



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

**JOINT PARLIAMENTARY
COMMITTEE**

on

PUBLIC WORKS

Reference: Infrastructure on the Bradshaw field training area, Timber Creek

DARWIN

Thursday, 1 May 1997

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Members:

Mr Andrew (Chair)

Senator Calvert
Senator Ferguson
Senator Murphy

Mr Richard Evans
Mr Forrest
Mr Grace
Mr Hatton
Mr Hollis

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Present

Mr Andrew (Chair)

Senator Calvert

Mr Grace

Senator Ferguson

Mr Hollis

The committee met at 8.59 a.m.

Mr Andrew took the chair.

CHAIR—Brigadier McCann, Brigadier Wallace, officers and colleagues, ladies and gentlemen: I declare open this public hearing into the proposed development of infrastructure on the Bradshaw Field Training Area, Timber Creek, Northern Territory.

The project was referred to the Public Works Committee for consideration and report to Parliament by the House of Representatives on 19 March, 1997 at an estimated out-turn cost of \$53.66 million.

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.

Yesterday the committee conducted an extensive aerial inspection of the Bradshaw training area, and the proposed locations of various components in the proposal were pointed out by the Army officers who accompanied us. Following the inspection, the committee held a public meeting at Timber Creek, which was well attended by members of the local community. At the meeting, members of the local community expressed strong support for the project; however, a number of issues were raised which we will canvass at this hearing.

Bradshaw Station is in the federal electorate of the Northern Territory, which is represented by the Hon. Nick Dondas. We extended an invitation to Mr Dondas to join us on the inspection, and to be present at the public meeting at Timber Creek yesterday and the public hearing today. Unfortunately, due to previous electoral commitments, Mr Dondas could not join us this morning, and has sent his apologies, but hopes to be with us at lunch time. I should also extend an apology on behalf of Senator Murphy, who in fact is incapacitated as a result of a back injury sustained over the weekend and is seeking medical advice this morning. Hopefully he will also join us later in the morning.

Bradshaw Station is in the Territory electorate of Victoria River, which is represented by Mr Tim Baldwin. Similar invitations were extended to Mr Baldwin. As you probably know, the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly is sitting today and, being the government whip, Mr Baldwin could not be present, and has also sent his apologies—

sentiments that will be understood more appropriately by Senator Calvert than anyone else who is present here.

Today the committee will hear evidence from the Department of Defence, and the Northern Territory Government. I will now call representatives from the Department of Defence who will be sworn in by the Assistant Secretary.

EASTER, Mr Bryan, Project Director, Facilities and Properties Division, Department of Defence, Campbell Park Offices (CP3-2-20), Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

LANS, Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin, Staff Officer 1 Training Area Design, Army Headquarters, Russell Offices, (G-3-28), Army Headquarters, Department of Defence, Australian Capital Territory

McCANN, Brigadier Raymond Leslie, Director General Accommodation and Works—Army, Campbell Park Offices (CP3-2-15), Department of Defence, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

MARTIN, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph John, Staff Officer 1 Combat Support—Force Development Land, Headquarters Australian Defence Force, Department of Defence, Russell Offices (B-3-08), Army Headquarters, Department of Defence, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

TWEEDIE, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Marshall, Commanding Officer, Darwin Logistic Battalion, Department of Defence, Robertson Barracks, Palmerston, Northern Territory

PINNEY, Mr John, Deputy Secretary Lands, Northern Territory Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, GPO Box 1680, Darwin, Northern Territory

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

Brig. McCann—Mr Chairman, this proposal seeks approval for the infrastructure development of Bradshaw Station to permit its efficient and sustainable use as a manoeuvre and field firing area. In the Defence White Paper 1994, the Government foreshadowed the acquisition of a new field training area in northern Australia as the result of the increased Defence presence in the north, particularly the relocation of the 1st Brigade to Darwin.

Bradshaw Station was acquired by Defence in February 1996. The property is approximately 600 kilometres south west of Darwin, and has an area of 871,000 hectares. It has been a pastoral lease and has very limited infrastructure.

