



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# Official Committee Hansard

JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

**Reference: RAAF Base Townsville**

WEDNESDAY, 16 JUNE 1999

TOWNSVILLE

BY AUTHORITY OF THE PARLIAMENT

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**JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS**  
**Wednesday, 16 June 1999**

**Members:** Mrs Moylan, (Chair), Mrs Crosio (Vice-Chair), Senators Calvert, Ferguson and Ripoll  
**Senators and members in attendance:** Senators Ferguson and Murphy and Mrs Crosio, Mr Hollis, Mr Lindsay, Mrs Moylan and Mr Ripoll

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

RAAF Base Townsville

**WITNESSES**

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**Committee met at 1.17 p.m.**

**GRAY, Air Commodore Norman, Director General, Aerospace Development, Department of Defence**

**KELLY, Brigadier Garry, Director General, Project Delivery, Department of Defence**

**McHUGH, Wing Commander Christopher, Officer Commanding Combat Support Force—Townsville, Department of Defence**

**NICHOLSON, Wing Commander Allan, Project Director, Department of Defence**

**MOSS, Mr Graham, National Airports Technical Manager, Gutteridge Haskins and Davey Pty Ltd**

**CHAIR**—I declare open this public hearing into the RAAF Base Townsville redevelopment, stage 1. This project was referred to the Public Works Committee for consideration and report to parliament by the House of Representatives on 30 March 1999 at an estimated outturn cost of \$70.1 million, and a further \$16.96 million for the capital equipment funded element.

In accordance with subsection 17(3) of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, 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 inspected the RAAF base, including the sites proposed for the components of the works in this reference. This afternoon, the committee will hear evidence from the Department of Defence, Townsville City Council and Australian Airports Ltd. The committee has received a submission from the Department of Defence dated May 1999. Do you wish to propose any amendment?

**Brig. Kelly**—I would propose two amendments, if I may. Firstly in paragraph 35: the selection process for the LTA has now reached the point where we know there are two potential tenderers that have been short-listed. Both have characteristics which indicate the maximum number referred to in paragraph 35 will not be required. We would propose to replace the last sentence, which currently reads:

Townsville is expected to accommodate up to twelve LTA, including a long term requirement for hangarage for up to five aircraft.

The replacement should read:

Townsville is expected to accommodate 10 LTA.

**Senator MURPHY**—What happened to the `hangarage for up to five aircraft'?

**CHAIR**—If we can deal with the amendments first and then we can ask those questions.

**Brig. Kelly**—The second amendment, which we have already actioned out of session before this meeting, refers to paragraphs 84 and 85. Environment Australia felt the words as indicated implied that we had formally submitted our environmental impact assessment to Environment Australia. That is not the case so we have reworded those two paragraphs to indicate more clearly that, in accordance with a memorandum of understanding we have with Environment Australia, we will clear the project through an environmental certificate of compliance. I have already given those two amended paragraphs to the secretariat so I do not propose to read them through, unless you require it.

**CHAIR**—Are the rest of the committee happy with that?

**Mrs CROSIO**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. It is proposed that the submission and amendments 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**—Would a representative of the department now read the summary statement to the committee, after which we will proceed to questions.

**Brig. Kelly**—The Department of Defence advocates the redevelopment of facilities at RAAF Base Townsville, Queensland. RAAF Base Townsville forms part of a chain of military airfields stretching across northern Australia and is vital to the air defence of northern Queensland and its approaches.

The primary function of the base, which is a shared airfield with civil aviation, is to serve as a deployment base for combat aircraft and as an air head for the Army's 3rd Brigade. The peacetime role of the base is to support the operations of the home based No. 35 Squadron, currently comprising Caribou aircraft, and the 5th Aviation Regiment's fleet of Black Hawk, Iroquois and Chinook helicopters. Additional and replacement facilities are required for RAAF in order that the operational and support capabilities assigned to the base are properly realised.

The prime deficiencies of the base can be summarised as follows: the absence of explosive ordnance aprons for deployed fighter, strike and maritime patrol aircraft inhibits their operational effectiveness and disrupts civil aviation activities; aircraft placed on alert lack an appropriate sheltered facility with rapid access to the main runway for take-off, creating air defence vulnerability; the existing 35 Squadron facilities are not suitable for accommodating the larger light tactical aircraft fleet, scheduled to replace the Caribou aircraft in 2001; and base maintenance facilities currently suffer functional inadequacies, including insufficient work and storage areas, inadequate security provisions and restrictive vehicle access.

The main components of the proposed works to redress these deficiencies include: explosive ordnance loading aprons for fighter, strike and maritime patrol aircraft; alert facilities for fighter aircraft; operational and technical support facilities for fighter and strike aircraft; new headquarter building, simulator building, hangarage, maintenance facilities and parking aprons for 35 Squadron; consolidated vehicle and battery maintenance facility; and associated road infrastructure and engineering services. The approved budget for the works is \$87.05 million, inclusive of construction and project delivery costs, and a contingency provision.

Subject to parliamentary approval, the project is planned to be committed in late 1999. It is intended that facilities associated with the light tactical aircraft be completed before its planned arrival date of April 2001 and that the remainder of the facilities be in place by December of the same year. Over the envisaged construction period, it is anticipated that an average of about 160 personnel would be directly employed on construction activities. Additional off-site work opportunities would also be generated.

The project requires acquisition from the Queensland Department of Natural Resources of a parcel of crown land adjoining the base. This land is currently under Townsville City Council trusteeship. The proposed project will necessitate the filling of borrow pits, located within the land to be acquired. The borrow pits have become an artificial habitat created from the accumulation of water into two large excavations established in winning pavement material for the construction of the original airfield.

Although not listed on the Register of the National Estate, the borrow pits support nearby register listed areas as one of the last remaining permanent freshwater sources in the area in times of drought. In recognition of this, Defence has been committed from the outset of the project to funding the provision of equivalent replacement habitat elsewhere within the vicinity, with similar

water retaining characteristics. The Australian Heritage Commission has also cited this as an issue which is likely to affect the Townsville Town Common and environs.

Commonwealth, state and local government representatives have been consulted. Substantial consultation has occurred with various local community interest groups through periodic workshop sessions, particularly in relation to the environmental issues. All parties have indicated support for the proposal. That completes my opening statement.

**CHAIR**—Are there any questions?

**Senator MURPHY**—I want to ask about the amendment to paragraph 35 with the removal of the hangarage for up to five aircraft. I thought we were talking about hangarage for up to eight aircraft in the proposal?

**Air Cdre Gray**—We are talking about parking for eight aircraft and three maintenance hangars. When the proposal was originally written a third aircraft—a Construcciones Aeronauticas Sociedad Anonima 235—was in the competition. The CASA 235 is a considerably smaller aircraft and it would have required a larger number of aircraft to do the job that we set in the request for tender. The larger number of aircraft, the maintenance schedule on it and the greater number of flying hours per airframe that that aircraft would need to do necessitated a larger number of aircraft going through the maintenance cycle at any one time. Now that that aircraft has been formally dropped from the competition, and CASA have been so notified, we thought it was more correct to demonstrate to you the fact that the larger numbers shown in the submission would no longer be required. Ten aircraft is the maximum that we will actually require, and the maintenance requirements for those 10 aircraft requires the three hangars we have talked about in the paperwork.

**Senator MURPHY**—I would like to ask some more questions on that with regard to the diagrams, but if I can ask about the other amendment: what has the Heritage Commission identified as an issue other than the freshwater supply?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—The main issue is the source of freshwater particularly in times of drought. They have mentioned as a much lesser issue the current levels of fish and so on that are in the borrow pits. Certainly the supply of freshwater is the most significant issue for them.

**Senator MURPHY**—Have they undertaken any study at all?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—No. They are relying on the research that we have done through our environmental consultant. We have done an environmental impact assessment in two stages. This document is the first stage and there is another document similar to this for the second stage. From the research that was undertaken by Woodward-Clyde, our environmental consultant, Defence prepared a section 30 referral to the Heritage Commission. We have provided the commission with the environmental impact assessment documents and also our section 30 referral. They are really working off documents that we have provided them.

**Senator MURPHY**—In paragraph 80 you said you had complied with the Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act to which they say, 'That was not quite the case.' There is then an agreed position now put. Was there a requirement to comply with the act?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—Yes. There are two pieces of legislation being considered here: the Australian Heritage Commission Act requiring the section 30 referral and the Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act. Under the Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act, Commonwealth departments are allowed to follow through certain procedures, which we have followed through. From that, if the studies determine that there are no significant issues, they do not need to formally refer it to Environment Australia with an environmental impact statement or perhaps with a notice of intent. Based on the results of the studies we have done, we believe that we do not have a significant impact. Therefore, under these procedures we are allowed to self-assess and issue a certificate of compliance for the project.

**Senator MURPHY**—With regard to the land that you propose to acquire, is it the intention to build a perimeter road around that?

**Brig. Kelly**—At this stage the intention is to build a perimeter road. However, we are looking at ways of minimising the impact on the flow of water through that area. I have directed that we should look further at providing simply a boundary fence to indicate that that is our boundary—a fence similar to, say, a cattle fence—while retaining the security fence and the boundary road adjacent to the maritime patrol aircraft OLA.

**Senator MURPHY**—I appreciate that but I have a slightly different view. I would be building a perimeter road right round and I would be building it substantially higher than you already have it. Anyway, that is my personal view about it. Madam Chair, I suggest that we might talk to the Heritage Commission.

**Brig. Kelly**—You are suggesting that perhaps we incorporate a levee bank into a perimeter road—we have discussed that in the bus on the way here and it is possibly worth looking at. My concern would be that, if we put in a levee bank that keeps the water out thereby taking away the habitat for birds, we might in fact be creating a dam unless we grade it properly, which might exacerbate the problem.

**Senator MURPHY**—I guess I looked at that from the point of view of what I have seen elsewhere. I think it has been done at Learmonth where they have a similar sort of arrangement but more related to tidal problems.

