



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

on

PUBLIC WORKS

Reference: Redevelopment of facilities at RAAF Base
Williamtown

WILLIAMTOWN

Monday, 18 May 1998

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

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JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Redevelopment of facilities at RAAF Base Williamtown

WILLIAMTOWN

Monday, 18 May 1998

Present

Mr Tuckey (Chair)

Senator Calvert

Mr Forrest

Mr Hatton

Mr Hollis

Committee met at 1.32 p.m.

Mr Tuckey took the chair.

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing into the proposed development of the Eastern Region Operations Centre at RAAF Base Williamtown, New South Wales. This project was referred to the Joint Committee on Public Works for consideration and report to parliament by the House of Representatives on 24 March 1998 at an estimated outturn cost of \$18 million. In accordance with subsection 17(3) of the Public Works Committee Act 1969:

(3) In considering and reporting on a public work, the Committee shall have regard to—

- (a) the stated purpose of the work and its suitability for that purpose;
- (b) the necessity for, or the advisability of, carrying out the work;
- (c) the most effective use that can be made, in the carrying out of the work, of the moneys to be expended on the work;
- (d) where the work purports to be of a revenue-producing character, the amount of revenue that it may reasonably be expected to produce; and
- (e) the present and prospective public value of the work.

This morning the committee undertook an extensive inspection of RAAF Base Williamtown, including existing facilities at Duckhole Hill and the site for the proposed facility.

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KELLY, Brigadier, Garry Ross, Director General, Project Delivery, Department of Defence, Room CP3-3-3, Campbell Park Offices, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 2600

KRIEG, Wing Commander Peter Anthony, Air Defence Ground Environment Operations, Department of Defence, HQ 41WG, RAAF Base Williamtown, Williamtown, New South Wales 2314

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CHAIR—Welcome. The committee has received a submission from the Department of Defence dated November 1997. Do you wish to propose any amendment?

Brig. Kelly—No, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR—It is proposed that the submission be received, taken as read and incorporated in the transcript of evidence. Do members have any objections? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The document read as follows—

CHAIR—Would a representative of the Department of Defence now read the summary statement to the committee, after which we will proceed to questions.

Brig. Kelly—Thank you, Mr Chairman. This proposal advocates the construction of a building to replace existing facilities used by No. 41 Wing Headquarters and No. 3 Control and Reporting Unit at RAAF Base Williamtown, New South Wales. The facility is to be known as the Eastern Region Operations Centre, or EASTROC for short.

The role of the Tactical Fighter Group is to provide for air defence, strike and interdiction capabilities for Australia's defence forces. An associated capability under the control of the Tactical Fighter Group is the system for national air defence and airspace control, including information from ground based sensors, as well as the control and operation of airborne early warning and control aircraft when they are obtained for the Australian Defence Force.

RAAF Base Williamtown will remain the home of the Tactical Fighter Group and will continue to provide major logistical support to both Williamtown and northern based elements of the force. The Commander Tactical Fighter Group exercises command of the force through subordinate wings, including No. 41 Wing, which has command responsibilities for air defence systems and air traffic control operations.

No. 3 Control and Reporting Unit, a subordinate unit, is to remain at Williamtown to provide air surveillance and operational training in conjunction with fighter squadrons, although its controller training and air defence personnel technical training roles have been divested to a new Air Defence Systems Training Unit also based at Williamtown and included in this proposal.

The following factors have determined the need for a new facility. No. 3 Control and Reporting Unit is currently located at Duckhole Hill, along with the Air Defence Systems Training Unit and the Software Development Unit, some two kilometres from the base. It occupies a variety of buildings, some of temporary construction, which no longer meet the expanding needs of the unit, present problems in housing new communications and surveillance equipment and do not meet contemporary standards for the functions they are required to perform. Additionally, the site on top of a hill does not lend itself to further development, although it will be retained as the site for a radar head.

No. 41 Wing is presently accommodated with Headquarters Tactical Fighter Group on the base proper but in congested accommodation. Moreover, the performance of its personnel would be improved by its collocation with No. 3 Control and Reporting Unit by enabling some of its personnel to perform dual operational roles.

The expanded air defence personnel training commitments cannot be housed in facilities presently available to No. 3 Control and Reporting Unit. The existing facilities do not provide an integrated tactical level command and control centre for the air defence of Australia capable of acting as a back-up for the control installation in Northern Australia.

The proposed facility would consist of a two-storey building with about 5,000 square metres of functional area to accommodate staff and equipment of No. 41 Wing Headquarters, No. 3 Control and Reporting Unit and the Air Defence Systems Training Unit, as well as contracted personnel engaged to support the equipment.

The facility would be required to house about 190 personnel on a day-to-day basis, together with up to 50 students under training. During periods of prolonged exercises, up to 30 additional personnel could be engaged in operational activities within the building. On occasions the facility would be required to sustain continuous, around-the-clock operations for extended periods.

The out-turn estimated cost of the works is \$18 million, including construction costs, professional fees and charges, furniture and fittings, and a contingency provision. Subject to parliamentary approval of this proposal, tenders would be called in August 1998, with the objective of having construction completed consistent with the planned delivery of new radar equipment by March 2000.

The benefits to stem from the new facility would be the provision of an effective command centre for the management of Australia's air defence. Efficiency would be improved through the collocation of units. Working conditions and staff morale would be improved through the provision of a building to contemporary standards. Replacement of the temporary and obsolete buildings used by No. 3 Control and Reporting Unit would ensure that new surveillance radar equipment, scheduled for delivery at the end of 1999, could be appropriately housed.

An environmental certificate of compliance has been issued for the proposed works. There are no direct environmental implications resulting from the provision of the proposed facilities. No heritage implications are evident. Commonwealth, state and local government representatives and instrumentalities have been advised or consulted regarding this proposal. That completes my statement, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR—Thank you, Brigadier Kelly. Are there any other witnesses who wish to add to those remarks? If you would rather just await questions, I will defer to my colleagues. Senator Calvert, have you any matters you would like to raise at this point?

Senator CALVERT—We did a windscreen tour this morning and drove through the base. I suppose one can ask the obvious question: why was that particular site selected, given that the rest of it is up on top of the hill? Would you care to comment on that? Have you had any objections from any interested bodies about flattening the parkland area that was there before?

Brig. Kelly—The site was chosen as a result of the deliberations of a technical site selection board, which considered six sites on the base. It was the most preferred site, considering the limitations imposed on the base by explosive ordnance storage, by fuel

installations and by the requirement to retain airside facilities for future aircraft operations. The site is consistent with future master planning intentions, and I am not aware of any complaints that we have had with regard to using that park area.

Senator CALVERT—EASTROC came to be a very integral part of the radar defence readiness of Australia. It is a back-up system for NORTHROC. From observing the site as we drove through this morning, we know it is surrounded by on-base housing. What sort of security arrangement will you put in place for this particular building? I would have thought there would be a need for very high security there, given the importance of this particular building in the overall scheme of things.

