

## Introduction

### Referral of Work

- 1.1 On 24 May 2001 the proposal to undertake a Stage 2 Redevelopment at the Royal Australian Air Force Base Townsville (the Base) was referred to the Committee for consideration and report to the Parliament in accordance with the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969*.<sup>1</sup>
- 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 \$72.5 million. Mr Slipper further noted that subject to parliamentary approval, it was intended to commence work on the proposed redevelopment in 2002 with a completion date of late 2004.

### Background

- 1.3 The Base is one of a chain of airfields maintained for defence and surveillance of the northern areas of Australia. The Base, together with RAAF Base Scherger, Weipa, North Queensland, provides operational and support facilities for the air defence of Northern Queensland and its approaches.

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1 The Hon Peter Slipper MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration, moved the motion in the House of Representatives. Extract from Votes and Proceedings No. 185, 24.5.2001.

- 1.4 The Base is owned by the Commonwealth and is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Defence (Defence). It has been controlled by the RAAF for over 60 years.
- 1.5 The Base is a joint user airfield, supporting both military and civil aircraft operations. The civil aviation facilities are capable of accommodating general aviation, domestic and international operations. Civil aviation operations are conducted in the eastern sector of the airfield and are separated from Australian Defence Force operations. The Base layout is shown at Annex B-1.
- 1.6 According to Defence's submission, a Defence presence in northern Australia has bipartisan support. Capital investment in infrastructure stems from a number of policy documents since 1987. The *Defence White Paper 2000* reiterated the importance of cover over the maritime approaches in the defence of Australia. The redevelopment of the Base is consistent with the aim of the Defence Reform Program.<sup>2</sup>

## Location

- 1.7 The Base is located approximately 5 kilometres west of the city centre of Townsville, within the suburb of Garbutt. It encompasses an area of approximately 700 hectares with a perimeter of 15 kilometres. Ingham Road and industrial/residential estates bound the Base to the south, Australian Airports Limited and residential property to the east and the Townsville Town Common Conservation Park to the north and west. The location of RAAF Base Townsville is shown at Annex A.<sup>3</sup>

## Organisation

- 1.8 The following units are located at the Base:
- Headquarters No 395 Expeditionary Combat Support Wing;
  - 5<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment (Blackhawk and Chinook helicopters);
  - No 323 Combat Support Squadron;
  - No 38 Squadron Detachment B (Caribou transport aircraft);
  - No 1 Combat Logistics Squadron;

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2 Submissions Volume 1, pp. 7-10.

3 See also Submissions Volume 1, pp. 7-8.

- No 1 Air Terminal Squadron Detachment Townsville;
- No 27 Squadron; and
- Combat Survival Training School.<sup>4</sup>

## Role of Base

- 1.9 Defence advised the Committee that over the last five years the Townsville Base has become the largest mounting Base of the Australian Defence Force. During regional crises such as those that occurred in Bougainville, the Solomon Islands and East Timor, the Base was used primarily to train personnel for overseas activities.
- 1.10 During the East Timor crisis, there were 17 nations training at the Base. The Base is the centre for the rapid deployment force from where operations into the south-west Pacific and the inner arc around the north of Australia are mounted.<sup>5</sup>

## Previous Works

### Stage 1 Redevelopment

- 1.11 Defence noted that continuous upgrades to the Base to accommodate new aircraft and associated facilities have taken place over time. These works have been the subject of Committee reports since 1972. The most recent report was the Stage 1 Redevelopment approved by the Committee tabled in 1999.<sup>6</sup>

## Inquiry Process

- 1.12 The Committee invited public input to the Inquiry by advertising for submissions in the local *Townsville Bulletin* on 30 May 2001. The

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4 Submissions Volume 1, p. 5.

5 Air Commodore Graham Bentley, Director-General, Policy and Planning, Royal Australian Air Force (Headquarters), Department of Defence, Evidence, p. 7.

6 Submissions Volume 1, pp. 8-10.

Committee also called for submissions from organisations, peak bodies and individuals with a possible interest in this reference.

- 1.13 The Committee invited Queensland Senators, Federal and local Members of Parliament in whose electorates the proposed project is located to make submissions and to attend the inspection of the works site and the public hearing.
- 1.14 On 31 July, the Committee inspected the proposed Stage 2 redevelopment project and took the opportunity to examine the work in progress for Stage 1. Representatives of the Defence briefed the Committee on aspects of the proposed works and brought the Committee up to date on the Stage 1 redevelopment.
- 1.15 Following the inspection, the Committee held a public hearing at the Base and took evidence from representatives of the Defence. The Committee received 5 submissions. These were from the Australian Heritage Commission, Environment Australia, the Queensland Department of Main Roads and supplementary submissions from the Department of Defence.