**Brig. Kelly**—That is correct.

**Senator MURPHY**—Given the bird strike problem that you have, you might get some assistance from the commercial operators to do that.

**Brig. Kelly**—I would be happy to undertake to have a look at that during the design process.

**CHAIR**—I notice that there is a plan for a flight simulator in the new facility because there is no flight simulator currently at Townsville. Can you explain why there is a need to incorporate a flight simulator in the current stage 1 plans?

**Air Cdre Gray**—The reason we do not have a flight simulator at the moment is that they never made one for a Caribou. Any aircraft that we purchase now, we will purchase a flight simulator for it. That achieves two things for us: first, it allows us to practice the dangerous manoeuvres that we do not want to do in an aeroplane for fear of losing them; and the other



thing is it reduces the wear and tear on the aircraft because we fly fewer hours training the pilots to do what we call circuit bashing—flying around the circuit, doing landings and take-offs. The simulator allows us to do most of that work in the simulator, thereby reducing the amount of wear and tear on the aircraft and extending its life.

**Mrs CROSIO**—In paragraph 43 on page 10 you state that the base liquid dry breathing oxygen storage facility is currently located in the proposed apron extension. My question is: what are the chemicals currently stored in that hazardous goods area?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—We currently have a storage area for hazardous goods. That has what we call POL—petrol, oil and lubricants. That includes any hydraulic fluid; any motor or aircraft fuel; any of the lubricants that we need, greases and things like that; any environmental chemicals we have to use in controlling vermin around the airfield; and any of the dangerous chemicals that we have to use for cleaning processes—they are all in a centrally stored area, a secure area that is cleared. All we propose to do in the redevelopment is to move that out of the edge of the habitation area that we have now and put it across in a central area that is substantially away from the rest of the base.

**Mrs CROSIO**—From the inspection this morning, I have a problem with the electrical system which is in paragraph 66, page 16. Why is the electrical system going to be fixed up in subsequent redevelopment projects?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—Our main aim is to connect the new facilities that are part of this development, but it is recognised that the existing electrical infrastructure on the base is getting pretty old and close to capacities.

**Mrs CROSIO**—That is my point: if it is recognised, why wouldn't you do that now?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—It gets down to dollars and cents. We know that it still has a certain life, even though it breaks down from time to time. I guess we are saying that this is the minimum amount of work that we need to do to get the new facilities up and running. But we have recognised that the stage 2 works are generally in the older part of the base. One of our concerns is that, if we did too much right now in the older part when we do not know the full scope of the works in stage 2, that that could be abortive work when we subsequently do the stage 2 development.

We are doing the minimum at this stage, enough to get the new facilities up and running. We know it is getting old and tired but we will have a serious look at that in the stage 2 development, and at that time we will know exactly what buildings are going into the area. I guess the same would apply to the sewerage and water in that area. If we tried to do too much now and second-guess all the facilities for stage 2, the worst case later is that we could be trenching them up.

**Mrs CROSIO**—But when you give consideration to stage 2, you are a number of years down the track. Are you quite comfortable with the fact that the facilities, recognised now as being deficient, are going to be adequate?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—It is a worry to us, but our technical advice is that we can get by—maybe not ideally—and we are a bit constrained with dollars as well.

**Mr Moss**—I would add to that: in regard to the electrical system as part of the master plan which we prepared, we identified two sites for the central emergency power house: one is to upgrade the existing facilities at the existing site and the other was to identify a new site. At the moment no decision has been made whether to upgrade the existing facilities or to provide a new one for a number of reasons. If we upgrade the total facilities, it may be a waste of government money because a future decision could dictate that it should be at an alternative site. So presently we are doing what is necessary to connect the new facilities to the existing infrastructure.

**Mrs CROSIO**—Forgive me if I am wrong but I was led to understand from the briefing this morning that there is a master plan. The master plan is going to look at stage 1, which is now hoping to be funded, and then stage 2 and looking at the cost of dollars and how much has to be cut back to comply. So you actually have a plan that you can work from; is that right?

**Mr Moss**—We have a master plan that has been approved within the Department of Defence. As I said, that master plan identifies two alternatives for the location of the central emergency power house. A master plan does not dictate that a development is going to proceed. That is a subsequent decision that goes through PWC and a lot of other processes. All the master plan does is reserve sites for the future facilities. In the master planning process we have tried to incorporate as much flexibility as we can so that we can anticipate future decisions. In this case, we identified two alternative sites that gave flexibility so that if we built it in one location or another location the master plan could accommodate that decision.

**Mrs CROSIO**—But overall you are quite happy that it is not a false economy in that you are going to have massive problems with what is recognised now as deficient electrical equipment and that it could possibly have been picked up in the first stage?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—Yes, that is right.

**Mrs CROSIO**—If you are happy with that, we can only take evidence as being supplied to us.

**Senator FERGUSON**—I have a rather broader question. In paragraph 107 you state:

The provision of living in accommodation to meet RAAF Base Townsville requirements is currently being examined. A number of broader Defence policy issues are under review.

I would hope that broad defence policy issues are always under review. What are the particular broader defence policy issues that are going to determine whether or not you need to provide more living-in accommodation to meet the RAAF needs?

**Brig. Kelly**—There is currently a draft proposal to provide living-in accommodation at RAAF Townsville. However, it has been placed on hold while these broader issues are looked at. In particular, Defence is very keen not to build living-in accommodation when it can be provided in more economical or better ways within the community, either by providing some form of rental allowance to people to live in the community or perhaps building living-in accommodation within the community so that it has a future use if bases ever downgrade, for example. We are currently looking at that.

With effect from 1 July this year people living-in standard 1 and 2—the bottom level of accommodation within the Defence Force—are entitled to a rental allowance which allows them

to go into the community and seek their own accommodation. The issue with Townsville would be to determine whether we want to provide living-in accommodation on base or we are happy for it to be provided in other ways, such as within the community. The difficulty with RAAF Base Townsville is that it is fairly difficult to provide living-in accommodation within the approved ANEF zones—which is where their quality of living is assured—because of the constrained nature of the base. They are the sorts of things being looked at.

**Senator FERGUSON**—This is part of an overall broad defence policy issue as to whether or not you are going to use rented accommodation off base as opposed to building accommodation for servicemen on base?

**Brig. Kelly**—That is correct. Each proposal will be looked at on an individual basis. In certain locations—for example, Sydney—it is much more cost-effective to build our own because of the high cost of rental allowance. In other places, including country areas, Canberra and Melbourne, it is more economical to provide people with rental allowance and allow them to live off base—unless we require people to live on base for contingency reasons, for training purposes or to provide transit accommodation.

**Senator FERGUSON**—How does the redevelopment of this base fit in to the overall strategy that results from the Defence Efficiency Review?

**Brig. Kelly**—The DER has identified that this is a long-term base, so we have a long-term master plan. It is in accordance with those plans. Any requirement to provide living-in accommodation will be looked at in terms of the Defence Efficiency Review: what is the most effective and economical way of providing accommodation for our people.

**Senator FERGUSON**—Currently you do not have anybody living on base in Townsville?

**Brig. Kelly**—Certainly we do.

**Senator FERGUSON**—We are looking tomorrow at some of the housing.

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—We currently have about 160 people living on base in Townsville. The accommodation has been classified across the five levels of accommodation—from five which is very good down to one which is not very good. A lot of it is affected by noise; it is inside the 25 ANEF boundary as laid out under the Australian standard; so a lot of that accommodation is levels 1 and 2. Most of the officers' and sergeants' mess accommodation is in there. But the airmen's accommodation, which is to the back of the site, is outside the 25 dB level. It is also brick accommodation that was built in the early to mid-1980s; it is airconditioned; and it meets most of the modern standards. So that will be classified as level 3.

**Senator FERGUSON**—You have about 160 living on base out of the approximately 600 people in total?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—Yes, we have about 160 living on base. However, having said that, we provided 84,000 nights of accommodation last year because a large amount of the accommodation we use is for exercises and contingency and supporting operations like Belisi in Bougainville. We have a large requirement for accommodation for operations and exercises.

**Senator FERGUSON**—Is accommodation readily available in Townsville for people that are not living on base?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—From anecdotal information, not really. If you are looking at a two-bedroom apartment, some of my staff that are renting downtown are paying about \$230 a week for a two-bedroom place.

**Senator FERGUSON**—Is that accommodation subsidised by the forces?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—At the present moment, no. Some of them are getting subsidised but the majority are not; they are paying out of their own pockets.

**Senator FERGUSON**—\$230 for a two-bedroom apartment?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—Correct.

**Senator FERGUSON**—I have one other question relating to a letter we received from someone involved in the Royal Australian Institute of Architects which talks about the project procurement method. Is there any reason why there has not been any information provided on the project method of procurement in this submission?

**Brig. Kelly**—No reason. We have decided on our method of procurement. We will be delivering the project by managing contractor, which has been used successfully in Townsville on a number of other major projects in recent years. We are about to appoint our project consultant who, subject to the deliberations of this committee, will assist us in delivering the project.

**Senator FERGUSON**—So you can provide the project method of procurement information to the committee?

**Brig. Kelly**—Yes, we can. It is by managing contractor. The head of Defence Estate has approved the acquisition strategy as delivery by managing contractor. That is the same method being used at Lavarack Barracks, and the same method that was used for 10 Terminal Regiment and 5th Aviation Regiment works over the last two to three years.

**Senator FERGUSON**—I only asked that question because included in our submissions is a letter that was written by the Public Works Committee back in 1994—Mr Hollis may even be able to comment on it—to do with procurement methods from the departments when it was suggested by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects that information about procurement methods was not being included and in fact should be in submissions.