Brig. Kelly—The proposed site is actually adjacent to married quarters but it occupies an area where married quarters have already been removed. The intent is that married quarters in the area will be removed over the next half-decade or decade, noting that the intention is to remove people living on base away from those areas most impacted by noise. I understand that the site itself will be fenced, and the entire site is within the secure boundary of the base.

Senator CALVERT—It is not as dangerous a site as a fuel storage depot would perhaps be, so I guess you would take similar sorts of precautions to ensure that the whole site is protected. Would that be right?

Brig. Kelly—That is correct.

Senator CALVERT—Would the rooms in the new building be soundproof?

Mr Brouwer—Certainly. There will be acoustic treatment provided within the building, to provide both protection from aircraft noise and normal acoustic protection for an office type of environment.

Senator CALVERT—One of the things we noticed this morning when we were up on Duckhole Hill was that the buildings that service personnel have had to operate in must certainly place a lot of pressure on them. I would have thought that, given the need for quietness particularly in the operational areas, that was one of the major requirements.

Mr Brouwer—That is correct, and we will be looking to provide, as part of the design, acoustic protection between the consoles within the operation room to avoid noise from one operator transferring to another.

Senator CALVERT—What sort of material do you use?

Mr Brouwer—You can use office types of screens, but with increased foam to provide sound absorption. As part of the design team, an acoustic engineer has been engaged, who will make a recommendation as to the most cost-effective way of providing it.

Senator CALVERT—None of the material you used starts with 'A', does it?

Mr Brouwer—It may start with 'A', but it is not asbestos.

Senator CALVERT—With a lot of projects we have looked at over the years—as my colleague Mr Hollis would know—technology has imposed upon us all the operational centres, such as you have, where you are increasingly adding and putting in new equipment; and that creates pressures. As we saw this morning, when you lift the floor up, it looks like a bowl of spaghetti. It is the same with Australia House. Everywhere we have been in recent years looking at projects, the under-floor part seems to be overloaded with wiring, and no-one seems to know what is actually there, half the time. When this new building is put in place, will it be built in such a way that, with new technology coming on stream, it will provide easy access to services?

Mr Brouwer—One of the things we are looking at for the operations centre is to provide a full computer floor across the whole area. The existing facility simply has cable trenches, and so all the cables are located in a very small area. With the new facility, there will be access to the total under-floor area, so that we are able to have flexibility with where we run our cables if, for instance, the requirements change in the future.

Senator CALVERT—Will all those requirements to stop flooding and stop vermin getting in and all that sort of thing be state-of-the-art?

Mr Brouwer—Yes. That will all be dealt with as part of the design.

Senator CALVERT—When are you going to replace the Australian Rules football oval out here? Has anybody got any ideas about that?

CHAIR—I am going to give Mr Forrest the opportunity to pursue that last question a little further.

Mr FORREST—My question is about the appropriateness of the site of this building. I get a bit worried. I know I have only been on this committee a short time. We get shown these bases, but I cannot remember actually even being presented with an up-to-date master plan, and I would like to know what the master plan current is for this site. The reason for asking that question is this: how do you know that this site is not better as a site for some other future requirement that the place might have? How do you really know that this is the best site, when there is no up-to-date master plan operating? I understand that it is nearly 15 years since a master plan was prepared.

Brig. Kelly—That is correct. I believe there is a 1983 master plan. The site selection process that was looked at for the siting of this place was virtually a mini master planning exercise, if I can put it that way. The site does have a number of limitations, as I said, in respect to facilities that are already here—for example, the explosive ordnance and fuel installations. Areas around the apron or the airstrip itself are reserved for future flight operations—for example, the potential future presence of airborne early warning—and that leaves very few other areas which can be used for a facility such as this.

Nevertheless, the technical siting board assessed that this location would be the basis of the master plan, which is currently out to tender for preparation—as we are about to update the master plan—and it provides sufficient space in that general area for the only other facility which we can anticipate coming here. No decision has been made on this, but it is possible that Headquarters Australian Theatre might come here. Its use would be consistent with the facility that we are building and with the ADF Warfare Centre just down the road; so that would create a new precinct for a strategic type of area.

Mr FORREST—It surprises me, though, because this is such a large building. It is 5,000-odd square metres, I understand, and that is five times the size of the Great Hall in the parliament. It is a huge building. It ought to have fitted in to some long-term planning process. It seems to have been a case of, 'Oh, we've got to have this now. Where do we put it?' rather than it being planned for and automatically going here. How regularly does Defence upgrade its master plans for all the sites it has around Australia?

Brig. Kelly—We normally upgrade them about every five to 10 years. This has been an unusually long time. I believe that it was not updated because there was a degree of uncertainty about the future of RAAF bases in the south of Australia. Now that that issue has been looked at and everyone is confident that the future of Williamstown is secure, we will now update the master plan.

CHAIR—Following Senator Calvert's question, looking at your plan in annex B, the question was asked about housing and you gave us advice that there was a plan to remove that housing. Am I correct in assuming that only a back-to-back single row of housing will remain on the base adjacent to the proposed building?

Sqn Ldr Browning—That is correct. There is a single row of houses on the opposite side of Henderson Street. As you go further south-west, there are houses on both sides, but on the site that we are looking at, the houses on the north-western side of Henderson Street have been removed.

CHAIR—Is that a single row of houses or is it a back-to-back row of houses?

Sqn Ldr Browning—There is a single row on either side of the road.

CHAIR—Once they go, that whole area will more or less be available for administrative activity, presumably.

Sqn Ldr Browning—Yes.

Mr HOLLIS—Following Senator Calvert's question about the location, I would like to go back one step further and ask about the location in Williamstown. Why was Williamstown the preferred location? Have other sites been looked at? What are the advantages in locating this in Williamstown? Is it just the fact that it has already been here and you are going to continue with it here or were other sites looked at?

Wing Cmdr Krieg—Other sites were looked at. With the advantages of modern technology we can remote our operations, and we took advantage of that opportunity and decided to leave the facility here at Williamtown, primarily because of the synergies that can be obtained by working with our peers in the fighter community and also, in the future, with the AEW&C personnel. The training values that can be gained from those synergies of working in close proximity are quite significant and so we decided to leave the facility here.

Mr HOLLIS—In terms of the comments made by Mr Forrest, which I agree with, this is going to be a huge building which will aggressively impose itself on the base. Are you concerned about the impact of such a huge building in this location?

Brig. Kelly—No.

Mr HOLLIS—Let me ask another question. We have been going around this area today and, granted, it rained very heavily last night—and it is raining as I speak—but this area is renowned for having huge floods every few years. Does this base get flooded when we have the famous Hunter River floods?

Sqn Ldr Browning—The base has had ponding of water here before which has caused problems with the runway, but generally not in the domestic area. The problems mainly stem from the fact that we are on a sand bed here and, if the watertable is low, then we generally get 100 per cent infiltration and the water just disappears, but if the ground water levels rise then we have had problems in the past with flooding. Generally, it has not been in the domestic area of the base; it has been either at the end of the runway or on the other side of the runway.

