
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Range Support Facilities, Delamere Range and RAAF Base Tindal, NT

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

5 April 2001
Canberra

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ISBN [Click **here** and type ISBN Number]



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Membership of the Committee

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Mr Colin Hollis MP

Mr Peter Lindsay MP

Mr Bernie Ripoll MP

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Senator Alan Ferguson

Senator Shayne Murphy

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Inquiry Secretary Mr Ian Ireland (until November 2000)

Ms Marie Kawaja

Administrative Officer Ms Maria Pappas

Ms Tiana Gray



Extract from the Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives

No 130 dated Thursday, 17 August 2000

22 PUBLIC WORKS – PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE – REFERENCE OF WORK – DEVELOPMENT OF RANGE SUPPORT FACILITIES, DELAMERE RANGE AND RAAF BASE TINDAL

Mr Slipper (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration), pursuant to notice, moved – That, in accordance with the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report: Development of Range Support Facilities, Delamere Range and RAAF Base Tindal, NT.

Debate ensued.

Question – put and passed.

Introduction

- 1.1 This report is intended to inform the Parliament of a proposed public work that was referred to the Committee in 2000 but which was subsequently withdrawn by the proponent organisation, the Department of Defence.
- 1.2 In preparing the report, the Committee has been mindful of its functions as contained in section 17 of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969*. Section 17 (1) states:
- (1) The Committee shall, as expeditiously as is practicable:
 - (a) consider each public work that is referred to it in accordance with this Act; and
 - (b) make a report to both Houses of the Parliament concerning the expedience of carrying out the work and concerning any other matters related to the work in respect of which the Committee thinks it desirable that the views of the Committee should be reported to the Houses;
- and, for those purposes, shall do such things and make such inquiries as it thinks necessary.
- 1.3 Chapter 2 presents details of the Committee's Inquiry up until the Committee was advised the proposed work had been withdrawn. The Chapter also provides details of information relating to the decision to withdraw the proposed work. Chapter 3 presents the Committee's conclusion.

The proposed work

Referral

- 2.1 On 17 August 2000, the Committee received a reference related to the Development of Range Support Facilities at Delamere Air Weapons Range and RAAF Base Tindal. The proponent agency was the Department of Defence.
- 2.2 The estimated cost of the proposed as per the motion moved in the House on 17 August 2000 was \$18.5 million. However, in the Department of Defence Submission, the total estimated cost was put at \$17.5 million. This figure included design and construction costs, professional fees and charges, furniture and fittings and contingency cost.¹
- 2.3 The purpose of the project was to provide infrastructure at the Delamere Range and RAAF Base Tindal to support the new air training equipment. The proposed works would include:
- the development of facilities at Delamere for a number of emitters, including operating sites and maintenance, and domestic facilities; and
 - the construction of a briefing, planning, maintenance and storage facility at RAAF Base Tindal.²

1 Submission No. 1, p. 15.

2 Submission No. 1, p. 2.

- 2.4 The Delamere Air Weapons Range is located 220 kilometres south-west of Katherine in the Northern Territory and is the RAAF's principal live air weapons range.³ RAAF Base Tindal is about 14 kilometres south of Katherine.⁴

Submissions

- 2.5 The Committee called for submissions by advertising the inquiry in the *Northern Territory News* on 30 September 2000 and the *Katherine Times* on 4 October 2000. The Committee also wrote to relevant stakeholders, seeking submissions.
- 2.6 Submissions were received from:
- the Wardaman Aboriginal Corporation;
 - the Australian Heritage Commission; and
 - Environment Australia.
- 2.7 The Committee also received a letter from Mr Geoff Clark, Chairman of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Commission relating to land claims issues.

Inspections and Public Hearings

- 2.8 The Committee arranged a program of inspections and a public hearing for 14 and 15 November 2000. The program included a tour of the Range Control Centre area at the Delamere Range and works and maintenance facilities at the RAAF Base. A public hearing was planned at the Katherine Council Chambers.
- 2.9 However, largely because of the unavailability of suitable air transport, the Committee was forced to postpone its arrangements until early in 2001 and informed the Department of Defence accordingly.