**Brig. Kelly**—It often is. In this case, I regret that we have not included it.

**Mr HOLLIS**—Wing Commander McHugh, you mentioned the question of noise with the living-in accommodation on the base and we heard about noise when we went through one of the workshops this morning. What about outside the base—do you get complaints from the general population about noise?

**Mr LINDSAY**—And the local member?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—I speak with the local member fairly frequently. Yes, we do get noise complaints. We have a positive program to ensure that we keep the working noise from the base and the aircraft noise to a minimum. A good example was last week where we had a transit of 16 aircraft departing at 5.30 in the morning. We went out to the local radio stations, TV channels and print media to tell everybody what was going on. We find that, if people are informed of what is going on, they tend not to complain. If you do not tell people they get very upset. We have tried to cut down as much noise near the boundaries as we can. We do not run engines late at night. We have a 'Be neighbourly, be friendly' program to make sure we do not upset people. We do get some noise complaints. People will be upset by the noise, but we are fairly proactive in reducing as much noise as possible.

**Mr HOLLIS**—The airport itself is owned by Defence, isn't it?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—Yes.

**Mr HOLLIS**—What is the arrangement with the commercial flights in there?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—The commercial flights follow the Airservices Australia rules. The Department of Defence arrangements are that we have commercial flights that start from 5 in the morning and most of them finish by about 10 at night—that is RPT passengers. We have freight aircraft that go through the middle of the night. We have very few complaints over the freight aircraft. Most of them are very quiet aircraft.

**Mr HOLLIS**—The airport itself is adjacent to what looked like to me a big swamp but people assure me it is a highly sensitive environmental area. I suppose as a good neighbour policy, how is that area managed?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—The wetland area is managed in conjunction with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. We deal with AAL, the civilian airport managers; we deal with the Townsville City Council and the Thuringowa City Council; and with all the local interest groups. We are members of several forums where we go along and put our point of view. We have a very good relationship with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and we talk to anyone who has an interest in that area.

**Mr HOLLIS**—I noticed in the submission somewhere there was a list of people who were consulted about where you are moving the two borrow pits—

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—The two borrow pits where the soil was taken to build the airfield up—yes, we have consulted with a lot of different groups about the benefits that we get from moving the borrow pits and the disadvantages of having them there.

**Mr HOLLIS**—Has anyone apart from the fishermen raised any complaints?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—I would not say anyone has raised any complaints. They have raised concerns that they would like the pits moved because they have become part of the ecosystem out there. They are the only constant freshwater areas. We find that by moving them we will benefit the total environment. By moving them further out, we should reduce a lot of the bird hazards that we have in the area.

**Mr HOLLIS**—One final question to you, Brigadier Kelly, on the new series of loading bays that we are going to have: where does that come in these arcs? Is that covered by the NATO arcs?

**Brig. Kelly**—Correct. The reason we are acquiring additional land is so that we can control the green arc on our own property.

**Mr HOLLIS**—The green is what? The purple is the closest—

**Brig. Kelly**—The green then the yellow and then the purple. The green is public open space. We need to be able to control access within the green line—that is, we would not even want bushwalkers or picnickers within that line.

**Mr HOLLIS**—When Senator Murphy and I were looking at that this morning, the facilities seemed awfully close to some other—

**Brig. Kelly**—I think it is 270 metres.

**Mr HOLLIS**—That is within the green line?

**Brig. Kelly**—Correct.

**Mr RIPOLL**—Wing Commander, can I follow up on those borrow pits: although they are artificially created they are now part of the environment and they are a catchment area. Do you expect any run-off problems or any other problems with drainage once they are filled in again?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—No, we do not. We are dealing with the Thuringowa and Townsville City Council about the flow pattern of Louisa Creek and the Blakeys Crossing area, which is on the Register of the National Estate. We are in consultation with those two councils. We are also in consultation with half a dozen other interest groups on how we will affect the flow pattern through the area, because it is on the Register of the National Estate. We are very cognisant of the dangers or the damage it will cause if we contaminate the water or put any contaminants into the water. We are very aware of what we are doing. My understanding is that the flow patterns should not change terribly, because the water that we are getting rid of now is just going to continue.

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—If I can add to that, the current advice we have is that it is all running off anyway in a wet season, so in the wet season flows they are saying you could not tell the difference. Where there would be some slight differences is in the dry season situation where at the moment the first thing that happens is any run-off in that area firstly fills the borrow pits before it runs elsewhere. But percentage wise that is a very small fraction of the total catchment area out there. The best advice we have is that there is some slight extra run-off in a dry season situation and that is because water would normally be filling them, and they will not be there to be filled.

**Mr RIPOLL**—Does the filling of those pits then give you a bit of scope to address any other issues surrounding those areas?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—Bird strike, do you mean?

**Mr RIPOLL**—Either with bird strike or actually with run-off?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—We have not done detailed design yet. We are at the concept design stage. We know that we have to look very closely at drainage in the detailed design stage. I guess we do not have the answers right now.

**Mr RIPOLL**—Will you be looking into whether there is any potential to address any other issues that are existing in that area?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—Yes. If you are talking drainage associated with bird strike and back closer to the base, that is where we are proposing a separate medium new work—relatively close to the runway, I guess, and some of those areas we looked at this morning—to see what we can do to reduce the attractiveness of birds to those areas.

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—If I can add further to that: we have a very close relationship with AAL, the civil airport operators. Our concern is the same as theirs. We would like to see some of the drainage work done prior to the next wet season and we are working closely with DEO to achieve that.

**Mrs CROSIO**—Have you actually identified a specific area or specific areas where the borrow pits are going to go?

**Brig. Kelly**—We have just received our first report as we sat down at this meeting that identifies five or six critical areas. Essentially we would be looking at any low-lying areas close to the base which we would not term to be wetlands but just low-lying areas. If we can grade those adequately so that there is no water lying but rather that it runs off adequately, then we should overcome part of the problem. It needs the broader management to work with Parks and Wildlife to determine the sorts of grasses that should be in the area because the grasses are also attractive to the birds. So it needs a holistic approach. We have received a report just this morning that identifies the areas we should be looking at. The intent is to commit up to \$5 million to a medium work before the next wet season to address the issue.

**Mr LINDSAY**—I will ask you about that further on, Brigadier, but my questions generally follow the order of the submission this afternoon. First of all, for the *Hansard* record could you indicate where the development is after the first stage? What is proposed in the second stage of RAAF Townsville redevelopment?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—There is a list of points, Mr Lindsay, in paragraph 106. That is broadly what is in the current department thinking as to what stage 2 is likely to include, although there is likely to be some pluses and minuses to that. For example, they are looking now at the need for helicopter OLAs and the long-term requirement for those. This is our best guess at the moment.

**Mr LINDSAY**—In that group of items, are there items related to the replacement of buildings with asbestos problems?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—A lot of these facilities here are the older facilities down in the south-eastern corner of the base. There is nothing specifically there for removal of asbestos. There is no specific item, but the Combat Survival Training School is an old building which we would say would have asbestos in it; the 27 Squadron facilities, you would expect to have

asbestos in them; and similarly some of the ground defence facilities. Some of the old living-in accommodation also has asbestos cement roofs. We are currently not 100 per cent sure on what we are going to do on living-in accommodation.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Also does the physical fitness centre still have a problem?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—Yes, you are right.

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—The roof on the physical fitness centre has just been changed. There is some asbestos in some of the walls but the roof has been changed.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Will the items that are in stage 1 but may not get funded carry on into stage 2?

**Brig. Kelly**—Yes, we would expect so.

**Mr LINDSAY**—In paragraph 23 on page 6, the second line talks about 'engaged in air defence of Townsville and Timor Sea areas'. Should Timor Sea have been Coral Sea? Is that a mistake?

**Air Cdre Gray**—Yes, it should be Coral Sea.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Senator Murphy asked you about the hangarage for aircraft. You are going to have 10 LTA aircraft. They may not all be here at the one time but, if they were, they would be parked on the new tarmac. Is that new tarmac a hardstanding area that will take 707 type aircraft?

**Mr Moss**—The design of the pavement for the eight aircraft is up to C130 standard, so there is the flexibility of parking C130s on that apron as well as the LTA aircraft.

**Mr LINDSAY**—On the parking of the aircraft, are there any issues related to what happened with the Black Hawks in relation to the environmental aspects?

**Brig. Kelly**—Do you mean in terms of providing covered accommodation?

**Mr LINDSAY**—Yes.

**Brig. Kelly**—In general terms, the way the aircraft operate are quite different. The Black Hawk operates at low level more often in a marine environment than the proposed use of the LTA. The cost of providing enclosed hangarage for such a large aircraft would be prohibitive.

**Mr LINDSAY**—In relation to the perimeter road, I have seen some sections of that road flooded. There has been evidence about that. Are you taking the opportunity to provide an all-weather connection around the base as part of this redevelopment?

**Brig. Kelly**—That is the intent of the other road. There are two road projects as part of this proposal: one is to service the OLAs; the other is to provide an all-weather road around the perimeter.



**Mr LINDSAY**—Turning to the evidence in relation to the potential for the Townsville City Council and Australian Airports Ltd to tap into the base's irrigation main for their own irrigation, my understanding is that the water originally comes from the Mount St John sewerage treatment plant—so it is Townsville city water—into the RAAF base and then you say back to Townsville City Council. Is that into the suburb of Garbutt?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—Yes, I think it is. It was the AAL area and I believe down towards the cemetery. I would have to get the exact detail of it, but it is going down past the airport.

**Mr LINDSAY**—I do not think it will be terribly likely to go towards the cemetery. Have AAL expressed an indication to you that they would like to take some of this water?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—I believe so.

**Mr LINDSAY**—You have suggested that the project proposes to partially upgrade the existing sewerage system, and you will obviously have to extend the reticulation system. How much of a problem is the inundation of stormwater into the sewerage system in the current network that you have under the ground? Has the council complained about the ingress of stormwater into the sewerage system?

