Yours faithfully

(signed on behalf of)
Paul Adam

Attch.

Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works Inquiry
into Site Remediation and Construction of Infrastructure for the Defence Site
at Randwick Barracks, Sydney, NSW

1. I welcome this opportunity to make a submission to the Public Works Committee in relation to the Defence Site at Randwick Barracks. Remediation works have been underway for some time. I am uncertain whether the remediation works proposed in the Statement of Evidence by the Department of Defence are additional to those already occurring, or whether by the time the Inquiry makes its recommendations the work will already have been completed.
2. The development of the Bundock Street site has been very contentious. It has been previously examined by the Senate Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade References Committee Inquiry into the disposal of Defence property. Details of the issues are provided in the report of that Inquiry, and, in much greater detail in the Hansard record of the hearings. There has also been litigation in the NSW Land and Environment court, and the judgement by Justice Talbot is highly relevant to issues of remediation.
3. Defence, in its statement of evidence (para 20) presents three options for the proposal. Here in lies much of basis for the on going controversy in that many in the community would have preferred to see other options – conceptually between options a) and b) – explored.
4. In its discussion of option a) one of the consequences identified by Defence is (para 21(a)) that the land “would not be put to its best use”. This would appear to regard “best use” as that which gives the highest short term revenue, rather than necessarily the use which is in the best long term public benefit. I, and others, have previously argued against

the development option. Interestingly, the concept of the whole site becoming public open space is not new, but was strongly advanced in the 1930s, when the site was a rifle range, prior to the major construction on the site during World War II.

5. Realisation of a major park proposal would require remedial works and would not yield revenue to Defence. However, it was a valid option which should have been one of those on the table in the limited consultation which occurred at the start of this project.
6. The question of future use of the site is covered by the term of reference “the need for the work” of this Inquiry. The need for the work as now proposed is predicated on acceptance of a particular outcome, which is clearly an outcome most favourable to Defence. The question remains as to whether, when the future of a major public asset is being considered, a much broader evaluation of options should have been required.
7. A matter of concern to local residents has been the remediation of asbestos, and the appropriateness of any standards set. The Statement of Evidence from Defence states (para 31) that the remediation will be “to a standard suitable for the proposed land use”, without specifying the standard. Unless other authorities set standards the required standard is presumably the zero level specified by Justice Talbot in the NSW Land and Environment Court.
8. With sufficient expenditure any level of remediation is theoretically possible, but this could have implications for any revenue projections, and, as para 70 of Defence’s statement indicates the works have a fixed budget.
9. I am concerned that the project has been proceeding on ‘a wing and a prayer’ in regard to remediation. Works commenced prior to complete assessment and the remediation requirements appear to have been

developed 'on the run'. It may be then in this instance the end result will be satisfactory but that will be by luck. When the project commenced in the 1990s the remediation options uncertain, and this does not seem to be an appropriate way of proceeding.

10. Also of concern is the question of off site contamination. The works proposed deal with a defined site, but asbestos has been used on the site for more than half a century. In earlier times what would now be regarded as necessary precautions were not necessarily observed. Contamination may have spread beyond the site boundaries. However there appears to have been a reluctance by both State and Federal authorities to test for this. It does, however, raise a question of relevance to this Inquiry, as to what provision, and by whom, has been made for any future liabilities which may arise from off site contamination.

11. The piecemeal approach to the approval process, rather than a whole of site approach, makes it difficult to assess eventual outcomes. If the disposal process is as a series of blocks, as is currently occurring, the different developers may have different approaches to eventual built form. This may result in a less than satisfactory hodge podge appearance of the eventual appearance. Again while this may maximize revenue it may not be in the broader community interest or of good urban design.

12. This Inquiry is only, at this stage dealing with part of a project. It may be appropriate from the Committee to determine whether this is, from a broader public interest perspective, the best approach, in this regard the previous Senate FADT Reference Committee's obvious unease about the process should be re-inforced. This project is well down the track, but recommendations to guide future disposals so as to meet community expectations would be desirable.

Paul Adam
20.3.03