Following acquisition, Defence commissioned a number of baseline studies to assess the impact of military training on the property. Additionally, Defence submitted a notice of intention to Environment Australia and the Northern Territory government in October 1996. Following this, Environment Australia directed that an environmental impact statement be prepared by Defence, and guidelines were prepared by the Northern

Territory Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, in consultation with Environment Australia. Defence intends to complete the EIS by December this year.

A preliminary range siting board was conducted in November 1996 to produce a development plan for the training area. The range siting board applied the user requirement to the ground to decide in broad terms the best areas in which to conduct the various forms of training, and where facilities should go.

To ensure the training area is used efficiently and to meet EIS obligations, certain basic infrastructure is required for reasons of safety, training support, and effective environmental management. The proposed works include access to the property consisting of a bridge over the Victoria River; two C130 airfields; a landing craft ramp and hardstand; access within the property consisting of a network of primary and secondary roads; facilities to support training, including a range control complex, two 500-man camps, a training force maintenance area; two managers' residences; and environment control and management facilities.

The estimated cost of the proposal was \$51.2 million in December 1996 prices, an out-turn cost estimated at \$53.66 million. Subject to parliamentary approval, works are planned to commence in late 1997 with construction to be completed by December 2000. Thank you.

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

The document read as follows -

CHAIR—Brigadier McCann, I understand there are some amendments proposed to the submission, and I wonder if you would like to elaborate on those amendments.

Brig. McCann—Thank you, Mr Chairman. I would request that the following amendments be made to the written Defence evidence: paragraph 16, line one, insert "unilaterally" after "used." Paragraph 20, line one, delete "shortfall," insert "load." Subparagraph 27, delete "sighted," insert "sited." Paragraph 57, delete "August 1997," insert "late 1997." Paragraph 57 again, delete "October 2000," insert "late 2000." Paragraph 79, second last line, delete "reduce," insert, "assist." Paragraph 95, delete "42 months," insert "36 months." They are all minor amendments, Mr Chairman. Thank you.

CHAIR—Gentlemen, the committee will now proceed to questions on the Defence evidence.

Brigadier McCann, this is a substantial project, and there can be no doubt that the committee were impressed by the enormity of the Bradshaw Station proposed development, and by its suitability as a field training area, particularly given the range of terrain. I have to say, though, frankly at the outset that the thing that most concerns me as the Chairman of the committee is the outlay of \$53 million in the face of what is clearly rationalisation of the Defence budget rationalisation which I believe, Brigadier McCann, you are probably more familiar with than almost anyone else in the room. Can you therefore give me any good reason why we should not be recommending to the Parliament a staged development of Bradshaw in order to minimise the expenditure of the \$53 million immediately, and allow infrastructure development to be phased in over a period of, say, 10 years?

Brig. McCann—For the last five months, I have been working on the Defence Efficiency Review, and the aim of that review was to try and make efficiencies in administration, reduce our overheads, so that those savings could be applied to what our Minister describes as the sharp end. The 1st Brigade is the sharp end. In fact, you can't get much sharper than the 1st Brigade.

This particular proposal was all about providing a facility for the 1st Brigade to undertake its training. In terms of both Defence and government priorities, I would see the expenditure of these funds being directly related to the sharp end, directly related to the very important requirement of training the 1st Brigade. And the time requirement is such that, firstly, the funds are being well applied; and the phased approach which you suggested was certainly looked at by the department in the development of the proposal.

The difficulty with the phased approach is that the 1st Brigade will be pretty much totally located in Darwin by the year 2000, and it has always been the Government's intention to provide the training area at that time. The existing training area at Mount Bunday is only suitable for sub-unit training, and for field firing. It will certainly not accommodate manoeuvre and field firing requirements of the total brigade.

I mentioned in the opening statement that the previous government in its 1994 white paper foreshadowed the provision and development of infrastructure on the training

area by 1999. We certainly looked at phasing the construction so that options could have been presented if a phased approach was thought necessary because of resource requirements. So that was certainly looked at, the department considered that, but on balance having the training facility in the north by the time the total 1st Brigade was in location was deemed to be so important that \$53.66 million will be applied to this proposal as a single stage project.