**Mr Moss**—I am not aware of any complaints in relation to water ingress into the sewerage system.

**Mr LINDSAY**—You have given evidence that it is a very old system. That is a very significant problem in the rest of this city. You are saying that council has not raised that matter with you?

**Mr Moss**—I am not aware of any complaints.

**Brig. Kelly**—I would expect that in World War II earthenware infrastructure it would be an issue, and that is why we need to get back into it. With these sorts of redevelopment projects we normally allocate a certain amount of money to get into the infrastructure redevelopment without knowing exactly what is required. We often do not know until we get back into it and see the scope of work.

**Mr LINDSAY**—In relation to communications, you say that the base communications infrastructure has little or no spare capacity. What is the base communications infrastructure that you talk about and are you replacing it with an upgraded modern system?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—What we would do, for instance, out around the ordnance loading area is put some fibre-optic communications out there. Communication covers a number of things now. It includes switching controls for substations when you need to do load shedding as well as information system lines. But we have allowed for some fibre-optic cabling around both the LTA facilities and out to the ordnance loading areas as well as some hard copper wire upgrade.

**Mr Moss**—The basis of the design has been that, where we are putting in new facilities, we will be cabling back to the relevant centre, whether it be the air traffic control centre or the base command centre. We are not upgrading the general cabling around the airport as such but, where

we are putting in new facilities, we are ensuring that cable goes back to the location where it is required.

**Mr LINDSAY**—With stage 2 coming, do you have some kind of master communications plan for the base—I am talking about infrastructure?

**Mr Moss**—There is not a master communications plan as such; there is a network plan that identifies the particular nodes that need to be connected. Some of those have been established with Rodnet and other cabling systems that have recently been put in as optic cabling.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Mr Moss, in your experience do you think it would be desirable to have a master communications strategy for the base with the redevelopment going the way it is going?

**Mr Moss**—Yes, it is desirable. It is something that will be developed as part of the project through the detailed design.

**Mr LINDSAY**—In relation to precautions against legionella, your evidence states:

Potable water would be below the temperature range where legionella can breed to levels affecting health.

Yet here in this city airconditioning systems are constantly checked for legionella. Is that evidence correct?

**Senator MURPHY**—If it is, how do you intend to achieve that?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—My understanding is that the systems we typically put in now are not the water type—

**Senator MURPHY**—But it says that air cooled airconditioning systems are proposed. Like Mr Lindsay, I am interested in the temperature of potable water being below that range.

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—At this time we do not have detailed design done but typically we would be requiring systems that fully comply with current standards.

**Brig. Kelly**—It seems that we cannot answer the question, Mr Lindsay. Can I take that on notice?

**Mr LINDSAY**—Sure. The next section of your presentation relates to bird hazard and bird habitat management and your separate medium works project. I need to be convinced that a separate medium works project will occur before the end of the year and, if not, should it be part of this particular project we are considering today?

**Brig. Kelly**—The reason that we have proposed to run it as a separate medium is so that we can pass on the inside the major work and have it completed for sure during this dry season. The head of Defence Estate, my boss, has told me to get on with it and that it will be funded this year.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Dry seasons in Townsville can last for 10 years, so you are saying by the end of this year?

**Brig. Kelly**—I was working on the general basis that we have a wet season at the end of each year.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Thank you, Brigadier. Will that address the problems we saw today where the low-lying levels come very close to the runway—at about the 400- to 500-metre mark of the runway? Will that have all of that filled in?

**Brig. Kelly**—'Graded properly' are the words I would use so that it does not have low-lying areas that hold water. No doubt during heavy downpours there will be water in the area. But the intent is that we would grade it and drain it so that we do not have low-lying areas that hold water for extended periods where grass flourishes thereby encouraging the birds.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Are you saying that it will be able to be mowed all year round?

**Brig. Kelly**—That would be the intent. I know that that in itself is another issue because, if we have the wrong sorts of grass, we can still encourage birds back into the area.

**Mr LINDSAY**—I refer you to the location plan that you provided which distresses me a little. It shades in defence properties in the legend. If the Army saw that they would probably be somewhat distressed because Lavarack covers the area that I have shaded in and not the area that you have shaded in. You have also left off 11 Brigade and Mitchell Street. That is just for your noting. That is the RAAF at work, I guess.

**Brig. Kelly**—That is all I can put it down to.

**Mr LINDSAY**—The conceptual layout shows something here at the end of the main runway which does not show on your plans. Could you explain to me what this particular area is?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—It is master planned only. It has been on the books for quite a while. There has been discussion of the need to extend the runway at Townsville. Currently, there is no defence need to extend the runway. As times change, Defence would review that situation, but there is no identified defence requirement to extend the runway. If that should be required, and there are certain operations where a longer runway may be required, Defence has purchased the land out that end of the runway so that it could perhaps some time in the future do the extension. But we have no current plan to do it.

**Mr Moss**—I might add to that. As part of the master plan we did have consultations with the FAC at the time and others. Although there is no identified defence requirement for it, the FAC identified that, for medium haul operations by 747 type aircraft, the runway extension would be required. In line with the flexibility of future operations, we have incorporated that as part of the master plan. That is not necessarily saying it will be completed. The purpose for including it in that particular plan was to show that the staged development we are looking at at this point in time is consistent with the master plan for the base.

**Mr LINDSAY**—You also see that I have ringed an extension here which does not show on the plans behind us. Could you explain to me what that is?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—I believe that is the helicopter ordnance loading aprons. Again, that is a possible contender for the stage 2 development. Defence is trying to work through whether it has a long-term requirement for those or not. So they may appear in stage 2.

**Mr LINDSAY**—So the helicopters would fly over there to be armed up and off they would go.

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—Yes.

**Air Cdre Gray**—In that section with the acquisition of the new armed reconnaissance helicopters. When and if we go ahead and acquire the armed reconnaissance helicopters—they were endorsed in this year's budget and so it is just a matter of time—it is a matter of where they will be based. If some of them are based here, because they are armed they will need somewhere to do ordnance loading.

**Mr LINDSAY**—We would be happy to have them based here. In your briefing earlier you referred to the OLAs needing to be close to the runway—you used some technical term—

**Brig. Kelly**—The quick reaction alert facility.

**Mr LINDSAY**—The problem I would like you to address is that normally aircraft movements are that way along the runway but, by coming in here, you are going to force aircraft movements that way. What is your comment on that?

**Air Cdre Gray**—For fighter operations it does not matter much. The object of the exercise is to have them in an ordnance loading apron close to one end of the runway. Wind direction does not matter too much for a Hornet when it is loaded for air-to-air operations. It will take off with the downwind component, if it needs to.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Terrific. On some other general matters, you are going to demolish the air movements section but you are not suggesting replacing it at this stage.

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—In stage 2.

**Mr LINDSAY**—That is perhaps going to be three or four years away, and that air movements section is used very extensively. Is there a problem in not having an air movements section for three or four years?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—Sorry, the demolition is not planned now either. The demolition and new air movements section is planned as part of stage 2.

**Mr LINDSAY**—I have misunderstood you. Would the hardstanding area that you are proposing to build be available for general aviation parking?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—In front of the future air movements or are you meaning the LTA facilities?

**Mr LINDSAY**—Yes. You may be aware that there is a shortage of overnight parking for current general aviation. Would that area be available for GA parking?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—Given the current defence policy and the security problems that that would impose, the answer is no. We do have a working arrangement with AAL where, if freighters come in and they need additional parking space and we have space available, we will

take commercial aircraft across in our area. They are normally freighters. No, we have no desire to have GA parked in the middle of the Air Force base.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Finally, is the flight simulator likely to be Australian made?

**Air Cdre Gray**—Probably not. Australia does not actually have an aircraft simulator manufacturing capability as such. We have transferred a fair bit of technology from CAE in Canada to Australia. It is possible that CAE Australia may get the contract but it will go out to open tender.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Is it likely to be Australian operated?

**Air Cdre Gray**—Definitely.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Not operated by the RAAF, operated by a subcontractor?

**Air Cdre Gray**—It is quite likely to be operated by a contractor.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Does that give you issues of access on the base?

**Air Cdre Gray**—No, we have security cleared contractors to do this sort of work all over the place. It is not an issue. It would only be an issue if they were trying to sell the time to a third-party customer, which is something that would be very difficult.

**Mr LINDSAY**—But wouldn't you encourage selling to a third-party customer?

**Air Cdre Gray**—If there is a third-party customer in the region that we would be happy to have there—

**Mr LINDSAY**—But you said it would be difficult to do?

**Air Cdre Gray**—That is correct. It would be more difficult to do when it is on a base if you do not have control of who the customers are. While ever we have control of the customers and prior notification of the customers for security clearances, it is not normally a problem. A regional air force would not be a problem if they acquired the same aircraft.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Thank you.

**Mrs CROSIO**—I have a couple of quick questions mainly for our records when we are putting our report together later on. In paragraph 60 on page 14, you say that testing would be conducted to determine the extent of contaminated soil. What is the nature of the tests to be conducted?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—Typically that would involve soil sampling. We would take surface samples and/or various level testing.

**Mrs CROSIO**—You then say that remediation activities would be conducted in accordance with state regulations. With what particular state regulations must these tests comply?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—There is an Australian standard for removal of storage tanks. That is the main one we would be following.

**Mrs CROSIO**—You are following that for the testing of contaminated soil as well. Can I then take you to page 20, paragraph 81, and we come back to Senator Murphy's question. It states:

An Environmental Certificate of Compliance is being obtained within the Department of Defence, based on the findings of the EPA prepared for the Department.

From where is an environmental certificate of compliance obtained?

**Brig. Kelly**—As part of the memorandum of understanding with Environment Australia we are able to approve our own projects. I am a delegate. If I consider that a project does have adverse impacts, then I refer it to a higher delegate who would either approve it himself or may require us to produce a NOI to forward to Environment Australia. It is a process that works routinely.

