

Issues and Conclusions

Amendment to the Statement of Evidence

- 3.1 At the commencement of the Inquiry, Defence proposed the following amendment to its Statement of Evidence:

Delete Paragraph 23, and insert new Paragraph 23 to read as follows:-

The location of the proposed works is within the existing base boundaries of RAAF Base Amberley in Queensland, RAAF Base Darwin in the Northern Territory, RAAF Base Edinburgh in South Australia, RAAF Base Pearce in Western Australia and RAAF Base Townsville in Queensland. RAAF Base Amberley is located approximately eight kilometres west of the city of Ipswich at the western edge of the Brisbane metropolitan area. RAAF Base Darwin is located approximately 6½ kilometres north-east of Darwin's central business district. RAAF Base Edinburgh is located approximately 30 kilometres north of Adelaide, in the Edinburgh Defence Precinct. RAAF Base Pearce is located adjacent to the town of Bullsbrook, north of Perth. RAAF Base Townsville is located approximately seven kilometres from Townsville's central business district. The location plans for each base are shown in the evidence at attachment 1 for RAAF Base Amberley,

attachment 15 for RAAF Base Darwin, attachment 20 for RAAF Base Edinburgh, attachment 26 for RAAF Base Pearce and attachment 31 for RAAF Base Townsville.¹

Background

- 3.2 Defence explained that the purpose of the proposed project was to develop essential infrastructure and facilities to support the introduction and operation of C-17 heavy lift aircraft in Australia. Its scope will include related infrastructure works at RAAF Base Amberley and a number of other bases – RAAF Base Darwin, RAAF Base Pearce, RAAF Base Edinburgh, and RAAF Base Townsville.
- 3.3 RAAF Base Amberley had been selected as the principal domicile for the new aircraft, with the other bases nominated deployment of the C-17 when required.
- 3.4 The need for the works have arisen from a government initiative to provide the Australian Defence Forces with a new heavy lift aircraft capability to support national and international operations and major disasters, rescue and relief efforts.²
- 3.5 In its submission, Defence informed the Committee that the Minister for Defence announced the acquisition of four new Boeing C-17 Globemaster III aircraft and associated equipment in March 2006. The first of these aircraft arrived in Australia in December 2006; the second aircraft arrived in May 2007 with the remaining two aircraft due to arrive in February and March 2008.³

The Nature of the Proposed Works

- 3.6 As Defence explained during the inquiry, the proposed works in support of the C-17 project were developed within a twelve month time frame largely because of the decision by government to rapidly acquire the aircraft. For Defence, this meant providing interim facilities at RAAF Base Amberley to support the relocation of No. 36 Squadron from RAAF Base Richmond New South Wales, together with other temporary

1 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 2.

2 loc.cit.

3 Appendix C, Submission No.1, paragraph 3.

- arrangements, followed by the development of the current proposal to provide permanent facilities to adequately support the new capabilities.⁴
- 3.7 The bulk of the work has to do with the provision of infrastructure to each of the five sites mentioned that includes the construction of new strengthened airfield pavements, strengthened aircraft parking aprons and the widening and strengthening of taxiways to accommodate a heavier aircraft that is capable of carrying a heavier payload than the RAAF C-130 Hercules aircraft.⁵
- 3.8 The remainder of the works will involve the construction of a new Headquarters building for No. 36 Squadron at RAAF Base Amberley and modifications and new terminal and cargo handling facilities at each site.⁶
- 3.9 The Committee questioned the need for there to be a separate headquarters building for No. 36 Squadron, suggesting that if it were relocated to an existing headquarters building on site potential savings to the Commonwealth might be available.
- 3.10 In responding Defence explained that currently the headquarters function for No. 36 Squadron was spread across fifteen other buildings on the base, and shared with other units. These arrangements were interim, and the units were unconnected to the operational role of the Squadron. The decision to rationalise all of the headquarters functions of the Squadron into one single building was the most desirable outcome.⁷