Mr HOLLIS—When we were going through that building today someone lifted up a tile and we saw that spaghetti junction, or whatever it is. To my untrained eye it would seem that if floodwater got into that it would cause quite a lot of damage. With this new huge building that we are going to put on—as Mr Forrest rightly says, it is five times the size of the Great Hall in Parliament House—

CHAIR—I do not know that we should continue to make that comparison—it makes us look like big guys!

Mr HOLLIS—We are very small, Chairman, compared with this. This is going to be five times that size.

Brig. Kelly—It is planned to be a two-storey building, and most other facilities in the area are also two storeys. The ADF Warfare Centre is two storeys, the living-in accommodation and the headquarters buildings in the area are two storeys.

Mr HOLLIS—Tell me more about the flooding. This area does have flooding, doesn't it? We have very specialised high-tech equipment here. If the old Hunter continued to rise and

flooded this area, would that building be flooded?

Mr Brouwer—As part of the design, the consultants would look at what is a 100-year flood level and would ensure that the floor level of the new facility was above that 100-year flood level.

Mr HOLLIS—So you are telling this committee that a guarantee that you would give is that the floor level and the cabling and everything else would be above that level.

Mr Brouwer—The floor level would be above. The cabling may be—

Mr HOLLIS—Below—and that would be even worse, would it not?

Mr Brouwer—It is obviously below the floor level, but there are ways to provide effective waterproofing of any substructure, to avoid the ingress of water.

CHAIR—To follow that up, the assurance we require is that, firstly, anything that was below the 100-year level or that could be affected by the watertable would be properly waterproofed; and, secondly, that the building could not be subject to inundation in a 100-year flood cycle. Is that your view?

Mr Brouwer—Yes.

CHAIR—That will be the specification.

Mr Brouwer—Yes.

Senator CALVERT—It might be 99 years since we had a flood.

Mr HOLLIS—Yes: with the way it has been raining here over the past two days, we might be ready for one.

Mr FORREST—I did have some questions about that master plan, but we are getting a new one, and so that has probably satisfied that. One of the witnesses has made references to acid sulfate soils, and that is what I want to get a comment on. It is surprising to me, in this part of the world. I know it is a bigger problem north of here and up the Queensland coast, but is anybody aware that this is a problem in this part of the world?

Sqn Ldr Browning—I am certainly not aware of that problem on the base here. Whether it happens outside in Port Stephens or somewhere else I am not aware, but I have certainly not struck that problem on the base.

Mr FORREST—The same witnesses also made reference to the matter of flooding, which Mr Hollis has raised. In driving around the whole region today, I have noticed saturation and water lying in paddocks everywhere. Senator Calvert remarked, 'There's a

decent swimming pool,' and there must have been five or six acres under water. At this time of the year, that is a regional issue, is it, or does the base exacerbate that problem?

Sqn Ldr Browning—We are aware that there has been a number of studies done on flooding in the area. The comments about the base were that, because there is a lot of hard standing, we increase the speed with which water runs off, but a lot of the problem relates to the level of the watertable. While the watertable is low, we generally get very high infiltration, because it is a sandy area and the water tends to disappear very quickly: even after very heavy rain, it disappears within a very short time. But if that watertable should become high enough that it actually reaches the surface, you get an almost 100 per cent run-off—and that has happened from time to time.

I must admit that I am probably not in a position to talk about floods and what recurrence period they have had and whether they were 100-year floods or whatever. I am not aware of flooding in the domestic area of the base, although there has been ponding in the past at the end of the runway or on the opposite side of the airfield and in some of the lower areas. There is certainly flooding in the area, but I am not aware of any flood that has occurred in the domestic area of the base.

Mr FORREST—You have already answered that. The next question is to Mr Brouwer. Will this issue be looked at in terms of the design and construction of this new building? It is 2,500 square metres, and so there is more roof run-off, I suppose.

Mr Brouwer—The building will increase the level of run-off, but it will only be marginal in comparison with the overall run-off from the base. It also needs to be borne in mind that the building is to be sited where there used to be married quarters, and so there used to be buildings on site which had roofs, driveways, et cetera; so the net increase in impervious areas is probably only marginal over what was there previously.

Brig. Kelly—We have had advice from the Port Stephens council that the design should include an infiltration basin and a detention basin for longer duration storm events, and our design process will take that into account. We do already have flood control and run-off control measures on the base.

Mr FORREST—Where will that be located? Is that marked on the master plan? That means pondage in another area. From looking at the map, I see that it might be 800 hectares, but the available areas are not that extensive. Where would you put a retention basin?

Mr HOLLIS—There will be a nice ornamental lake.

CHAIR—We have to get enough filler to get the building up to the 100-year level so they have to dig a hole somewhere.

Sqn Ldr Browning—But most of the stormwater from where we are talking about goes in at the opposite direction.

Mr FORREST—Does it have to be at the lowest point?

CHAIR—I am sure it is well within the competence of the engineering people.

Mr HATTON—Mr Redriff has raised the question of coordinated action to prevent flooding in the area after high rainfall events. Our notes here indicate that, in the committee's third report in 1983, the stormwater system and problems with that were highlighted. Apparently those problems are still continuing without any progress being made since the committee recommended the construction of the FA18 works in 1983. Is that the case? Since 1983, when the committee recommended that remedial works be done on those stormwater drains, have they still not been fixed?

Sqn Ldr Browning—There were a number of recommendations. I am not sure whether we are talking about the same report. The report I have is March 1992.

Mr FORREST—It is one of our Public Works Committee reports.

Mr HATTON—It is May 1983.

Sqn Ldr Browning—I am not aware of that report. There were recommendations to do some works to alleviate some flooding on the base, which I believe has been done. That was some works on Moors Drain and a diversion that was built at the end of the runway. This report contained a lot of other recommendations which are, obviously, outside the RAAF's control. That may still be in place and causing flooding.

Mr FORREST—The point is that in 1983 this committee approved some works to be spent on the basis that some subsequent work would be done and it was not. So now we are being asked again to approve some more money being spent on the base and the same issue is being raised. That is what this is about.

Brig. Kelly—I do not know that we can say that it was not done.

CHAIR—You might like to advise us on that because I think it is a good question.

Brig. Kelly—That is a retention basin south of the strip, is it not?

Sqn Ldr Browning—Yes, it is.

Brig. Kelly—That may have been as a result of that work, so I just cannot answer the question.

Sqn Ldr Browning—I am not sure about the recommendation, so I cannot tell you what was done about it.

Mr HATTON—That is something we would appreciate an answer on because, if it is the case, that has been a bit too long. We would like to question the guarantees that we have had advanced so far a bit further, in terms of just how much this has been thought about. From what I saw this morning and what I have read in the briefing papers, the idea of taking it off the hill to put it down on the flat might solve some construction problems, but it might then raise the other problems. Firstly, given that Northroc has been buried and this facility will not be buried, even though it is of equal strategic significance, there is a cost saving by not burying it, but are we going to flood it instead of burying it? How much has that been thought about?

Brig. Kelly—The design of the actual drainage systems and the elevation of the floor and so on would not have been considered at this stage. This base has now been here for over 50 years and we should have a relatively good idea of those areas which are suitable for a site. There have been married quarters on that specific site, or adjacent to the site, for at least 30 years, I would say, looking at the houses. Presumably, it is not a low-lying site and the design process should be adequate to take account of any broader flooding that occurs in the area.