**Mrs CROSIO**—With all due respect it is not Caesar judging Caesar then, is it? I have not worked how it is not.

**Brig. Kelly**—You might consider that it is, but we have an MOU with Environment Australia which are quite happy for us to do this. We certainly refer plenty of projects to Environment Australia. This committee has sat on a number of hearings in recent years where we have done that. We generally liaise with Environment Australia and the Australian Heritage Commission in the lead-up to producing our own documents. We generally have a fairly clear idea of what is and is not significant.

**Mrs CROSIO**—For the record, if they were concerned I am sure we would have heard about it and we have not had anything as yet presented to us. The community involvement program has been established to contact key stakeholder groups and to seek their attendance at periodic environmental focus workshops. How many people in total and in particular how many of the general public actually attended the environmental focus workshops?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—In the vicinity of 15 to 20. When you say general public that includes representatives of some of those departments, city councils and other groups like Ross Island Volunteers for Estuarine Research and so on. There were three meetings in total conducted in August and October of last year and then February of this year. If there are 15 to 20 of interest groups and others, there would have been about 10 defence and environmental consultants. So around 25 in total.

**Mrs CROSIO**—It was advertised very widely and people had the opportunity of coming forward?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—Yes, we advertised twice in August. We actually got no reaction when we advertised in August so we advertised again in September. We also set up the free call hotline. Out of all the advertising and free call line, we got one query, which was a general query not to do with the project specifically but more to do with noise for the base.

**Brig. Kelly**—I suspect the general lack of interest from the general public is simply because of the more formal arrangements that we had in place. Nineteen separate organisations were involved in environmental focus workshops, and I presume that most people who had a specific interest might have considered they were represented in that way.

**Mrs CROSIO**—From the financial point of view, you say in paragraph 101 on page 24:

The estimated cost of the project is \$95.0 million, however the approved budget figure is \$87.05 million (with some further indexation ...

Just for the record, why is there a gap between the estimated cost and the approved budget for the development?

**Brig. Kelly**—The project has been cost capped within Defence based on the amount of money that is available for the capital facilities program prior to us refining our final estimates. So there is a gap of \$8 million between the money available and our estimate of the works required. We are hoping to make some savings that will enable us to fund the full scope of works. But we have identified at this stage three parts of the scope which can drop off, if necessary, to achieve the cost cap that I have been given.

**Mr HOLLIS**—Just one quick one, I notice in the submission that there is funding for a vehicle wash. What is going to happen to the waste water from that vehicle wash?

**Mr Moss**—The waste water from the wash will go through coalescing plate separators that will separate any detergents from the waste water before going into the stormwater system. It is environmentally controlled and it is the same system that has been recently put into the helicopter wash at 5 Aviation Regiment.

**Mr HOLLIS**—Thank you.

**Senator MURPHY**—I just want to go to the cost estimate, if I can.

**CHAIR**—There is some confidentiality involved in the cost estimate.

**Senator MURPHY**—I want to ask some questions with regard to the savings proposed and the current budget.

**CHAIR**—I think we should attend to this when we wrap up.

**Senator MURPHY**—I am happy to do it whenever but it is something I want to cover.

**CHAIR**—I think it would be more appropriate at a later time.

**Mr HOLLIS**—Just on that issue about confidentiality of costings, we all appreciate the necessity of commercial-in-confidence but sometimes it is a limitation to what we can ask. Is this necessary because of contracts you are going to let? It is on the public record what the estimated cost is, what the outturn cost is, what the cap is and the gap between the cap and the estimated cost.

**Brig. Kelly**—Correct.

**Mr HOLLIS**—It just seems to me that—it is not only Defence; we deal with this all the time—we are always having a constraint put on. We are supposed to be charged with making sure the taxpayer gets value for their dollar but in the very area when it comes down to the nitty gritty of that questioning—on not only defence projects but all projects—we are then prevented from asking questions on it.

**Brig. Kelly**—We would be quite happy to take general questions on the costing. I suppose it becomes sensitive where you have specific components of an element. For example, we are saying that the operational facilities will be about \$40 million, and that is fairly broad at this stage. But we have a fairly defined estimate for airfield lighting, and it would be fairly easy for a supplier of airfield lighting to work out relatively accurately the basis of that and so perhaps temper their tenders against that. It is only when we get into lower level components that we would have a concern, Mr Hollis.

**Senator MURPHY**—Madam Chair, my questions do not go to specific items other than the design and project management costs. I am particularly interested in those costs set out in the budget. There are two figures: one on the second page which is much for the norm, 10 per cent of the facilities costs excluding the LTA, and there is a figure beside that; on the previous page there is an item for design and project management related to the LTA facilities and a figure beside that. I am curious about the figure that you then propose as a saving in the overheads column, which I thought I understood somebody to say it is essentially from project management cost savings. They relate in part to the LTA facilities and in part to the OLAs. I am just curious as to how that was worked out.

**Brig. Kelly**—It is almost an academic exercise given that the percentage for both components in both packages that you have mentioned are the same; that is, 10 per cent for project design and management and eight per cent for contingency. We would normally only show it under miscellaneous at the end. We have shown a break-up of those two components separately against the LTA facilities purely for completeness or you might say bookkeeping purposes from our point of view, because that component of the project is being transferred to the capital facilities vote from the capital equipment vote to support the Air Commodore's project. That is why we have shown it separately. It is purely for completeness.

**Senator MURPHY**—With regard to the 10 per cent relating to facilities costs, does facilities costs include the compensatory works and LDBO store?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—Yes, it would. It includes all the basic construction costs, so the compensatory works and LDBO store would be part of our facilities cost.

**Senator MURPHY**—It therefore goes into your assessment of the 10 per cent?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. We have completed the questions and we will now break for afternoon tea before we call the next witnesses.

**Proceedings suspended from 2.24 p.m. to 2.43 p.m.**



**BUNNELL, Councillor Ann, Deputy Mayor and Chair of Environmental Services Committee, Townsville City Council**

**CHAIR**—I welcome the representative of the Townsville City Council. Do you wish to make a comment on your appearance?

**Councillor Bunnell**—I am the Chair of the Environmental Services Committee for Townsville City Council. I am also the ward councillor for Garbutt and other areas which are adjacent to the Defence Force area.

**CHAIR**—The committee has received a submission from the Townsville City Council dated 4 June 1999. Do you propose any amendment?

**Councillor Bunnell**—No, just to add a few points.

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

**Councillor Bunnell**—Thank you, Madam Chair. Townsville City Council recognises the critical role that the RAAF and the defence forces stationed in Townsville play in the defence of the Commonwealth of Australia, and we support their important economic contribution to the region. We also value the social and cultural values the Defence Force brings to our area.

As we say in the submission, the Defence Force has a special and historical place in the hearts of Townsville people since Federation and especially during World War II to the present. The community of Townsville will also work to ensure defence personnel and their families are welcomed to our northern city.

Just in closing, the community of Townsville recognise our city as a defence force city. It is often referred to as 'the garrison city' and it does so in the most positive of ways. In recent years the combined effort of the Defence Force, especially the RAAF, and our community has ensured that further development of defence infrastructure is most welcome in our region. I would like to congratulate the project managers for the thorough planning undertaken by them and, as chair of council's Environmental Services Committee, I would like to commend the broad environmental planning applied to this proposal.

**CHAIR**—Councillor, I will ask the first question. It is good to see there is obviously a good relationship between the council and the RAAF in Townsville. However, sometimes our committee comes across a situation where the council is happy about a project but that is not generally reflected in the community. In what ways has the RAAF consulted with the local community and what indicators are there that the community supports the project?

**Councillor Bunnell**—The Defence Force advertised widely about their proposal. I certainly saw it. The project is well talked about in the suburb of Garbutt, the area I represent. It is probably fair to say that the Defence Force have been so responsive to complaints or inquiries that people have a sense of confidence about this. I would not have said that perhaps 10 or 15 years ago, but there has been a sea change, to use the modern term, in the way the Defence Force deals with our community anyway. It is now one of open consultation and of being very responsive to issues. I heard mention earlier of instances where noise has been a problem. They are very responsive to that. It is always dealt with at the top level which ensures that you get a good commitment and satisfactory response.

**CHAIR**—What is the actual process if someone has a complaint or a query? Do they ring the council or do they ring the base directly?

**Councillor Bunnell**—As Mr Lindsay would know as a former councillor, people usually ring their ward councillor first. I know the people of Garbutt are very promptly on the phone if they have a problem. There is also a very well-known hotline to the defence base here that they respond to. They would come to council very promptly. I imagine there are other avenues. Perhaps AAL would receive complaints. It is very well known that it is a defence base and that AAL are the commercial part of that.

**Senator FERGUSON**—If I can follow on from the chair's question: it would appear as though the RAAF have been so fulsome in their consultation with the local community that, when they advertised in the media and print media that they were going to have public meetings and environmental focus workshops and the general community was also invited, only 15 or 20 people turned up. Is that a sign of the confidence of the community in what the RAAF does?

**Councillor Bunnell**—Partly, but also I think it was mentioned earlier that groups such as the RIVER group, which is a very broad community group, would have membership in the hundreds from very diverse areas of our environmental and conservation community and they were represented on the focus groups. In the past I have seen the Defence Force have groups that they meet with beforehand, people that they know will have an interest in the proposal, and they take on board their suggestions. Then they call for the public meeting. I did not attend the public meeting. While that is not a big response, I think a lot of work had been done before those public meetings.

**Senator FERGUSON**—Has anyone ever measured in financial terms what it is worth to the Townsville area having the armed forces present?

**Councillor Bunnell**—I know that, when Defence Force people go to community functions such as the Legacy dinners, they always mention that. I think that is very appropriate because the Defence Force are very integrated in our city. They do not stand alone. That is not only in a residential sense but also in a community sense. I know the Defence Force tell the community from time to time the value, but we also know about it from our surveys and from our work with the defence base.