Site Selection

- 3.11 The Committee was interested in whether other sites had been looked at as an alternative to the location of the C-17 hub at Amberley.
- 3.12 The Defence witness stated that the reason for the selection of RAAF Base Amberley as the home base for the operations of C-17 was based on the facilities previously provided following on from the decision to locate the Multi-Role Transport Tanker (MRTT) at Amberley. The new facilities and improvements to the existing infrastructure to support the KC -30B Multi-Role Transport Tanker has allowed the opportunity for both aircraft to co-use a hanger being constructed under the RAAF Base Amberley

4 Appendix D, page 5.

5 *ibid.*, pages 2 and 3.

6 *ibid.*, page 2.

7 *ibid.*, page 9.

redevelopment project stage 2 for the MRTT. According to the witness, to locate the home base for C-17 elsewhere would have required the outlay of Commonwealth funds for a new hanger, whereas the decision to use RAAF Base Amberley would potentially realise savings to the Commonwealth.

- 3.13 Defence also explained that the weight of the aircraft combined with the heavy payload it was able to carry meant that runways at an alternative site not equipped to handle heavy aircraft would need significant works to make them longer and stronger. Defence also mentioned that geographically the choice of Amberley was also the best location, since the bulk of stores for both Defence and the government are located on the eastern sea-board it is easier and more economical to collect and transport cargo to other parts of Australia or overseas.⁸

Infrastructure Impacts

- 3.14 The Committee asked Defence to comment on any likely impacts the proposed development for C-17 might have on infrastructure services that would be required to service the completed works.
- 3.15 In responding, Defence informed the Committee that works associated with the implementation of RAAF Base Amberley redevelopment stage 2 were designed to accommodate C-17, as well as providing spare capacity for future developments over the life of the project. Defence was confident that there would be no requirement for additional base-wide infrastructure to support the C-17 project. This also applied to the provision of power.⁹
- 3.16 The Committee also received evidence from the Mayor of Ipswich on infrastructure issues. The Mayor informed the Committee that following a recent meeting with the Queensland Premier and Deputy Premier, he had been advised that a proposed pipeline between the Bundamba water treatment plant to Swanbank would be commissioned to increase the water supply to Ipswich City. This initiative has been combined with other conservation measures including the use of rainwater tanks on all new housing.¹⁰
- 3.17 The Mayor expressed the view that Council would like to see the water infrastructure at RAAF Base Amberley linked to the community supply

8 *ibid.*, page 3.

9 *ibid.*, pages 3 and 4.

10 *ibid.*, page 14.

rather than being separate. According to the Mayor the approach being followed by the Government of Queensland was the amalgamation of water supply irrespective of from where it was derived so as to minimise wastage, and to provide some certainty that all communities were unified in ensuring the best outcome for water sustainability.¹¹

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that, in response to the views of the Ipswich City Council that RAAF Base Amberley connect to the community water supply, Defence consider the feasibility of this proposal, and maintain dialogue with the Council on this issue.

Facility Modifications

- 3.18 The Committee referred to the earlier comments made by Defence on the co-use of hanger facilities for both heavy lift aircraft types, and asked whether there were any modifications that needed to be made to this facility.
- 3.19 Defence responded to the effect that a number of small changes will be required prior to the hanger being commissioned at little cost to the Commonwealth. These changes currently in the design phase are being made to the docking system – a scaffold arrangement that permits maintenance of the below-wing mechanicals on the MRTT. In its original form the docking structure for the MRTT was a permanent structure, but has been redesigned to be moveable so as to allow hanger access for the C-17 at an estimated cost of \$75,000.¹²
- 3.20 In responding to a question from the Committee relating to the possible need for an additional hanger, Defence stated that the extensions proposed to the existing MRTT apron parking space would, consistent with the Master Plan for RAAF Base Amberley, free-up some additional airside real estate that could be used for any purpose that might be required in the future including an additional hanger. Fuel lines and the provision of fuel

11 loc.cit.

