

## Introduction

### Referral of Work

- 1.1 On 26 May 2005 the proposal to undertake an operational upgrade of the Darwin Detention Facility (DDF) at Berrimah, NT, was referred to the Public Works Committee for consideration and report to the Parliament in accordance with the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969* (the Act).<sup>1</sup> The proponent agency for this work is the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA).
- 1.2 The Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration, advised the House that the estimated cost of the proposed works was \$8.21 million. She reported that, subject to parliamentary approval, work was scheduled to commence in September 2005, with completion anticipated for mid-2006.

### Background

#### Existing Facilities

- 1.3 On 23 August 2001 the Government announced plans to increase the contingency capacity for detaining unauthorised boat arrivals by establishing facilities at a number of sites, including HMAS *Coonawarra* at Defence Establishment Berrimah (DEB). Work on this facility commenced

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1 Extract from the *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives*, No. 33, Wednesday, 26 May 2005

in late August 2001, creating contingency accommodation for 250 detainees by December 2001 and accommodation for a further 400 from March 2002.<sup>2</sup> The facility is currently used by the Department of Defence and other agencies on the understanding that immigration detention requirements take precedence.<sup>3</sup>

- 1.4 The existing facility comprises two separate compounds with individual sally port entry and perimeter fencing consisting of two 3.6 metre chain wire fences with razor wire in between at ground level.<sup>4</sup> The southern compound has the capacity to accommodate 400 people in 43 demountable accommodation units. Each unit consists of four to five two-person rooms containing a double bunk, wardrobe and table, and 28 of the rooms have ensuites. The southern compound also includes two ablution blocks, a laundry and two large multi-purpose buildings.<sup>5</sup> The northern compound accommodates 250 persons and comprises 32 demountable accommodation units, with four rooms per building. Each two-person room includes an ensuite, double bunk, wardrobe and table. The compound also contains two large multi-purpose buildings.<sup>6</sup>

## Location

- 1.5 The proposed upgraded detention facility will be located within the northern compound of the existing contingency detention facility (formerly known as *Coonawarra*) at DEB, Stuart Highway, Darwin.

## Inquiry Process

- 1.6 The Committee is required by the Act to consider public works over \$6 million<sup>7</sup> and report to Parliament on:
- the purpose of the work and its suitability for that purpose;
  - the need for, or the advisability of, carrying out the work;

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2 Appendix C, Submission No. 1 from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, paragraph 19

3 *ibid*, paragraph 22 and Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 3

4 *ibid*, paragraphs 25 and 30

5 *ibid*, paragraphs 26 - 28

6 *ibid*, paragraphs 27 - 28

7 *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Part III, Section 18 (8)

- whether the money to be expended on the work is being spent in the most cost effective manner;
- the amount of revenue the work will generate for the Commonwealth, if that is its purpose; and
- the present and prospective public value of the work.<sup>8</sup>

1.7 The Committee called for submissions by advertising the inquiry in the *Northern Territory News* on Monday, 30 May 2005. The Committee also sought submissions from relevant government agencies, local government, private organisations and individuals, who may be materially affected by or have an interest in the proposed work. The Committee subsequently placed submissions and other information relating to the inquiry on its web site in order to encourage further public participation.

## Public Hearing

1.8 On Monday, 18 July 2005 the Committee travelled to the Darwin Detention Facility at DEB and inspected at first hand the scope and environs of the proposed works. Later that day, the Committee received a commercial-in-confidence briefing on project costs from DIMIA, and held a public hearing at the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, Darwin.<sup>9</sup>

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8 *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Part III, Section 17

9 See Appendix D for the official Hansard transcript of the evidence taken by the Committee at the public hearing held on Monday, 18 July 2005 in Darwin