**Senator FERGUSON**—Is there a shortage of community housing in Townsville?

**Councillor Bunnell**—I did hear the earlier comment. But, as someone who owns units, I sometimes do not think there is a shortage but I think there is an oversupply.

**Senator FERGUSON**—You may not be getting enough for yours.

**Councillor Bunnell**—That is true perhaps. We are also a university town with quite a large university especially in the area of international students. It is fair to say that at the beginning of the university year and at the beginning of each semester accommodation is at a premium but, as that moves on through the months, that seems to settle down. If you looked at today's paper you would see probably 100 advertisements for units, flats and houses in Townsville, ranging from \$95 upwards. We have everything from very basic accommodation to luxury accommodation. It is probably whatever is your whim.

**Senator FERGUSON**—It may become an issue in this so-called garrison town, which is likely to remain that way, in that the availability of public housing for rent and the quality of that housing may have some impact on the Defence Force's determination on whether they are going to build on base for themselves or whether they will be able to get that housing from public housing in the community.

**Councillor Bunnell**—That is possibly so. Townsville and Thuringowa are having record residential building and they have been now for about 18 months. There is a great flurry. Obviously, it is a very lucrative area for developers otherwise they would not do it. I think our needs have been taken up. It is not only the Defence Force that has brought new people to our city but also the university, as I said. We also have new industries starting up and we are very much the city centre for fly in and fly out workers for the Carpentaria mineral province. That is being taken up in the commercial area with unit development. I am trying to say that I think our very diverse economic base will cater to those needs—and very promptly.

**Senator FERGUSON**—So you have a very diverse economic base but the Defence Force do play an important part in that economy; is that right?

**Councillor Bunnell**—Yes, that is certainly right. They would probably be our major source of money with the multiplier effect. They have a very disposable income.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Senator Ferguson, about half a billion dollars a year are circulated in this economy as a direct result of defence expenditure, which is quite a considerable amount. Councillor Bunnell, currently the management of the Town Common is effectively being jointly managed by the council and DNR; isn't it?

**Councillor Bunnell**—No, we are no longer part of that trusteeship program. It is all now in DNR. We have no role in that.

**Mr LINDSAY**—So council is not funding anything on the Town Common?

**Councillor Bunnell**—No, but we will give project funding. When the environmental act changed the Town Common became a conservation park that is solely managed by the state government.

**Mr LINDSAY**—So DNR does not refer any decisions to the council?

**Councillor Bunnell**—They do refer decisions to us and we make comment on issues, much as we do with other stakeholders such as GBRMPA or AIMS.

**Mr LINDSAY**—In relation to the sensitive nature of the ordnance loading areas, in the past there has been a proposal to have a western entry into that side of the runway; is that now dead in the water and not likely to occur?

**Councillor Bunnell**—We have no information that it will. I have no information about that. Are you talking about the entrance to the airport?

**Mr LINDSAY**—Remember there was an aircraft maintenance facility—

**Councillor Bunnell**—In front of Garbutt?

**Mr LINDSAY**—No, on the other side. There was going to be an aircraft maintenance facility on that side.

**Councillor Bunnell**—It seems to us those proposals are dead in the water.

**Mr LINDSAY**—It has gone?

**Councillor Bunnell**—Yes. But we are certainly very interested if they are resuscitated.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Are you satisfied that this proposal meets the council's requirements in relation to sewerage and water supply?

**Councillor Bunnell**—We are very happy with the work. We have done a lot of preplanning with the project managers. We are very happy with that.

**Senator MURPHY**—I want to go to the question of the Town Common and the fact that the state government now have the responsibility for the management of it as a conservation area. I understood you to say that the council does or can commit funds to specific projects. With the proposal to move the borrow pits and/or any other development that might enhance the Town Common area and overcome the problem or concerns that some people may have about both the bird life and fishing, has the council discussed the possibility of contributing any funds to a project of that nature?

**Councillor Bunnell**—No, not to this project. The issue of the borrow pits has been discussed many times with Townsville City Council about the area Mr Lindsay was speaking about, the maintenance facilities. We had worked for some time with those proposals. The issue of the borrow pits was always on the table. We were well aware that it would have to be either filled in or moved. I know that Sunfish have made submissions in that area. We see no problem with that because of the compensatory wetland and fish habitat that the Defence Force will be supplying with the filling in of those borrow pits. No, we do not see a problem. We have been working with DNR on that.

**Senator MURPHY**—I was not asking you necessarily if you saw a problem, I was asking whether or not the council had considered the possibility of providing funds, if necessary, to assist with the cost of relocation, et cetera.

**Councillor Bunnell**—No, we see this as entirely a Defence Force cost and not ours. I am not sure if there is a proposal; I do not know of it.

**Senator MURPHY**—There is not one.

**Councillor Bunnell**—As Townsville has many wetlands and huge environmental issues of our own, we keep our money for our own. But certainly we are happy to help in kind in any way.

**Senator MURPHY**—Does council receive any rates or payments from the commercial air operators here?

**Councillor Bunnell**—I just see Catherine Rule nodding. I was not aware of that, but apparently we do. I would have to take that question on notice.

**Senator MURPHY**—If you could provide some details of those payments and also what responsibilities the council has in respect of the management of commercial air activities as it relates to the question of bird strike, et cetera.

**Councillor Bunnell**—I can answer in a general sense. We have been involved with a working group looking at the issue of bird strikes. At one stage we had a management committee, which council coordinated, through the Department of Natural Resources as it is called now and the Department of the Environment. The whole issue of bird strikes came to that committee, which I chaired for some years. We worked with the relevant agencies on that. We see ourselves as a partner in working towards a suitable outcome.

**Senator MURPHY**—Does the council have any responsibilities in so far as bird management for the want of a better description?

**Councillor Bunnell**—In terms of bird strikes on planes?

**Senator MURPHY**—Yes.

**Councillor Bunnell**—No more than a moral commitment, I suppose. We do not see a role in that but, if one were pointed out to us, we would certainly play our part.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for appearing before us today.

[3.00 p.m.]

**LORES, Mr Ronald James, Acting Operations and Technical Manager,  
Australian Airports (Townsville) Pty Ltd**

**RULE, Ms Catherine Patricia Mary, Chief Executive Officer,  
Australian Airports (Townsville) Pty Ltd**

**CHAIR**—On behalf of the committee I welcome the representatives of Australian Airports Ltd. The committee has received a submission from Australian Airports Pty Ltd dated 8 June 1999. Do you wish to propose any amendment?

**Ms Rule**—No.

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

**Ms Rule**—I would like to reiterate some of the points we made in the submission. AAL is very supportive of the development and also of the environmental measures being taken to minimise the impacts of the development on the environment. We believe that any approach that they are taking should be an integrated approach with AAL.

In particular, we support the measures being taken on bird hazard management which includes the stormwater drainage works. We would like to stress here that the timing of the works is important to us, and we were very pleased to have the questions put by Mr Lindsay to Defence on the timing of the works. We recognise that these have been identified through the statement of the evidence document. With the high rainfalls that have been experienced in the last two to three wet seasons in Townsville, we believe it is imperative that these works are completed prior to the next wet season. We also believe that there should be an integrated approach on that. Thank you.

**CHAIR**—I notice that the issue of stormwater is a major concern in your submission. Are you satisfied that all the measures are being taken to prevent serious problems of surface water pollution and contamination in the stormwater system?

**Ms Rule**—From what I have read in the submission, yes, there is, although I would add that the terms of reference have not been written for the minor works that are external to this proposal. It will be important that bird hazard management is considered to ensure that we are not taking a problem away from one area and moving it into another area.

**CHAIR**—You are satisfied that will be undertaken?

**Ms Rule**—We are satisfied, yes.

**CHAIR**—You also talk about 'monitoring and pollution devices to ensure compliance with the guidelines on surface water quality in the area'. Are you satisfied that monitoring will take place?

**Ms Rule**—Yes, we are satisfied with that. The reason why we put that in is that we have just undergone our environmental strategy for the next five years. We will be undertaking our own monitoring and we want to make sure that we do that together so that we do not have one system in place and Defence have something else.

**CHAIR**—So you are happy about the procedures in place at this stage?

**Ms Rule**—Yes, we are.

**Mrs CROSIO**—In paragraph 2 on page 1 of your submission you state:

We believe the development necessary in improving the Base's facilities ./.

Why do you believe that the development is necessary?

**Ms Rule**—Currently for the bomb, the OLA, they close the 07/25 runway. This impacts on our general aviation operators most specifically in the afternoon when the winds change. When a major exercise is on, that runway may be closed for up to a week at a time and our general aviation operators are impacted. By relocating that, the runway should be open for a much longer period.

**Senator MURPHY**—If I can ask a follow-up question on what you just said about the impact on your general aviation operators where you have the 07/25 runway closed for up to a week at a time: that obviously has a financial impact on AAL as well as on the operators?

**Ms Rule**—That is correct. We have a different way of charging for our operators. Some can pay in advance. If they do pay in advance they can land for an unlimited amount of time within the year for a discounted rate. However, the other operators that have not paid in advance pay every time they land.

**Senator MURPHY**—Whatever way, you would make more money if the runway was open, wouldn't you? In reality that would be the case.

**Ms Rule**—Yes.

**Senator MURPHY**—In your view, who has the responsibility for the bird hazard management?

**Ms Rule**—It is a shared responsibility under regulations and, as we understand it, it does not just stay with the airport owners and the airport operators. That is why when we convened the Bird Hazard Management Committee we looked at including the Townsville City Council, the Thuringowa City Council and the Department of the Environment because what they do off the airport impacts on what happens on the airport, and vice versa.

**Senator MURPHY**—As part of the potential solution, would it be reasonable to expect that there be a cost sharing arrangement?