12 ibid., page 4.

hydrants could also be installed to any new hanger facility with little difficulty and in a way that would allow their removal if needed.¹³

Tender Arrangements

3.21 In the context of Amberley, the Committee asked whether the C-17 project and the works associated with RAAF Base Amberley Redevelopment Stage 3¹⁴ project could be addressed by one tender rather than the current two, in order to achieve efficiencies in the delivery of both projects.

3.22 In its response, Defence drew a distinction between the two projects. The proposed stage 3 works would be undertaken in an area of the base remote from the sensitive area of the flight line, whereas the C-17 project facilities are on the flight line and will entail major construction works on the active airfield, including taxiways and parking aprons. According to Defence, both projects were distinctive, involving a different scope of works for each and that:

To try ... and rationalise the number of consultants [engaged on two projects] would have increased Defence's risk profile exponentially with regard to the quality of documentation. So this was the lowest-risk approach for us.¹⁵

Adequacy of Existing Facilities

3.23 The Committee was interested in the extent to which the current operations of a heavy aircraft would impact on the existing taxiway aprons and runways, and whether any assessment of that had been made by Defence.

3.24 Defence stated that under stage 2 of the Amberley redevelopment project some strengthening of the main taxiway had been undertaken, and that C-17 aircraft were currently using that section of the taxiway. The department informed the Committee that over the previous six months aircraft had been operating from a number of airfields in Australia - primarily future deployment bases - using a variety of cargo weights, and

13 *ibid.*, page 5.

14 See Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, RAAF Base Amberley Redevelopment Stage 3, Queensland, Eleventh Report of 2007

15 *ibid.*, page 6.

that it was working with engineers in determining what weights the aircraft can be taken up to on those runways. Runway strengths were tested at Amberley, Pearce, Darwin, Townsville and Edinburgh under maximum weights. Testing at Edinburgh concluded that only lower weights could be carried until the runway had been strengthened as foreshadowed under the current project.¹⁶

- 3.25 Defence added it was confident that because of the similarities between the MRTT and C-17, temporary arrangements that have been implemented are adequate for the time being until the new works associated with further strengthening of taxiways at all sites has been completed.

Master Planning

- 3.26 The Committee sought assurances from Defence that a Master Plan was in place to ensure that works currently proposed and the expenditure on those works would not need to be repeated at some stage in the near future as a consequence of inadequate planning.¹⁷
- 3.27 Defence informed the Committee that in developing the Master Plan for RAAF Base Amberley in 2006 there were indications that the operational role of the base might be enhanced. Before the plans had been finalised, the department undertook a major revision of the draft version including consideration of the Defence Capability Plan to ascertain the potential capabilities that might come on line, and that might operate out of Amberley or be domiciled at Amberley over the next 30 years. This included a consideration of the possibility of a new heavy lift aircraft being acquired. As a result of this review the base Master Plan for Amberley was finalised and approved in November 2006. The plan has a life span until 2036. Similar planning processes were undertaken at each of the other C-17 deployment bases.¹⁸

16 *ibid*, page 7.

17 *ibid.*, page 9.

18 *loc.cit.*

Project Costs

3.28 As previously described in Chapter 2 above, the Committee is being asked to consider an estimated out-turn cost for this project of \$268.2 million across five bases. This includes:

- construction costs;
- management and design fees;
- furniture, fittings and equipment; and
- contingencies and escalation.¹⁹

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the C-17 Heavy Airlift Infrastructure project at RAAF Base Amberley, Queensland; RAAF Base Darwin, Northern Territory; RAAF Base Edinburgh, South Australia; RAAF Base Pearce, Western Australia; and RAAF Base Townsville, Queensland proceed at an estimated cost of \$268.2 million.

Hon Judi Moylan MP

Chair

13 September 2007

¹⁹ Appendix C, paragraph 77.