CHAIR—What strikes me though is that everyone accepts that the 1st Brigade will come here—and in fact that is a responsible thing to do as part of the total APIN proposal—but surely training would be even more realistic if instead of 500-person camps we had tents and air conditioners were unknown, and the fuel supply had to come all the way from Darwin via Army fuel lines, as a part of injecting some realism into the training, and saving a large portion of the \$53 million.

Brig. McCann—In fact the building component of the work is quite small. The major part of the work is related to access roads and airfields, which are all integral parts of the training requirement, and also those facilities are required to enable us to manage the property. In fact, many of the facilities are there so that we can meet our EIS obligations, as well as allow the 1st Brigade to train. The building construction proposed, as opposed to the civil works, is relatively minor, and those facilities merely allow units to arrive at Bradshaw and shake out into a training formation to allow the best use to be made of time.

CHAIR—You referred to the EIS obligations that Defence face. Some criticism has been levelled at Defence that you would be aware of in the submissions given to this committee, on the grounds that in fact the project is proceeding ahead of the environmental standards being met. How would you react to that criticism, Brigadier?

Brig. McCann—The environmental assessment is one of the first occasions I can recall where the studies will be assessed by two governments. So we have almost a double measure of supervision in this particular exercise. And I assume that is rightly so, because of some of the values of, and the size of, the property. At this stage there is general agreement that what we are seeking from the EIS, an outcome which looks to how we can manage the facility. Many EISs in the past focused on development of a greenfields site. What we are very interested in, and so are all the environmental authorities, is producing an outcome that allows for the longer term management of the site.

As far as proceeding with some works before the environmental impact statement process is completed, there are protections there. They have been agreed, certainly with the Northern Territory Department of Lands, Planning and Environment. For example, the construction of the bridge over the Victoria River will be subjected to a separate notice of intention process. And the Northern Territory Department of Lands, Planning and Environment will manage that assessment.

We are also preparing a range construction management plan, which will cover all the environmental issues associated with construction practices on Bradshaw, and that plan will be assessed by both Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments. So we are working within an endorsed program, and are confident that the management practices will ensure the protection of sensitive areas.

CHAIR—I was interested in your reference to a greenfields site. There are parts of Bradshaw that at this time of the year are scarcely greenfield sites, as you will understand. Could you perhaps comment for the *Hansard* record on what has been the Army's experience with its training grounds, and the level of environmental sensitivity displayed by Defence Australia on its various sites around Australia?

Brig. McCann—I believe Defence has quite a good record with its environmental management of its training areas. And that record has been achieved, I might add, at some considerable financial cost. To give an example, the restoration of the very seriously degraded Puckapunyal training area in Victoria is a very deliberate process, that has taken place over the last three decades, with local environmental authorities. That has now produced, I believe, a remarkable result with Puckapunyal now almost appearing like a postcard landscape. We are talking about an area that was severely degraded by previous grazing, by heavy traffic and by constant use, particularly during the World War II period. And many of your committee, Mr Chairman, have visited Puckapunyal and have seen some of the achievements made there. I think there is widespread recognition that Puckapunyal has been a model of restoration and environmental management.

The other example I would draw the committee's attention to is Shoalwater Bay Training Area on the east coast of Queensland. That is a large training area, some 274,000 hectares, which the Army acquired in 1965 at the start of the Vietnam conflict. In 1965 Shoalwater Bay was a degraded grazing property. In 30 years, Army's environmental management and the ability to allow the land to be rested has resulted in Shoalwater Bay being declared the last great wilderness area on the east coast of Australia. It has been registered on the National Estate as a heritage area. So 30 years of Defence use has turned what was a degraded property to a national treasure registered on the National Estate. I believe that we could do something similar at Bradshaw, and that is why I am confident that with our experience and our resources, and by working together with the Northern Territory government, we can achieve a very satisfactory outcome at Bradshaw in environmental management.

CHAIR—But in response to my question, Brigadier, and I quote you, you said that what had happened at Puckapunyal and at Shoalwater Bay had been, your quote, achieved at considerable financial cost. Why should the rehabilitation of the now Bradshaw Station into an environmental wilderness be the financial cost to the taxpayer through the Department of Defence rather than through Environment Australia? Are you envisaging similar financial outlays would be necessary to rehabilitate the environment at Bradshaw?