**Ms Rule**—Cost sharing arrangement with whom?

**Senator MURPHY**—With all of the parties: with Defence, with yourselves and with the commercial operators?

**Ms Rule**—It is a difficult question to answer straight off because if any actions have to be taken off airport to limit the environmental impact for the bird hazard, we could also have those responsible people coming and saying that we should be sharing the costs for that as well. I do not necessarily agree with that.

**Senator MURPHY**—But as I understand it there have been two bird strikes with regard to commercial airlines this year or in this last financial year?

**Ms Rule**—That is correct.

**Senator MURPHY**—At a cost of some \$3 million to the two operators or one or both of them; is that correct?

**Ms Rule**—I am not exactly sure what the costs were.

**Senator MURPHY**—I think that was a comment made in passing. One would have thought that, given that people are involved in the commercial activity at an airport that has a bird strike problem that has a potential to be alleviated, there ought to be some cost sharing to alleviate that problem and that it ought not fall just with Defence or just with the council or just with AAL or just with Ansett or Qantas.

**Ms Rule**—Without being specific as to what you are looking at in terms of cost sharing, it is something that we would need to sit down and work out what the responsibilities are. Specifically on the defence land, that is something that you would need to talk to the airlines about; it is their responsibility. In terms of our responsibility, we have a commercial arrangement with Defence. We have a joint user deed which deals with commercial arrangements for works.

**Senator MURPHY**—There is a reasonable amount of money committed to doing certain work that is designed to alleviate the bird problem. I am curious that everybody seems to be of the view that that is Defence's problem not theirs.

**Ms Rule**—It would be something where, should we own that airport as well, people would be saying to us, 'That is AAL's problem; you own the airport. That is your responsibility.'

**Senator MURPHY**—Yes, but you run a commercial operation at the airport, as does Qantas, as does Ansett and all of the other smaller commercial operators and/or larger ones—

**Ms Rule**—Correct.

**Senator MURPHY**—I would have thought it was in their interests for the problem to be fixed.

**Ms Rule**—Yes, it is within everybody's interests that the problem is fixed.

**Senator MURPHY**—I guess it would be in light of the public safety issue.

**Ms Rule**—Correct.

**Senator MURPHY**—I would have thought that people ought to try to make a reasonable contribution towards fixing the problem. It should not just be left up to the person or in this case Defence who own the property. I include in this the state government but I am interested in AAL's concern about the bird strike problem, and correctly so. I am also interested to see whether or not AAL has considered making any contribution. As the council has indicated, 'We are supportive to the extent that we think something ought to be done about it but maybe we do not put our money where our mouth is'—if I can use that as a description—'and we would like Defence to pay for it.' I think that there ought to be a contribution from other users and there is also a public interest factor here across the board. Has AAL ever considered that?

**Ms Rule**—We have not sat down and spoken about anything specifically in terms of the costings and who would be responsible for the costings at this stage. Whether we would consider it, that is something we would need to look at in greater detail before we could make a definitive answer.

**Senator MURPHY**—I would be interested in AAL making some further comment on that.

**Ms Rule**—Thank you.

**Mr RIPOLL**—You say in your submission that during the development and future operations there is a potential to cause surface water pollution. Can you elaborate on what you mean by that?

**Ms Rule**—I will just find it specifically.

**Mr RIPOLL**—You also specifically state:

Defence should be encouraged to incorporate into their development plans the design of all possible measures on-site to eliminate stormwater contamination . . .

**Ms Rule**—Stormwater contamination was something that was brought up as part of our environment strategy by the Department of the Environment saying that, because of the type of operations that we run and the possibility of fuel creating problems with the surface water, we need to ensure we are monitoring that. We wanted to draw to the committee's attention that it is something that we will be looking at and any new development works that are undertaken should ensure that those types of things are looked at as well.

**Mr RIPOLL**—Was that the only type of pollution you were looking at—any run-off and any sort of contamination from fuel?

**Ms Rule**—Specifically looking at the fuel type of contamination going into the surface water.

**Mr RIPOLL**—That was it, thanks.

**Senator FERGUSON**—Are magpie geese the only birds that cause a problem?

**Ms Rule**—No, they are not. It is their major habitat in the wet season. However, we do have some other birds on the airport as well.

**Senator FERGUSON**—Have birds ever been a hazard for light aircraft as well?

**Ms Rule**—Correct.

**Senator FERGUSON**—Have there been occasions of bird strikes on light aircraft?

**Ms Rule**—Yes, there have. We do not seem to get as many accurate records for the light aircraft as we do for the commercial jets, but we do get records of strikes on the smaller aircraft as well.

**Senator FERGUSON**—I note from your submission that it seems to be the vegetation along the runways and taxiways that actually attracts the birds. Are there reasons other than just the vegetation that causes them to be attracted?

**Mr Lores**—We believe that there were other things that were attracting the magpie geese. We believe they are the major concern at the airport because they flock in very large numbers out there and have the potential to bring down large jets, whereas with other bird life you might have one or two but not significant when compared with the magpie geese.

We have undertaken a vegetation survey of the airport some three months ago to identify the types of grasses out there and, in conjunction with that, we had crop and gut analysis taken of magpie geese which was able to show us what they were actually feeding on. We believe they like the airport or any of the low-lying water areas just off the edge of the airport. They come over and feed there and then they fly back to the Town Common. We believe that is the reason why they are there. I think it needs to be an approach that looks at not only the drainage but also the vegetation, which is something that Brigadier Kelly mentioned earlier.

**Senator FERGUSON**—Has the mowing of the grass lowered the incidence of birds being around? I am just not sure how you monitor it.

**Mr Lores**—As stated before, during the wet season you cannot get into some of these low-lying areas so the grass tends to

seed and the magpie geese go in there to feed. It could be two to three months before you can get in and slash the area.

**Senator FERGUSON**—What is the most serious incident involving birds? We have heard there has been up to \$2 million or \$3 million damage with Qantas and Ansett.

**Mr Lores**—Ansett have had the major damage in the last six months, costing a few million dollars, and Qantas had quite a lot of damage last year.

**Senator FERGUSON**—Is that birds being sucked into the motor?

**Mr Lores**—That is right. They hit the cowling and go straight through and destroy all the blades. That is just one engine. So if two engines are taken out, that is the aircraft.

**Senator FERGUSON**—We do have to take off again.

**Mrs CROSIO**—Do the passengers breathe in or what?

**Senator FERGUSON**—I was just thinking about that.

**Mr Lores**—On both occasions it has been on approach rather than the take-off.

**Senator FERGUSON**—Thank you, that is very consoling. Just one other completely unrelated issue, what are your landing charges for light aircraft?

**Ms Rule**—For light aircraft, it is \$2 per 1,000 kilograms per landing.

**Senator FERGUSON**—Thank you.

**Senator MURPHY**—Who are the shareholders in AAL?

**Ms Rule**—Catalyst Investment, they are funds investors, and also Sabona. Management has been offered shares and that is being finalised at the moment.

**Senator MURPHY**—Are they Australian companies?

**Ms Rule**—Yes, they are.

**CHAIR**—There being no further questions, I thank the representatives from AAL.

[3.17 p.m.]

**GRAY, Air Commodore Norman, Director General, Aerospace Development, Department of Defence**

**KELLY, Brigadier Garry, Director General, Project Delivery, Department of Defence**

**McHUGH, Wing Commander Christopher, Officer Commanding Combat Support Force—Townsville, Department of Defence**

**NICHOLSON, Wing Commander Allan, Project Director, Department of Defence**

**MOSS, Mr Graham, National Airports Technical Manager, Gutteridge Haskins and Davey Pty Ltd**

**CHAIR**—I now recall officers from the Department of Defence. Sunfish were unable to appear so I think some of my colleagues are disappointed. However, it looked like they will have plenty more questions to ask you in conclusion.

Perhaps I can start by going back to the first question I asked of AAL relating to the management of stormwater and pollution problems. I have not seen anything in your submission about the ongoing monitoring. Can you explain to me what your intentions are in terms of continuing monitoring of the stormwater effluent and particularly any pollution that may arise from that?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—I am not sure of the extent of our current monitoring. I would have to check that one.

**CHAIR**—Would you be able to advise the committee on that at a later date? It is quite a significant issue. It is clearly something that needs to be addressed.

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—Yes.

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—We do have a full-time environmental health officer who is charged with monitoring things like stormwater, the drainage, the management of hazardous goods, the washing and cleaning areas. He ensures that we are complying with both the Australian standards and the national standards. We also have a series of plans on the base for management of spills and the use of hazardous materials. These are currently being put into an environmental management plan through Defence Estate, which will provide a holistic approach to it. We have individual plans for each of those things but we do monitor stormwater and hazardous goods and their usage on the base.

**CHAIR**—That was going to be my next question. While you say there is someone there, is there some kind of formal plan to ensure that these are regularly monitored or is it a very haphazard process—a bit of a hit and miss process?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—He has told me that it is not hit and miss, so I hope he has not lied to me. My understanding is that he works to the standards as laid down by the Department of Defence and by Air Command who are our masters. My understanding is that we work to a well structured plan. It is not haphazard.

**CHAIR**—Would you say that this is not the normal problem that you might encounter on an airfield and that this is something quite specific to an area such as Townsville?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—For the management of waste effluent and materials like that, no, I would say that was standard on an airfield. All other airfields and anywhere where you wash, where you clean and where you have petrol oils and lubricants being used, you must have a plan to clean that and to make sure that the environment is not spoiled after you have used them.

**CHAIR**—Except here you have the additional problem of high rainfalls at certain times and ongoing problems outside the normal effluent problems of water being used for washing and other pollutants being used?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—I understand, but I guess we see that as normal up here because the rainfall is so high.

**CHAIR**—I guess what I am saying is that the generic type plan for all bases is inadequate for the actual specific requirements here in Townsville. Are you taking steps to ensure that your monitoring takes into account the particular requirements for this locality?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—My understanding is that we take into consideration the unique requirements of the Townsville area.

