



Australian Government
Department of Defence
Defence Support Group

PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE

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LETTER

Acting Director General
Infrastructure Asset Development
BP-1-B001
Department of Defence
CANBERRA ACT 2600
William.grice@defence.gov.au
Tel: 02 6266 8101
Fax: 02 6266 8103

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SUBMISSION 11

Mr R Knight
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir

**FACILITIES UPGRADE TO SHOALWATER BAY TRAINING AREA,
ROCKHAMPTON (SWBTA), QLD**

References

- A. Friends of the Earth Brisbane dated 7 Jul 06- Submission 3
- B. Honourable D. N. Everingham letter dated 7 Jul 2006 - Submission 4.
- C. Peace Convergence Advisory Board dated 7 Jul 06 – Submission 5.
- D. No Nukes South Australia dated 6 Jul 06 - Submission 6.
- E. Mrs Christine Fensham dated 7 July 06 – Submission 7
- F. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom dated 12 Jul 06 – Submission 8

In the various submissions to the Public Works Committee on the matter of the Joint Combined Training Centre facilities proposed for Shoalwater Bay Training Area, as listed at References A to F, the various authors make a number of statements in regards to the environment, health and safety of the community, the destruction of indigenous heritage, threat to safety, security and peace and depleted uranium arising as a result of activities at Shoalwater Bay Training Area. This submission is provided in response to References A to F, and particular concerns are addressed in turn.

Requirement for Urban Operations Training Facility

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) undertakes training to prepare its members for a wide range of operations in many parts of the world. The current operations being undertaken by the ADF in the Solomon Islands, East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq involve operations in urban terrain in a range of different contingencies, including peacekeeping. The Urban Operations Training Facility planned for Shoalwater Bay is therefore necessary to enable ADF members to train in and be familiar with operating in urban areas.

The Urban Operations Training Facility is intended to be used on a regular basis and therefore the facility will not be used as a target for bombs, nor will live ammunition be used within the facility. The Department of Defence takes pride in maintaining good environmental practises to

sustain our training areas; Defence is required to reuse these facilities for training and ensures that use of training areas and facilities is undertaken in a sustainable manner.

Environment

Defence agrees with a number of the submissions that have identified that Shoalwater Bay Training Area (SWBTA) is one of Australia's most pristine coastal regions. In fact, it is the last large parcel of undeveloped coastal land on the east coast of Australia south of Cooktown. Worldwide, ecological research repeatedly demonstrates that military activity and environmental conservation are not mutually exclusive. In many places in the world, land used for military training often represents the last refuge for rare or threatened species. Shoalwater Bay is no different. Since acquisition in 1965, while under Defence's environmental stewardship, the ecological condition of Shoalwater Bay Training Area has dramatically improved as the property recovers from being degraded through the unsustainable land management practices and overgrazing by livestock that had characterised the area. Defence has removed large populations of feral animals, managed incursions by weeds and implemented fire management regimes that complement the natural processes that support ecosystem function. This has allowed the property to recover and provided habitat that simultaneously supports military training and delivers biodiversity conservation.

Claims that military training has an adverse effect on environmental heritage or wilderness values at Shoalwater Bay (or indeed elsewhere) are simply not supported by the facts. Military training areas in Australia are generally large areas where access is closely managed and natural ecosystem processes allowed to function.

The specific impacts associated with the construction and operation of the Urban Operations Training Facility have been carefully considered. Environmental constraints strongly influenced the siting of the Urban Operations Training Facility in an area historically impacted by the location of a homestead (now removed).

In keeping with Defence's commitment to open and transparent communication about its impacts on the environment, Defence commissioned an environmental consultant, HLA Envirosiences, to prepare a Public Environment Report (PER) on the construction and use of the Urban Operations Training Facility at SWBTA. This PER was publicly exhibited for 20 business days from 17 February - 16 March 2006. Public meetings were also convened at four locations in the Rockhampton region (Rockhampton 20 February, The Caves and Yeppoon 21 February and Stanage Bay on 22 February). Interested members of the public were also taken on a bus tour of the site on Saturday 4 March 2006. Two written submissions were received from members of the public and one from Livingstone Shire Council. The PER was finalised on 9 May 2006.

Following finalisation of the PER, Defence staff who are environmental professionals, experienced in environmental impact assessment (from Defence's Directorate of Environmental Impact Management) reviewed the environmental assessment documentation. They evaluated the conclusions regarding the potential for significant impacts and an assessment report was prepared that considered the public submissions received and documented the conclusions reached. Following its consideration of the PER, Defence concluded the proposal would not have a significant impact on the environment. Copies of these documents were also provided to the Department of Environment and Heritage for their information.

The traditional owners of SWBTA, the Darumbal people, could not be contacted by Defence's consultants during the PER exhibition period. However, Darumbal are represented on the Environmental Advisory Committee for SWBTA which has considered the proposal and Darumbal have subsequently been directly consulted about the proposal.

The Environmental Advisory Committee meet biannually (May and October) at Western Street or at Range Control at Shoalwater bay. The consultation for the Joint Combined Training Centre project to this committee was held at the October 2005 meeting at Western Street. The Environmental Advisory Committee is made up of representatives from all interested stakeholders of Shoalwater Bay Training Area, which includes members from the following organisations:

- Department of Primary Industries - Forestry,
- Central Queensland University
- Department of Natural Resources and Mines
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
- Queensland Environment Protection Authority
- QPWS
- Livingstone Shire Council
- Central Queensland Wildlife Preservation Society
- Darumbal Noolar-Murree Coop for Land and Culture
- Fisheries Representative
- Neighbouring Graziers Representative
- Defence Representatives

Unfortunately this list of organisations and personnel that were consulted on the proposal was not included in the evidence. The evidence will be amended to reflect the additional organisations consulted.

Depleted Uranium

Australia does not use munitions containing depleted uranium. Depleted uranium munitions and equipment are not cleared for use on Australian training ranges and therefore not permitted for use by Australian or foreign forces, including United States forces.

Only approved in-service weapons are used. Overseas training partners taking part in exercises on Australian military training areas are also bound to use only those weapons approved for in-service use in this country. Depleted uranium ordnance is not an Australian Defence Force approved weapon so it is not used during any training exercises on Australian Military Training Areas.

There is no evidence that Depleted uranium munitions, or vehicles equipped with Depleted uranium armour, have ever been used or tested by Australian or foreign forces at Shoalwater Bay Training Area, or any other Australian land training range.

Defence is open and transparent about the environmental effects of its activities.

Defence would not object to independent testing for Depleted uranium being carried out by others using their own resources and subject to all the usual protocols for access and safety that apply to Defence training areas. There would be no restrictions on publication of the data obtained.

Current in-service weapons include precision-guided munitions, or 'smart bombs'. By definition, such weapons are safer in training than unguided bombs.

Strict training regulations control the use in training exercises of these weapons. These regulations ensure rigorous and detailed planning, risk assessment and management, and adherence to strict environmental regulations.

I trust that this additional information satisfies the Committee

Yours sincerely



William Grice
Colonel
Acting Director General Infrastructure Asset Development

18 July 2006