Mr HATTON—But you don't know how specifically that whole question has been looked at in terms of the design process and how much was taken into account.

Brig. Kelly—At this stage all we have is a conceptual design showing the general layout, the association between functional areas, and the approximate size of the areas that are required.

Mr HATTON—Is there an order of magnitude assessment in terms of cost for rebuilding it on the hill? I know the chief problem is that people are already undertaking activities there. You would disturb those activities, so it is a lot easier if you build an entirely separate site.

Brig. Kelly—Rebuilding it on the hill was discounted on the basis of the constrained site and the fact that it was isolated from the other activities on the base. To take the headquarters element to the current location would achieve little in terms of achieving wider base synergy. To bring it back onto the base proper puts it close to the people that it has to deal with and to the amenities that support it.

Mr HATTON—How much of the 800 hectares involves the runway and the rest of the base as it is configured? Does that include all of the wooded land around there or just the part that is described here?

Sqn Ldr Browning—The base boundary at the moment is roughly along Medowie Road, Nelson Bay Road, around these houses and the civil airport. It actually extends out some way into this bush, joins up and includes the approach lights at the end.

CHAIR—For the record, can we say that that corresponds to the dotted line here in annexure B?

Sqn Ldr Browning—Yes, that is more up to date because it also shows additional land which we purchased on the 200 hectares, which comes out here and joins back, leaving the engine run-up facilities, which makes up the 800 hectares or whatever it is.

CHAIR—Is the little isolated place up there Duckhole Hill?

Sqn Ldr Browning—Yes. Initially they were out about two kilometres off the base. Our land almost reaches up to where they are now. There is only a short stub of road and some land up there which is Duckhole Hill.

Mr HATTON—Brigadier Kelly, you noted there was a problem in terms of where you are going to put it and the fact that it would sit in fairly tightly, given the possibility of the AWACs coming through in the future. Who owns that land just outside the current base perimeter? Is it Hunter Water?

Sqn Ldr Browning—Most of the land outside the base is all Hunter Water board land. To the south-west, there is some privately owned property, but most of the land which is onto the north there and also to the east is Hunter Water board land.

Mr HATTON—As Mr Forrest pointed out to me, the base is going to stay 30 years in the future. We have a massive investment, particularly in the computer equipment systems, that will go into this building when it is built. What are we looking at in terms of 30-year time frames? Is the amount of land that you have available to you for the base adequate, as far as you can see at the moment, looking at it in 30 years time?

Sqn Ldr Browning—I guess we can only base it on what we know at the moment when we look at things like AEW&C and the possibility of Australian theatre. This is one of the contenders. All the things that we know of so far will probably fit on the base, but I guess that can change fairly quickly. Ten years is a fairly long time and other things might come along or other uses might change at the base. I believe that, in the foreseeable future, it is adequate.

Brig. Kelly—There is still some potential for development on the other side of the strip. In fact, a site was looked at in that location for this facility and discounted on the basis of being too remote from the rest of the base and the cost of putting engineering services into it. If necessary, additional development could be done on that site.

Mr HATTON—And you would not get the synergies that you would get with the site that you are looking at. In terms of redundancies, this is a redundant facility when you associate it with Northroc. So the two work together in such a way that one backs up the other and one is as important as the other. Is that the case? Would you see this facility Eastroc as equivalent to Northroc?

Wing Cmdr Krieg—Initially the facility was perceived to be a stand-alone facility to replace the current systems. It is required here to support local flying training operations with

the local squadrons and also to conduct our basic trainer requirements to the whole air defence community. With the advent of technology and the new systems we have, for a small cost premium we have been able to introduce that back-up capability. It makes an important facility, but we have really done it because technology has allowed us to.

Mr HATTON—So the two back each other up, but you are doing a lot more here that you cannot do at Northroc.

Wing Cmdr Krieg—That is correct. We cannot do the training there, and the local support for the local fighter squadrons cannot be done there as well.

Mr HATTON—As I understand it, the facility at Northroc is large—as this one is large—but not all of that facility is actually used. There is spare space. Is that the case?

Wing Cmdr Krieg—The Northroc facility is still empty at the moment. It is awaiting new command control equipment to be delivered. Our calculation, with the project information that we have at the moment, is that there will not be spare space in that facility.

Mr HATTON—So with this facility that we are looking at here, as Mr Hollis pointed out, there are five great halls and we are going to have spare space. Even though a lot of the equipment is getting smaller, are you going to be able to fill this entire space adequately as currently proposed?

Brig. Kelly—The conceptual drawing that is shown in the evidence is based on the user requirement: our estimate of the space required for the functions in addition to our normal scales and standards for office space. So it should be as required.

Mr HATTON—And what we saw this morning, do you think that would fit into that space, or are you able to do more things there a bit more efficiently in terms of training and so on because you will have a better range of space? What we saw this morning was a whole combination, a history of the base, with inadequate facilities.

Brig. Kelly—I cannot compare the total space of all the ad hoc facilities you saw this morning with our plan of the space, but I would presume that we will be more generous in the rebuild because the facilities you saw this morning are certainly poor, below standard, dysfunctional and do not meet occupational and health standards.

Mr HATTON—Which is the key reason why you think this facility needs to be built, to do away with all that substandard material.

Brig. Kelly—Exactly.

Mr FORREST—I thought it would be an appropriate time to raise the issue of noise, with that aircraft taking off earlier. It is obviously some credit to the RAAF here that we have not received, as far as I am aware, any submissions in regard to aircraft noise. Obviously, there

is a process by which the RAAF engages the community here. In fact, most of the evidence is very supportive letters from the different local government associations around the place and so on. What do you do especially there that overcomes what would be obviously a serious issue? This is my third visit here—the other two times were accidents—but the thing I remember about Williamstown is the noise. What is the secret in keeping the community embraced in all of that?

Sqn Ldr Browning—I guess the community is not 100 per cent happy, but we do the best we can to let them know what activities we have happening. We attend meetings. We have intergovernmental committees to look at noise and what can be done about it, because it involves several levels of government. We cannot influence developments in the area, but local government can, and we engage them in those sorts of discussions.

We try to let the public know as much as we can and we have an officer appointed to be a noise officer, for want of a better word, who receives complaints and responds to people who have made complaints about noise. They do not only occur in the Williamstown area; they occur wherever the Hornets fly. We will never satisfy 100 per cent of the people but, as much as we can, we try to obviously keep the public onside by, first of all, informing them what is going on and then following up any complaints they might have.

Brig. Kelly—There has also been one area where recently the Commonwealth acquired the properties of 18 people who live on Slades Road, which was actually impacted more than other inhabited areas by the operations. Defence made an offer to buy out all 20 properties on the road and 18 took up the offer.

Mr FORREST—Are there any operating limitations though? Are there limitations on after hours flying and so forth?

CHAIR—You cannot fight a war with limitations.

Mr FORREST—I know, but training is a little more controlled than conflict situations.