Brig. McCann—The reference to costs, Mr Chairman, relate more to Puckapunyal where construction activities and special works were required to restore the area. Much of the work at Shoalwater Bay occurred as a result of natural regeneration with the cessation of grazing. Bradshaw is in that category. There is no major work required to effect restoration. Much of the restoration will happen through natural regeneration and through the application of sound environmental management practices. The other area of expenditure comes with the cost of undertaking the environmental impact studies themselves. But that is a procedural aspect which is required as part of the development and approval of all proposals.

CHAIR—I would just like briefly to return to the community reaction that we gauged yesterday, and I thought yesterday was a very useful day from the committee's point of view in not only assessing the potential of Bradshaw but meeting with the Timber Creek community and seeing how enthusiastic, frankly, they have been about the development and the enthusiasm that for example Sergeant Danny Bacon showed for the lifestyle of Timber Creek. Brigadier McCann, can you indicate to the committee whether or not any of the infrastructure that currently makes up the Timber Creek community—power and water—will be required in any way for the maintenance of Bradshaw once the field training area is fully developed? Will the field training area be quite independent of the community in terms of its own power and water supply?

Brig. McCann—Yes, Mr Chairman, the training area will be independent. Timber Creek, while it appears to be a thriving metropolis, does in fact have relatively limited infrastructure. The committee may have noticed a small diesel power generation plant there, and that infrastructure would not be capable of supporting the loads which we would impose on it. The facilities at Bradshaw will be totally self-reliant and will not create any demand on the limited Timber Creek infrastructure.

CHAIR—Among the concerns expressed by the Timber Creek community were concerns about access to the Victoria River. Could you comment on what you see as the imposition that Army and, particularly, Defence field training will put—on the Victoria River and the use of it by the local community or by tourists?

Brig. McCann—At this stage, Defence has acquired the pastoral lease, and the major river, the Victoria River, falls outside that lease. So there will still be an ability by the locals and tourists to utilise the Victoria River. Any Defence use of the Victoria River would be reasonably minor, and would consist of bridging and rafting training, which would not impose any great restrictions on the use of the Victoria River. Major access to the training area will be provided by a permanently constructed bridge. So on each deployment, it's not as if we will be undertaking major river crossing exercises. Continued use of the Victoria River by tourists and fishing groups will be possible.

CHAIR—The permanently constructed bridge you referred to was a matter of a great deal of interest at yesterday's public meeting, and there was a request from the

Timber Creek community for some sort of public access to that bridge, particularly pedestrian access. Is Defence prepared to consider that request, and do you envisage that a separate pedestrian lane may be economically justified in the circumstances?

Brig. McCann—Mr Chairman, the proposal from the local community seemed to have merit. My understanding of the request was that the bridge would be able to be used in a recreational form for fishing. Just how we might do that, whether it is a pedestrian walkway or some other type of structure, we will look at. Certainly we will take that into account in the design stage of the bridge, and there could be a number of ways of meeting that requirement. We will investigate that further with a view, of course, to keeping costs to a minimum.

CHAIR—There is also a good deal of enthusiasm in the community for what they saw as the job opportunities created by the development of Bradshaw and the ongoing job opportunities that may exist when the field training area is fully developed. Can you comment—this is a twofold question, Brigadier—on the way in which contracts may be let as part of the development phase, and the opportunities that there may be for employment for the Timber Creek community as a result of this proposed \$53 million expenditure?

Brig. McCann—The construction works will be let in two separate areas. The bulk of the work relates to civil construction—that is earthworks; roadworks and airfields—and that is going to be what I would describe as some fairly brute force civil engineering work, which I would expect would be more suitable for the larger civil contractors in the Northern Territory. Having said that, opportunity would exist for smaller businesses to work for major contractors or subcontractors on civil works. But, certainly, the bulk of the work relates to the civil earthworks part of the project.

