

Introduction

Referral of Work

- 1.1 On 26 June 2002 the proposed RAAF Base Williamtown Redevelopment Stage 1 and Facilities for the Airborne Early Warning and Control Aircraft 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*.¹ The proponent agency for this project is the Department of Defence (Defence).
- 1.2 The Hon Peter Slipper MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration, advised the House that the estimated cost of the proposed works was \$149 million. Mr Slipper further noted that, subject to parliamentary approval, construction would commence early in 2003 with a view to completion by the end of 2006.

Background

- 1.3 In April 1999 the Government announced that the Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW & C) aircraft fleet would be stationed at RAAF Base Williamtown, NSW.

1 Extract from the Votes and Proceedings No. 32, Wednesday, 26 June 2002.

- 1.4 In January 2000, No. 2 Squadron was formed to operate the new capability. The Squadron is currently based in Canberra, but will redeploy to Williamstown in January 2004.
- 1.5 A contract between the Defence Department and the Boeing Company for supply of the AEW& C aircraft was signed in December 2000. It is intended that the first two aircraft should be on location at RAAF Base Williamstown in 2006 and operational by 2007.

Inquiry Process

- 1.6 The Committee is required by the Public Works Committee Act to consider public works over \$6 million² 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;
 - whether the cost of the work is being spent in the most cost efficient way;
 - 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.³
- 1.7 The Committee called for submissions by advertising the inquiry in *The Newcastle Herald* on Saturday, 6 July 2002 and in the *Port Stephens Examiner* on Thursday, 11 July 2002. 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.

Inspections and Public Hearing

- 1.8 The Committee travelled to RAAF Base Williamstown and inspected at first hand the scope and environs of the proposed works. A public hearing was held in Newcastle on 14 August 2002⁴.

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

3 *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Part III, Section 17.

4 See Appendix D for the official Hansard transcript of the evidence taken by the Committee at the public hearing on Wednesday, 14 August 2002 at Newcastle.