Sqn Ldr Browning—I do not think there is a curfew, but I do not think they fly late at night. They do night flying, but they have generally finished by 10 or 10.30 at night. We always try and inform the public through the newspapers when we are going to be flying at night.

CHAIR—There is no way you can avoid it. I have a couple of questions myself. In looking at the concept plan, which I have to assume has some status, the upper floor will not be consistent with the lower floor. We have an interesting development at the front where a very large area will stick up into the second floor, but not be contiguous with the rest of the building, and similarly at both sides. Considering that the only financial saving is the walls for the second floor, would it not be more economic, even if the building were shrunk overall, to utilise those areas of both storeys?

Mr Brouwer—That could be investigated. At the moment there is a design consultant who is reviewing the conceptual design that was prepared here with a view—subject to PWC approval—to proceeding with the detailed design. It would be their role to take this conceptual design, review it and undertake value management studies on it to ensure that the final design which is built is the most cost-effective possible.

CHAIR—We are all about maximising the space for the dollar. It is not exactly a Collins Street or a George Street property; it is a commercial property in that sense. I thought that there are quite substantial areas where the ground floor will be larger than the upper floor. I wonder about the economics of that. The second question I have for you comes from something we noted today, where the air conditioning services have followed the change in technology. I assume that the design factors in this building will substantially have air conditioning for equipment as much as for people and that that will be delivered through the floor and all those sorts of things?

Mr Brouwer—Yes. Again, that would be up to the mechanical engineer to design. One of the design criteria is the heat loads caused by the equipment that is likely to go into that area. These are generally a significant factor in determining the size of the airconditioning plant required.

CHAIR—And where it is delivered directly to the equipment, of course, it is substantially quieter than what is achieved by having to do it after the event. I do not know that I have any further questions.

Senator CALVERT—I have a couple of questions about costs. I will not mention figures because they are commercial- in-confidence. I note the project management design fees and contingencies make up about 10 per cent of the overall cost. Is that about the normal range that you would expect?

Mr Brouwer—That is correct.

Senator CALVERT—There is nothing in there that is abnormal?

Mr Brouwer—No.

Senator CALVERT—There are a couple of other costs. I notice that the base security upgrade allowance is around about five per cent of the total cost of the project. Is that amount of money being spent just for securing the building, or is that for the total base?

Mr Sheppard—That is for the total base. The current systems were put in in 1983. For us to integrate the current security technologies they will not go onto the old panels so we need to replace the current panels to meet the new requirements.

Senator CALVERT—What you have done is use the allocation of this money to take

the opportunity to upgrade the security for the rest of the base? Or do you take the view that, because of the importance of this building, there is a need to upgrade the security of the whole base? Which one comes first, the chicken or the egg?

Mr Sheppard—The security systems have to be integrated to the base, but they cannot do that unless they put outdated technologies into the new building. It is a cheaper thing to provide the right security panels so this building can connect to it.

Senator CALVERT—It is not an insignificant amount of money though, is it?

Mr Sheppard—No, it is not.

Senator CALVERT—It is certainly better than my Chubb system. But, given that, then we find 10 per cent of the project is taken up with a new electricity supply. What is the story with that? Is this new building going to soak up so much power that you are going to use 10 per cent of the project funds to provide a new electricity supply?

Mr Sheppard—The current power supply to the base is almost at capacity. For us to put this building on the ground we would have to increase by a small margin the incoming feeder to the base. But, taking into account all the other projects that are going to come on-line later on, which is what the master plan is all about, there will be some portion of this project going to pay for the long-term base feeder system.

Senator CALVERT—In other words, like the security system, the cost of this is not all being provided for this new building?

Mr Sheppard—You would still have to upgrade it by a small margin now but when the other ones come on-line you would have to upgrade it again. So, you are better off to spend the money up-front and upgrade the base feeder for the long term.

Senator CALVERT—If you had built on Duckhole Hill it still would have been the same cost, wouldn't it? I was wondering whether it would be cheaper to put one of those wind generators in like they did down the road?

CHAIR—With a building of that size, considering just the basic airconditioning load plus the fact that you calculate airconditioning at one horsepower for every 10 people therein and then you add to that the very severe loadings that will be generated by the electronic equipment, I would imagine the electricity demand would be quite substantial in itself.

Mr FORREST—This is actually to upgrade new feeder mains.

Brig. Kelly—When we undertake significant enhancements to a property such as this we take the opportunity to upgrade services where they are closely related to the project that you are talking about. We could just as easily undertake it as a separate medium work but it is more appropriate to tie it to a facility such as this.

Senator CALVERT—Having dealt with the army for so long we are used to this.

CHAIR—If they had brought it in as an individual effort we would not be considering it, Senator Calvert.

Brig. Kelly—We are aware that the committee prefers that we group medium works, where it is associated in some way with major works, into that project.

Senator CALVERT—As we all know, this Eastroc facility will be part of the overall jigsaw of our radar defence of Australia. The proposal to bring AEW&C aircraft on site is another part of that overall proposal. Is it likely that those aircraft will be using this air force base? Is that allowed to be asked or not? Do you want to come back here again and have approved another facility?

Brig. Kelly—Certainly, it is the most likely option because it is so closely related to the capability that we are talking about. No formal decision has been made. I understand that we are certainly master planning for the likelihood.

Senator CALVERT—That was the question I was leading to. If that happens, is this part of the master plan?

Brig. Kelly—It is, and that requirement is one of the reasons that this facility is going where it is.

Senator CALVERT—We have unearthed a plot here, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR—I am not sure about a plot. I would have thought that those aircraft, notwithstanding they must have a base, will be wherever there appears to be a need. That is why we are buying them.

Brig. Kelly—They have to be home based somewhere and the training that they are going to undertake is most appropriately linked to the other training on this base.

Senator CALVERT—Would they be capable of being off-loaded to Tindal or wherever they are needed?

Brig. Kelly—Absolutely.

Wing Cmdr Krieg—The proposal at the moment is to split base, the AEW&C aircraft to have their home base located here and one or two attached to the Tindal area.

CHAIR—I think it is significant, Brigadier Kelly's comment, that there is going to be a very substantial training component and during that time they will want to be in

communication with Eastroc or Northroc.

Senator CALVERT—How portable are the facilities you have here? You mentioned this morning that some of the gear you are getting will be able to be moved. Does that mean that, whilst Eastroc remains here, parts of your operation can be moved around Australia as needed? Is that not operational?

Wing Cmdr Krieg—It is certainly the case that the radars and communications scanners that we are buying under separate projects can all be relocated forward to where the need is.

Senator CALVERT—They can go north or south, if they can go anywhere.

CHAIR—With mobile satellite technology you can still talk to Eastroc.

Wing Cmdr Krieg—In fact, as part of the radar project and the communications projects, there are satellite terminals—

Senator CALVERT—So we could have a Southroc if need be by default, couldn't we?

Wing Cmdr Krieg—Certainly.

Brig. Kelly—None is planned at this stage, though.

Senator CALVERT—I haven't had an answer about the Australian Rules Football over here.