**CHAIR**—Perhaps you might forward to us the specific plans and guidelines for the ongoing management of this particular problem.

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—We will take that on notice.

**Senator MURPHY**—I want to pursue this issue of the bird strike management. I would like to know if you have had any discussions with the state government, the major airlines and AAL with regard to resolving that issue.

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—This is not a matter that I have taken light-heartedly. I have had some fairly heated discussions with both airlines. As you are aware, figures of \$2½ million to \$3 million are being spoken of in terms of damage and loss of revenue. There are some precedents overseas where aircraft have crashed following bird strikes. There was a good case in Alaska where an American 707 early warning aircraft crashed killing 18,



and that hit snow geese which are about the same size as magpie geese.

We have spoken to the airlines. The general thrust that seems to be coming back is that, as the landlord, we are responsible for the property. The advice from my legal people is that is correct. There might be other advice around from other sources saying that that is not so. But the advice I have is that, as the landlord and as the face of the landlord in the local area, I am responsible for the management of the bird hazard and under my duty of care under occupational health and safety legislation I have to provide a safe environment, and that means looking after the birds. Off the record comments from the airlines have been that these routes—if we continue to have bird strikes at this rate—are not economic and we will not fly here. So the airlines basically have us in a position where they are implying that we have to look after the airfield.

**Senator MURPHY**—I do not quite accept that, I have to say. There is crown land bordering on the defence owned property and, for all intents and purposes, defence owned property is crown land. What discussions have you had with the state government? Because the Town Common, as I understand from the council, is now the state government's responsibility. Who are you going to buy the land off?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—I would have to hand that over to Brigadier Kelly.

**Brig. Kelly**—The Queensland Department of Natural Resources.

**Senator MURPHY**—That is also a problem; isn't it?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—The major bird problem is not out of the Town Common—

**Senator MURPHY**—No. Even if you cut all the grass down within the compound that you currently have, if you levelled it and mowed it as bare as this table and as unattractive to every bird within 500 kilometres, the first thing they would do is jump over the fence and that is where the problem will be.

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—The major problem that we have though is not outside the fence; the problem is inside the fence.

**Senator MURPHY**—But they will not recognise the fence when they are flying from point A to point B. I know a bit about magpie geese; I have seen a fair few of them in the territory. They are there by virtue of the fact that there is something there that attracts them. If it is not there, it is somewhere else they will still flock to there and they will still be a hazard. Somebody has to take the responsibility.

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—We discussed informally the Air Force philosophy of looking at accidents, which is breaking the chain

and breaking the cycle. There was a report done at either the start of last year or two years ago by a Mr Davidson looking at the bird habitat. One of the comments he passed in that report was that the area of the coast—he named an area from the north up towards Cairns down south towards Mackay—is a known bird habitat and a migratory area for, I think, a Chinese tern and several other birds that travel long distances because of the attractiveness of this whole part of the coastline to birds. We cannot change the migratory habits of birds. One of the things most people have noticed—but we have not documented—is that the birds are diurnal. You will see the birds moving a lot early in the morning between five and about seven and between about four and seven at night they do the same thing.

If we make the airfield environs—and I refer you to the drawings behind you in talking about the current fence line—the environment from the edge of the fence line to the runway unattractive to birds, that will reduce substantially the bird strike problem that we have. Aviation is to a certain extent an inherently dangerous business and birds, as you said, do not recognise fences. Therefore, we are trying to make the runway environment unattractive as much as possible. The movement of the borrow pits further out will take some of the bird life away. But a lot of the birds that we actually saw today nesting on the airfield are not the birds that are causing us problems.

**Senator MURPHY**—I understand that. We are proposing to spend some \$2 million to move the borrow pits but they are currently not on defence land, are they?

**Brig. Kelly**—That is correct.

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—No.

**Senator MURPHY**—That is why I have a view that there has to be more of a shared responsibility with regard to the cost of overcoming this problem of bird strike where the birds locate themselves in very close proximity to the runway and within internal areas of existing defence land and what is going to be acquired land. The Heritage Commission says, 'This could have an impact on the environment in respect of the birds.' I still have a view that therefore there ought to be a bit more of a cooperative effort to cover the cost of achieving that. It is not going to cost you \$2 million to fix up that bit of low-lying land that you have next to the runway.

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—I cannot comment on the cost because that is not my area of expertise. It is quite surprising what the costs are. The underrun area that we noticed this morning I pointed out on either side of the road—

**Senator MURPHY**—Where is the cost for that?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—That was done as a local works project through the Defence Estate Organisation.

**Senator MURPHY**—Is this the \$5 million?

**Brig. Kelly**—No, Wing Commander McHugh is referring to some works that you saw at the end of the strip this morning just as we commenced the tour. I think that cost \$400,000. We have identified a certain amount of money set aside for the additional works that we spoke of although we do not know the actual estimate at this stage.

**Senator MURPHY**—But I understood you, Brigadier Kelly, to say that you might be proposing a medium works of around \$5 million to fix that problem?

**Brig. Kelly**—Correct, but I hope it will be a lot less than \$5 million. In terms of the principle you are raising, I am sure we would agree that, if we could offset some of the cost, we would be keen to do that. I believe that the cost in relocating the borrow pits was raised informally with council a couple of times but without any great interest, and I can understand that. We would generally accept that, even though we put the borrow pits there, they have been on public land. But after 55 or whatever years, we would accept they are part of the environment and we would accept the responsibility to move them.

**Senator MURPHY**—I am not disputing that.

**Brig. Kelly**—In terms of the other issues, I am not sure that Qantas or Ansett would expect to contribute. It is certainly a pragmatic approach that they might do so to offset their own losses. The airlines are likely to believe that the airport operators are responsible, and that puts it back to ourselves and AAL.

I am not sure that we have had discussions with AAL. I think before I answered the question, I would want to check what our existing MOU is with AAL in terms of maintenance. In very general terms, I believe AAL pays a contribution each year and we undertake maintenance presumably partly on their behalf. I do not know without checking the wording of that agreement, but it could include additional things like fixing vermin, bird strike, et cetera. I would need to check that. If it is not clear, then perhaps we should take it up with AAL. I am not sure how AAL contributes to capital works that are for the overall benefit of the airport either. I simply do not have that local knowledge, but it is something that I think we should take up. I would not want the works to bog down necessarily while we do this, so perhaps we could look at it and get some agreements in principle and proceed.

**Senator MURPHY**—Thank you.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Just on birds, my understanding is that you had an expert over from New Zealand; is that right?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—No, a UK expert came out.

**Mr LINDSAY**—They indicated to your committee that if you could manage the area inside the airport perimeter the problem would be significantly reduced?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—His informal advice was that, if we could manage the areas adjacent to the runways and the flight strip area, we would substantially reduce our bird strike problem.

**Mr LINDSAY**—I was at Brisbane airport a few weeks ago with the operators there and they have a bird problem there, but the system still seems to operate. I am sorry I did not hear AAL's evidence but I was downstairs doing a citizenship ceremony. We have 12 new Aussies this afternoon. Does the RAAF master plan for the base fit in with AAL's master plan? As I understand it, AAL has a strategic development plan and an environmental plan. Has the consultation been there to lock those two together?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—Consultation between the two has been extensive. We are not tied to their master plan and they are not tied to our master plan, but a lot of parallel planning is going on. There is certainly a lot of consultation on what we hope to achieve, what they hope to achieve and how we can best complement each other in the works they are doing.

**Mr LINDSAY**—How would they not be tied if in their evidence they have talked about a drainage plan? There would surely have to be a commonality there; is that right?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—Correct.

**Brig. Kelly**—Any master planning process has, as one of its initial steps, an investigation of local requirements. Without being able to speak specifically on this, I would be confident that that would occur. We have to look at the other stakeholders in the area.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Currently AAL are seeking to have a meeting between the ministers involved in relation to the leasing of the airport and the original undertakings that were entered into. Is there anything in all of that that you know might affect this committee's decision today?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—No, I am not aware of anything specifically. I was not aware this meeting was coming up.

**Mr LINDSAY**—It is with Fahey, Anderson and Moore, as I understand it.

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—We have not been involved in preparation for that meeting.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Just two final matters: AAL's evidence talked about 'mowing priority in operational areas'; is that an issue with Defence?

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—We have had some difficulties with one of our contractors, and I believe that all of the problems have been overcome.

**Mr LINDSAY**—The final matter is this point raised by AAL:

revegetating the grassed areas adjacent to the runways, taxiways and aprons with vegetation that does not attract birds, in particular magpie geese.

Is that planned?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—That is not a simple one to answer. The dilemma is that we are adjoining the RNE area and the RNE listed area might not appreciate widespread use of the sort of grasses that we might introduce that birds do not particularly like. It is something that would take a bit of research to come up with an answer. I guess we do not know right now. Para grass has been used for years and years, and Parks and Wildlife are currently saying that is an introduced grass—a weed if you like. Parks and Wildlife are keen to try to get rid of the Para grass. We are having discussions with them on what else we can come up with. At this stage I do not think we have a solution other than that we need to do something. But it could not be as simple as it seems.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Just one more question, was the Bureau of Meteorology consulted about this project? Do they have any concerns in relation to their facilities on base?

**Wing Cmdr Nicholson**—We are not aware of any concerns. I do not know whether Wing Commander McHugh is aware of any.

**Mr LINDSAY**—They are quite close to the development that will be taking place.

**Wing Cmdr McHugh**—No concerns have been raised with me.

**Mr LINDSAY**—Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIR**—There being no further questions, it is proposed that the correspondence received that has been circulated to members of the committee be taken as read and incorporated in the transcript of evidence. Do members have any objections? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

*The correspondence read as follows—*

**CHAIR**—Before closing, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the witnesses who have appeared before the committee today and also to thank committee members, the Hansard officers and the secretariat.

Resolved (on motion by **Mrs Crosio**):

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

**Committee adjourned at 3.33 p.m.**