3 Submission No. 1, p. 2.

4 The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Parliamentary Standing committee on Public Works, Ninth Report of 1991, *Stage 3 – Development of RAAF Base Tindal, NT*.

Withdrawal of Reference

- 2.10 On 20 December 2000, the Committee received a letter from Brigadier G R Kelly that advised that the Defence Estate Organisation 'no longer has the project to refer' and requested its withdrawal.
- 2.11 Brigadier Kelly's letter stated the reason for the withdrawal of the reference was related to the release on 6 December 2000 of the Government's Defence White Paper. Brigadier Kelly observed that:
- The White Paper follows a review of Australia's defence capability requirements and includes a new Defence Capability Plan. Under this plan, Defence has identified that the air combat training capability could not be afforded at this time and accordingly the proponent has deferred the project for approximately four years.
- 2.12 Brigadier Kelly was asked to brief the Committee on the reasons for the withdrawal of the reference. On 8 March 2001, Brigadier Kelly briefed the Committee at a private meeting and re-stated that the reason for the withdrawal of the reference related directly to the Government's Defence White Paper.
- 2.13 In a subsequent letter to the Committee dated 22 March 2001, Brigadier Kelly provided supporting information regarding the 'deferral' of the project by Defence. The letter emphasised that in developing the Defence Capability Plan in conjunction with the White Paper:
- ... Defence determined that high priority capabilities, including Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) aircraft for Air Force, and Armed Reconnaissance Helicopters and additional Troop Lift Helicopters for Army, should proceed and that other lower priority capabilities could be deferred. Within this context, Defence identified that the air combat training capability can not be afforded at this time. Essentially then, the decision to defer the Delamere project has simply been one of available budget and competing priorities.
- 2.14 Brigadier Kelly raised another point in his letter relating to the 'improved living accommodation for range staff'. He noted that this component of the Delamere project, '... was not fully dependent on the air combat training system project'. He added that the:
- ... RAAF is keen to improve living conditions and safety for staff domestic accommodation, and in any case must provide limited staff accommodation on the Delamere escarpment for a new air defence radar. A medium work to install the radar is programmed for this year, and was notified as an associated work in the PWC

evidence. Defence will now examine options to meet these requirements in the absence of the air combat training system project.

2.15 The Committee noted that an associated project relating to a Tactical Air Defence Radar site at the cost of \$2 million was planned at Delamere as a separate project. This was advised in Defence's Submission.⁵

2.16 The Committee sought information in relation to an article in the 3 January 2001 issue of Janes Defence Weekly. In response Brigadier Kelly provided the following explanation:

... Project Air 5333, also known as Project Vigilare, is not related to the Range Support Facilities Project. Project Air 5333 will require some works at an existing RAAF Base Tindal facility, to accommodate new equipment. This work, which requires further definition, is anticipated to cost less than \$6 million and would be delivered as a medium work prior to equipment fit-out. This work will be briefed to the committee in annual reports on medium works.⁶

5 Submission No. 1, p. 1.

6 Section 18 (8) of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969* provides that works, which exceed \$6 million, must be referred to the Committee for examination.

Conclusion

- 3.1 The Committee was somewhat surprised by Defence's decision not to proceed with this reference. From the Committee's point of view, it was unfortunate that a significant amount of preliminary work had been completed and the Inquiry had been advertised.
- 3.2 The Committee notes that the withdrawal of the reference was directly related to the release on 6 December 2000 of the Defence White Paper and the Defence Capability Plan. In this context the withdrawal of the project was understood to be solely for budgetary reasons.
- 3.3 The Committee concludes that, while Defence provided an explanation of the withdrawal of the proposed work, significant time, effort and tax payers' money could have been saved if some elements of the Defence organisation had consulted more effectively with the Defence Estate Organisation prior to the proposed work being referred to the Committee.

SENATOR ALAN FERGUSON
Acting Chair

5 April 2001