Brig. Kelly—I think that is a matter for the local and regional estate centre to—

Senator CALVERT—I hope it goes on the record, because this committee previously raised that matter in Darwin when we were looking at the Robertson Barracks, and we believe that all sporting codes should have equal facilities given the upsurge in interest in Australian Rules Football in Sydney.

CHAIR—I think we will pass on from that. Are there any other matters that committee members would like to raise at this stage?

Mr FORREST—The Defence people will be appearing again after the other witnesses, won't they?

CHAIR—Yes, we will follow the normal procedures. Mr Brouwer, we have on record the comments of the Commonwealth Fire Board and Defence's response. There is little doubt that the amount of equipment that is in there probably warrants well above the normal human protection fire services to adequately protect the equipment. I assume that your experts will be

approaching it with that in mind?

Mr Brouwer—Yes. That will be dealt with as part of the design process. There will be a VESDA system, for instance, and fire suppression systems to provide adequate protection to the equipment as well as the personnel.

CHAIR—Thank you. According to our normal processes, we will call our other witnesses and then ask the Defence representatives to return if they need to make any comments.

[2.28 p.m.]

REDRIFF, Mr William Walter, RMB 2546 Steel Street, Williamtown, New South Wales
CHAIR—Welcome. In what capacity are you appearing?

Mr Redriff—I am appearing in a private capacity as a neighbour—a resident in the area. I am here to comment on what the water situation has been over the last decade.

CHAIR—The committee has received a submission from you dated 29 April 1998. Do you wish to make any amendments to that submission?

Mr Redriff—No.

CHAIR—It is proposed that the submission and the Department of Defence's response be received, taken as read and incorporated in the transcript of evidence. Do members have any objections? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The documents read as follows—

CHAIR—I invite you to make a short statement in support of your submission before we proceed to questions.

Mr Redriff—My only comment is that, since 1990, we have lost an enormous amount of people that had some experience in that wet. We have had three facility officers that I know of. The council staff have all moved on. Public works have moved on and the water conservation have taken over. I may be moving on, because the noise was raised earlier. In relation to the water effect on my property, the council is recommending to the local federal member that my place be resumed. I will say it now and people can do what they wish with it, but I would not feel right without saying some of the things that have been lost in the system. That is about it.

CHAIR—Fine. We have Mr Redriff's statement.

Mr FORREST—I do not know whether your property is identified on the map; it is on the wall here. You said you were a near neighbour. How close are you to the base?

Mr Redriff—I am under the eastern flight path. I am probably in this area here. It is too far away for you gentlemen to see, but it is basically there.

Mr FORREST—What size holding do you have there?

Mr Redriff—It is 210 acres.

CHAIR—Is that particular property directly affected by water shedding off the base here?

Mr Redriff—Yes. I would like to argue that what was responded to by Brigadier Kelly was definitely not correct. You may also refer to the same report and supplement to the AEW&C report 1990/25 at page 4. There is a fair bit of it, but it finishes:

I assume that Council is not proposing to redirect all flow as the letter implies but only that part which overflows when the Moors Drain capacity is exceeded.

It does get exceeded. That is what happened in 1990. It will now be further exceeded from the developments that have occurred in main road development. We have Richardson Road which has been developed, which is to the north-east. The council dug drains bigger than the Moors Drain down the sides of that and redirected the water into the Moors Drain. That will back flood worse than it did in the past, in 1990, back onto the RAAF base area or back down here. As such, you are going to lift the water table.

What the committee has to understand is that, up till the mid-1980s, the water corporation used to draw roughly 20 per cent of the region's water from the bores. Since then, they take it all from the Grahamstown Dam. The water table now will rise more quickly and stay up higher longer. In 1990 we had a situation where we had a saturated water table. That is an aerial photo there that you may just wish to look at. That is five days after the event—an

event that forced the RAAF base to abandon the strip because the tarmac was sort of floating. In relation to the talk about the neighbours, they had to wait till the water went down to the level of their septic so that they could then get them cleaned out to use them and they had to send their family away. A lot of these things will definitely repeat themselves.

CHAIR—Can you indicate to us where the Moors Drain operates to drain that area?

Mr Redriff—I do not know if you are going to get a good enough view from that. No, you cannot. Moors Drain starts at the RAAF base here. Somewhere along the line one of the problems was that it was connected to the RAAF base in the mid-1960s. It was in agreement with the drainage union. Since that time the RAAF cut a drain right at the base down here through a sand ridge. The back flow of that was what flooded the village of Williamtown in 1990. To overcome the extent of the flooding there, the council forced them to dig it out and redirect the water down through my place. That is designed that way. There is a boom there which was built by the RAAF to stop the water going down onto the village, but it will still come back onto my place.

This drain—I do not know the scale of it—comes right through this low ground here. As you can see, there is no contour there on this data map; it is just flat, basically. It goes right up through here to Tilligerry. It has limited capacity because it has to go through four areas where there are culverts of no more than four square metres. It is impossible for that area there to be drained by that.

Since 1990, Richardson Road and Medowie Road have had major rebuilds to direct water in this direction, but basically the capacity has not been increased, nor have any of the floodgates, channels or drains. Are you are going to repeat it? It has happened before, and it is going to get worse. In the past we were protected a bit by the watertable being kept down by the Hunter Water Corporation, but now it is going to stay up and it is going to be drawn on only in emergency situations—basically, in drought periods.

CHAIR—Nevertheless, from what you are telling us, firstly the drainage system needs upgrading where it flows under roads, because the culverts are inadequate.

Mr Redriff—The whole system has been identified by that report as being totally inadequate—the channels and the floodgates.

CHAIR—In recognising from your evidence that there is a serious problem for the locality, would your concern with regard to this development be that that would have only a minimal effect, that the effect is really with us before the construction of this building?

Mr Redriff—Yes, it depends upon the straw that breaks the camel's back. If you are looking at the military side, you have put up a similar sized building for the lead-in fighter hangar, upgraded the airport and put in access roads on many hectares. All these things have been added since 1990. You talk of a master plan. I can show you minutes of a drainage meeting in 1949 that brought out the same things I am bringing out now, 49 years later. It is

up to you to decide.

I know it is not directly associated with this—and you could argue that it has only a marginal impact—but the cumulative effect of all these marginal impacts is going to affect the RAAF base's security because, when the Moors Drain does not work and forces water back there, the water will hit the bottom under the flight path.

Then there are all the others down here, through Lake Cochran and what have you. They have dug another drain there now. I supported that; I recommended that the Dawsons Drain be added to it but that the Dawsons Drain floodgates be recommissioned. I also would have done it differently. In other words, I would have put the spoil to keep this retention basin here. It was the one that was identified in the FA18 environmental impact statement, and I would have tried to keep that there. The way it has been dug now, the water has been released.

You are going to have an enormous volume of water under the RAAF base area which is going to stop the RAAF base from draining as well as it could, and this will maintain a high watertable on the RAAF base. In addition to that, all these changes have accelerated the flows—we experienced problems with the main roads in 1990—and where we might have had a small culvert, these have now been built for one in 100 and we will get an enormous flow quickly down here and accumulating there. We will get thousands of gulls and ibis in there while we have a swell in the ocean in this sort of weather. I have brought in a video for the OC which will show you thousands of birds directly under the flight path. Those birds are a threat. You cannot take a photo of them. Have you ever tried taking a photo of birds in the sky? Flies would be better!

