

Submission No. 4

(Robertson Barracks)

SL 9/4

Subject: Robertson Barracks redevelopment effects on community
Ms Leyne,

My wife Louise and I attended the community meeting advertised in your flyer yesterday 7/4/08, at the corner of Brandt and Campbell Roads in Knuckey Lagoon. It was disappointing that Warren Snowden and Damien Hale did not act on their invitations, though Gerry Wood and Mary Walsh attended and led the discussion. This is probably indicative of the level of interest various elected representatives have in the issues of concern to their constituents.

Of the 20 years we have lived in Darwin, we have been local residents to this area since we bought the 40 Farrar Road property in Knuckey Lagoon in early 1994. We came there because of the quiet and secure life style this area offered, which has been steadily degraded over time. The near proximity of Robertson Barracks has played a significant part in this change, though we are supporters of the military presence here- our son has substantial active army service and is currently based in Sydney.

Our objections are not to the Barracks per se but to the ongoing misuse of the local road system and its results, exacerbated by the increase in traffic related to the growth of the Barracks and clearly with the present expansion described in the Statement of Evidence for its redevelopment, this will become more prominent as 400 personnel plus no doubt many construction contractors are added to the 3500 military and civilian personnel already working there. The main issue here is the large proportion living off base, and contractors, both commuting to the site daily.

The Statement of Evidence has little to say about the impact on the community, limited to the 3 clauses under the heading Establishment Population. Clause 92 mentions the increase in traffic via the main gate and Thorngate Road. Since no other access to the Barracks is mentioned, the authors appear not to know the area nor have observed the traffic routes used by Barracks personnel and contractors. There are both issues of safety and the rights of residents to be addressed here.

This is a serious shortcoming and should be addressed by making an assessment of what proportion of Barracks traffic goes where. Traffic counters have been utilized frequently in the area so the NT government should be able to provide statistics on both the rate of increase in traffic volume and routes used. It would not be a surprise to find that only half the Barracks traffic goes as described in Clause 92.

The Thorngate and Tulagi Roads access south to the Stuart Highway from the Barracks is via a traffic light at the intersection, and I have observed that it is already close to an overload on that narrow junction at the peak times of travel. However it should be noted that this route caters generally to those living in the Palmerston area or further south. A large proportion of those living off base have homes in the opposite direction, particularly the northern suburbs of Darwin, and recently the new Lyons suburb was opened there. Off duty

servicemen living on base and visiting the nightspots of Darwin go that way also, often returning in the early hours of the morning- Palmerston has few such attractions.

The alternative routes to Darwin from the Barracks are firstly in mostly 80km/hr limit areas north via Thorngate Road (unless the northern Barracks gates are used), west via Campbell Road to the intersection with Brandt Road (going north west) and Stevens Road (going south). Stevens Road is intended to be the main traffic route and runs a short distance to the intersection with the arterial McMillans Road. To go back south to the McMillans Road-Stuart Highway intersection (with traffic light) is a dogleg if the destination is north and little traffic uses that route to Darwin.

Instead quite logically those using Stevens Road from/to the Barracks follow McMillans Road to the north west and Darwin city or its suburbs. The Stevens Road intersection has been wired for traffic lights but these have not been installed. As Darwin and the adjacent areas population grows, the peak hour access to/from Stevens Road is becoming more difficult and dangerous. Adding to the Barracks traffic will aggravate this and accident potential will increase.

The alternative to using Stevens Road to access McMillans Road is via the short sections of Brandt Road to the north west and Farrar Road to the west. These are 60km/hr limit sections through solely residential areas, and access from McMillans to Farrar Roads is signposted for local traffic only. Since this route is slightly shorter and more direct, a large proportion of the northern area traffic uses this route in preference to via Stevens Road, ignoring the signs regarding through traffic, and frequently in excess of the posted speed limit.

Apart from the obvious daily evidence of traffic passing our Farrar Road property, for exercise for 10 years I regularly run around the block bounded by Farrar/Brandt/Stevens/McMillans Roads, usually during the early morning 0530-0630. Typically the proportion of traffic using Stevens vs Farrar/Brandt to access Campbell Road at that time is about 2:3 respectively. This ratio has improved from about 1:4 originally, but the volume overall is greater now. Taxis seem to use the latter route exclusively. The bulk of the traffic comes during the usual rush hours but follows the same pattern.

The Farrar Road access to McMillans Road is less structured than that from Stevens Road, and has not been wired for traffic lights. Yet it is subject to about the same level of traffic as Stevens Road overall, maybe more. It is particularly hazardous for traffic turning north west on McMillans Road against the often dense traffic flow, using the 80km/hr speed limit. The accident potential there is high and increasing.

Other accident potential in the area is significant and there have been deaths along Campbell Road and at its intersection with Stevens Road, and also in recent times there have been significant accidents at the latter not leading to serious injury or death. These generally occurred to vehicles travelling west on Campbell Road and probably speeding, asleep, impaired or a combination of these, coming abruptly to the end of a long straight road. I have come upon these in the ditch or in residents' yards close to houses, when running early in the morning. I have also had cars deliberately swerve at me while running, unprovoked as I stay off the road. Where the driver can be seen if in uniform it is easy to

see if they are service personnel, which is usually the case.

The Farrar/Brandt Roads area is popular with kids on ponies, riding in the reasonably broad verges. This would not help them with a vehicle that loses control, as one did a couple of years ago, rolling along the middle of Brandt Road at dusk. Road cyclists use the area for training, mostly on Sunday mornings which are quieter after dawn, as do cyclists going to/from the Barracks during the week when it can be hectic. The main risk per my observation is from powerful motorcycles, often exceeding the speed limit by a very wide margin, particularly at night or on weekends. Clearly from their clothing these are mostly Barracks personnel. Hoons are starting to use these roads at night also.

A lesser concern, annoying but not dangerous in itself, is the littering from passing cars. That those responsible are mostly Barracks personnel is obvious from their uniforms, and it is interesting to observe that newly arrived personnel often lack vehicle airconditioning and consequently have less barriers to throwing their litter out the window. Knuckey Lagoon is in Litchfield Shire which has no public garbage management and caring residents have to pick up the litter on a daily basis.

The point of provision of this detail is to demonstrate that the local community does have issues that the Statement of Evidence does not address, and repeated complaints by residents at meetings going back around 10 years as I recall, attended by Gerry and Mary on occasion, have had no effect either. There appear to be 2 bodies who could take effective corrective action- the Army and the NT Government department responsible for roads.

The solutions put forward to date are numerous. Signs alone will not deter those who drive where they want, and the occasional police presence only catches the speedsters at the time, without making an impact generally. Changing the configuration of the Campbell and Stevens Roads intersection, to stream traffic via Stevens Road, and make it difficult to turn off Brandt Road, has been raised many times but the cost of re-routing the intersection (on Army land) has always been put forward as an obstacle. Closing off either Brandt or Farrar Roads at one end would stop through traffic at the expense of local residents. The Army could dictate to its personnel how they will come to work.

The answer has to be worked out satisfactorily to both the road users and residents, which is the job of government. To date we have not seen any positive action, and without it all parties can expect the problem to get worse and accidents to increase.

Please treat this email as the submission of concerned residents with regard to the Public Hearing to be held in Darwin on the Robertson Barracks Redevelopment on 16/4/08. As such, please confirm you have received it.

Kind regards,