That is basically your problem. I know what your job is: you are trying to identify if anything belongs to this. It has to, similar to what you are talking about with your transmitters and other things, but you have to accommodate each one of these, either with a big step in the drainage of this area or by using up previously supplied capacity.

CHAIR—Thank you. I think the purpose of my question was to identify for the record that, whilst this particular individual building in itself is not a substantial problem, you are recommending to us that, basically, as a separate issue the entire effect of future flooding on this base should be taken into account and addressed. It is not irretrievable, but you are really submitting to us that additional works—be they state, local or federal government—are needed to ensure the security of this base.

Mr Redriff—Several things: first of all, you make no contribution towards the maintenance of the drains in this area. It is the biggest land-holder, it sheds the most water and it makes no contribution whatsoever to the drainage maintenance.

The other thing that I find nearly objectionable is this passive approach—'We will drain it, so we drop it off the base.' The FA18 threw it a couple of hundred yards off the boundary and left it there. We had no established system to use the Moors Drain at all. That is

what is happening—'We're right, Jack; you look after it some way.' That is wrong. It is socially irresponsible.

CHAIR—Fair enough. Could I just ask another question before other members may wish to proceed. Are you able to provide independently the numbers of your aerial photographs in that thing you gave us so that we might be able to get similar photographs if we want them?

Mr Redriff—Yes. That is from council. I have a smaller one at home.

CHAIR—Yes, but they are photographs which are available through whom—the lands department?

Mr Redriff—No, the Port Stephens Council have those there. What I wish you would appreciate there is that that is five days after the event occurred. There was a significant drop—or a drop—in that time.

CHAIR—But, for our records, we can obtain those, you suggest, through the Shoalhaven Council?

Mr Redriff—Port Stephens.

CHAIR—Port Stephens, I am sorry; I am getting mixed up. Do you any other members wish to raise any further questions?

Mr FORREST—I am interested in point 7E in Mr Redriff's submission. It talks about acid sulfate soils. I would like to see some formal reference to wherever that is recorded.

Mr Redriff—Recorded?

Mr FORREST—On what basis do you make that assertion in 7E that:

7E. This Area is now identified as having Acid Sulphate Soils—

Mr Redriff—Land and water conservation have tested the drains. They will not use mechanical digging on it.

CHAIR—Can you say what the association with acid sulfate soils and mechanical digging is? Does it corrode all the equipment?

Mr Redriff—No. Once you bring it out of the water it starts to oxidise, or what have you, and sulfuric acid gets into the waterways. These channels are 130 years old. You have to be conscious of some of these things. It gets to the extreme that in some cases now, I am told, by the land and water conservation people, they have a program that says they will need to do an EIS before they can clean an existing drain. We have alligator weed down here.

There was at one point \$1.1 million spent down in Beremboke swamps, in the Riverina, which was one flood away from causing enormous damage that the Riverina may not have been able to recover from. What you are doing now by maintaining this high water through here is spreading that weed. There is no known biological or other control, basically, of that at this stage. That is all in an ECOS article if you people wish to have access to those sorts of things.

Senator CALVERT—The alligator weed blocks up all the drains, does it?

Mr Redriff—Yes. It has changed from its native South America here. Where it is basically an aquatic weed, it has gone terrestrial here. We just cannot kill it. The only thing we can do in this area is try to contain it.

CHAIR—When you say you cannot kill it, is it not subject to herbicide treatment?

Mr Redriff—The top is different to the roots and so on. It can propagate from part of a leaf. If you let this spread through this area it will spread through the country. They are hoping it becomes one of the one in 20 weeds that ends up in the national heritage trust group. That is something that the states have to agree on. New South Wales are hoping that it is one of those weeds.

Senator CALVERT—You mentioned more than once in your submission about bird strikes. Are you aware of any bird strikes with aircraft coming into Williamtown?

Mr Redriff—No; I understand the bird strikes are low.

Senator CALVERT—I asked whether you are aware of any?

Mr Redriff—No. What needs to be recognised is that since 1990 we have had basically a dry cycle. When it was wet last year I took a video of this and brought the video and photos into the base. I have already explained that ibis are high soaring gregarious birds. I have seen them in the flight paths many times. It will happen.

Senator CALVERT—You live adjacent—

Mr Redriff—The flight path goes over my place.

Senator CALVERT—Are you an engineer?

Mr Redriff—I am an accountant. I am now a dairy farmer. I was a fellow of the Certified Practising Accountants basically involved in project work and integrated works.

Senator CALVERT—How many years have you been here?

Mr Redriff—Some 16 years or so.

Senator CALVERT—So you have seen this water problem?

Mr Redriff—I went with Bob Martin down to Ian Causley's office in 1989 to instigate this study. What I am saying is backed up by records from water boards, libraries and from reading the FA18 and all the other drainage union minutes back to the turn of the century. I am not blowing hot wind. I am saying what I honestly believe.

Senator CALVERT—Your submission and observations are based on having lived here, having seen it and having been a practical farmer. That is fine.

Mr Redriff—Yes.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Redriff.

[2.50 p.m.]

BROUWER, Mr Michael Dirk, Project Manager and Superintendent, Gutteridge Haskins & Davey Pty Ltd, PO Box 36, Belconnen, Australian Capital Territory 2616

BROWNING, Squadron Leader Ian William, Estate Planning Manager, Regional Estate Centre—Central and Northern New South Wales, RAAF Base Williamtown, Williamtown, New South Wales 2314

KELLY, Brigadier Garry Ross, Director General, Project Delivery, Department of Defence, Room CP3-3-3, Campbell Park Offices, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 2600

KRIEG, Wing Commander Peter Anthony, Air Defence Ground Environment Operations, Department of Defence, HQ 41WG, RAAF Base Williamtown, Williamtown, New South Wales 2314

SHEPPARD, Mr Robert Sherman, Project Director, Department of Defence, Room CP3-3-22, Campbell Park Offices, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 2600

CHAIR—Once again, I remind all witnesses that they remain under oath. I request any comments you wish to make on Mr Redriff's evidence.

Brig. Kelly—Mr Chairman, there is a lot detail in Mr Redriff's evidence, and I am unable to comment on some aspects of his presentation. I did note driving around this morning that drainage is a considerable problem in this entire area. The area is inundated at the moment, and the number of drain lines that we saw would indicate that it has been a longstanding and relatively serious problem in a large part of the surrounding area. I cannot comment on whether or not the works specified in the 1983 submission have been undertaken. I have a feeling that Lake Cochran, that large retention basin, and associated works were as a result of that, but I cannot confirm that. We will have to check that and advise you.

The handling of drainage from a property is always a difficult issue, and I know that councils struggle with it all the time. It was suggested in Mr Redriff's submission that the Commonwealth should perhaps pick up the coordination of this. I do not believe that is our role. In my response I indicated that we like to think we have a good neighbour policy and certainly we would be required to comply with any plan that existed in the area. I considered that that is generally a local council obligation or responsibility, or if it was a higher level problem perhaps the state government would pick it up. But, as a landowner in the area, I cannot see that we can actually control that.

Mr Redriff suggested that we provide no contribution to maintenance of drains. Again, I cannot comment on that at all, but I can check. We do have a facility to provide maintenance assistance for services. For example, we do pay money to local councils under an arrangement called roads of access support. For example, we pay for maintenance of the road into

Shoalwater Bay or into the Myambat ammunition depot. So I would think that if it can be shown that other organisations contribute to maintenance of drains, and we were expected to, then provision could be made to contribute in an appropriate way. In terms of accepting responsibility for how the water is managed after it goes off our property, I really cannot comment without knowing the broader scheme.

CHAIR—Thanks, Brigadier Kelly. I think the evidence probably points more to a concern for Defence, that their own assets could be at risk some time in the future, particularly from viewing those aerial photographs. Maybe a separate initiative with the local authorities and state authorities is required from Defence to review the drainage system, irrespective of who eventually meets the bill, in the interests of ensuring that your runways and so forth would not be affected, as Mr Redriff fears. I note some of the suggestions he makes, that farm bridges have been replaced with pipes, in his opinion, reducing the outflow by 80 per cent. The solutions, therefore, might not be all that expensive if there was some positive review. Whilst it is probably more than we can ask of you here, I would not be surprised if we raise in our report that the broader interests of the Defence establishment here should include a review of the adequacy of drainage for the region.

Brig. Kelly—Given the history, I would be very surprised if we have not done a number of reports, quite frankly. I cannot confirm that we have. But Mr Redriff himself indicated that a number of works had been done, not necessarily to his satisfaction or the appropriate solution, and drainage tends to be of that nature. I would emphasise that the difficulty is not just one of our making.

CHAIR—No. I am the first to agree with you on that.

Brig. Kelly—The issue appears to be one of the watertable. Presumably, the Hunter Water Authority used to draw down for its service on the sand beds in this area. It does not do that anymore, so the watertable has come up. There is no doubt that our aprons, runways, paved areas and roofs contribute to the problem, as does every other development in the area, including new roads. I would suggest that if we look at this proposal by itself the number of roofs that we are proposing would probably be in the area of 20 to 30 homes, which is probably not much more than we removed from the area in the first place. So the total outcome might be a little different.

CHAIR—I think that we can deal with this reference outside of any significant consideration of drainage other than that which has been raised by the Port Stephens Council, on which you have already given a commitment. I believe the evidence is such that there should be a wider consideration in the interests of the base. We do not want to be fighting a war on the day that these runways are flooded. It might be that, without any specific activity on our behalf, there really needs to be some review.

Brig. Kelly—I suppose the difficulty is that we do not know what activity that was in 1990. That might have been a one in 100 years flood.

CHAIR—What we are really suggesting is that you go and find out.

Brig. Kelly—Thank you, Mr Chairman; we will do that.

Mr HATTON—Can we have an indication as to where the facility is going to be. This shows the situation five days after those 1990 floods; where will the facility that you propose to build be located? Is it under water or not? It will not appear on that? Is it blacked out because of the water?

CHAIR—No, it is not in that photograph, I do not think.

Mr HATTON—What was the situation on the base in 1990?

CHAIR—Was that the year that you advised us that you had to discontinue operations?

Sqn Ldr Browning—Yes, operations stopped there. There was a problem with the runway. Apparently, the rising water table forced up either air or water underneath the runway and lifted the seal on the runway. It bubbled up and made it unusable; they had to re-seal it over several months. I was not there, unfortunately, so I am not sure what they did. I believe operations did continue in some other way. They either moved the aircraft or they used the parallel taxiway. There certainly was an interruption.

Mr HATTON—I would suggest it might be wise to find out where you intend to put it at this stage—just what the situation was in 1990, when you are looking at drainage problems and the fact that all of that communications equipment would have to be protected from whatever is running there.

Brig. Kelly—I take your point. I do not know that the drainage problems relating to this specific facility are any worse than those related to the married quarters, the messes or anything else in the area. I do not know that we have a history that would cause us great concern.

Mr HATTON—But it may have changed if the water pattern has changed.

Brig. Kelly—That is true.

Mr HATTON—That may have changed and it might not otherwise be looked into if we do not raise it.

Brig. Kelly—That is true.

CHAIR—It is an interesting point. In my state of Western Australia, the city of Perth, I can assure you, would be delighted to know there was excess underground water that we could deal with by selling it to people. Obviously, it is a different proposition here.

Mr FORREST—Can I ask a question beyond this reference, because we are dealing with the building. I am interested to find out what remedial action was taken to repair the runways which I understand heaved due to excessive ground water. Were ground water relief wells put in or something? What happened—did you wait until it went away?

Sqn Ldr Browning—I was not here, but I understood that they planed the runway off to take the bitumen layer off and re-sealed it.

CHAIR—In that process, apparently, the water table fell to other levels. What Mr Forrest was interested in was whether there was any effort made to de-water the area at the time.

Sqn Ldr Browning—Again, I am not aware of any effort that was done.

Mr FORREST—Just repaired it without any attention to what was underneath it. It could happen again, in other words?

Sqn Ldr Browning—Yes, I guess it could.

CHAIR—I think that is the issue on this particular evidence.

Mr HOLLIS—If you are talking about the water table, how do we get on with the foundation? Is this going to be a slab?

Mr Brouwer—Yes.

Mr HOLLIS—So it is going to be two-storey?

Mr Brouwer—Yes.

Mr HOLLIS—With the slab—

Mr Brouwer—Again, there would be a geo-technical investigation taken as part of the design process and that geo-technical investigation would provide the criteria for which the foundations will need to be designed.

Mr HOLLIS—But you could well have to put something in the ground to stabilise it.

Mr Brouwer—Possibly.

CHAIR—If you are working on sand, it is an excellent foundation. Is there any other comment you wish to make on this matter?

Brig. Kelly—No, Mr Chairman.

Mr FORREST—We need some indication of how long it will take to get a response to some of the issues that have been taken on notice.

Sqn Ldr Browning—I am not aware what was said in the PWC previously for the NTF projects. I need to look at that to see what the answers are.

Brig. Kelly—I would think it would take a week to research our records to find out what works have been done and when they were done.

CHAIR—Fine. If we can have that, we will be meeting on Thursday week in the House. That would be a nice time to have information because we would be anxious, in the interests of the defence of the country, to complete our deliberations.

As there are no further questions, it is proposed that the correspondence received, which has been circulated to members of the committee, be incorporated in the transcript of evidence. There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The correspondence read as follows—

CHAIR—Before closing, I would like to thank the witnesses who appeared before the committee today and those who assisted our inspections this morning.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Hollis**):

That, pursuant to the power conferred by subsection 2(2) of the Parliamentary Papers Act 1908, this committee authorises the publication of the evidence given before it and submissions presented at the public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 3.01 p.m.