A smaller, but nevertheless still significant, workload of about \$12 million relates to basic building works, and we are talking about fairly rudimentary building work. Those works would be let to builders on the Defence Northern Territory panel. We have a number of panels for builders in the Northern Territory. These panels have a life for the next two or three years. We deliberately established one of those panels to provide increased opportunities for small and medium enterprises. We have a building panel for projects less than \$4 million, and many of the small Northern Territory and Darwin based builders are represented on that panel.

We would go to that panel seeking competitive prices for the building works at Bradshaw and, again, opportunities for local involvement—by local I mean Timber Creek—would be in the subcontract area. I believe that the value to Timber Creek comes more from the ongoing management and operation of the range. There will be work associated with maintenance, environmental management, hazard reduction, support of the range control complex—tasks like cleaning—and the provision of some supplies to training troops. And that is an opportunity which remains for the life of the facility. The capital works component of the project is relatively short lived. I believe the employment

of the building panel for small builders will be welcome in Darwin. We conducted an industry briefing last year before we set up these panels, and we certainly had agreement from the local building industry in Darwin before we took the steps to establish the present panels.

Mr HOLLIS—What consultation has there been with the local Aboriginal community?

Brig. McCann—There has been an extensive process of consultation. Defence commissioned a specialist firm—a firm specialising in issues management—to undertake a community consultation program on our behalf. That company has been used very successfully by us on other projects, and there has been a program of meetings at various small centres such as Timber Creek, Kununurra and Katherine. There has been the production of newsletters, which the committee saw an example of yesterday, and some of those newsletters have reached down into the Timber Creek community. A freecall hotline number has been established, as has a mailing list. The mailing list has something like 250 people on it. So that community consultation program is reasonably extensive and appears to be working, and there have been quite a few responses to that program. As a separate program of consultation, the environmental assessment process again will more formally seek community comment.

Mr HOLLIS—I am not sure where we are up to in regard to the Wik decision at the moment—I don't think anyone knows—but what access would there be for traditional owners if there were significant sites on that property?

Brig. McCann—We would be quite prepared to consider access to small groups for specific purposes, and certainly access by Aboriginal groups to some of those sites would be considered. Access would have to be controlled for public safety reasons, and that is an issue which will be examined in some detail in the environmental assessment and community consultation process.

We would also consider access for other parties who might be involved, for example, in research, and it is our intention to use some Northern Territory government agencies to undertake some research on our behalf which would assist us in formulating long-term management plans for Bradshaw which are consistent with Northern Territory environmental practice. We consider the Northern Territory agencies are much more expert in this area than us. What we would be hoping to achieve is some form of strategic relationship with the Northern Territory government which would allow Defence's management of Bradshaw to occur in a broader regional context, so that we do have consistency between what we do at Bradshaw and what neighbouring property holders might do.

Mr HOLLIS—Brigadier, as I understand it, the government has purchased the

lease; or that would be the remaining period of the lease rather than the lease itself, I take it.

Brig. McCann—We have purchased the pastoral lease, and that is a perpetual lease, Mr Hollis.

Mr HOLLIS—I see. So that is that similar to having freehold, if it is a perpetual lease?

Brig. McCann—There are certainly differences in rights and obligations between a perpetual lease and freehold lease, and Defence are, in fact, considering converting the pastoral lease to freehold. We have done that with our other training area here in the Northern Territory at the Mount Bunday training area. At this stage, the issue has become a little more complex with some contemporary consideration of issues such as Wik, and they are really matters still to be resolved by government. In a way, we are just waiting for the position to become a bit more clear before we will consider further converting pastoral leases to freehold.

Senator CALVERT—I note in this \$54 million project, there's no mention of the cost of the lease. Are we allowed to know how much Commonwealth paid for this piece of land?

Brig. McCann—There are confidentiality agreements with the sale price. I am quite prepared to advise the committee confidentially of the sale price—but on the basis that it is confidential.

Senator CALVERT—Do you have a fund for property acquisition and it comes out of that particular fund?

Brig. McCann—Property acquisition is funded from the same program as capital works, and that is managed by the organisation I work for. There is a program of acquisition, the same as we have a program of capital construction.

Senator CALVERT—On any stretch of the imagination, it's a huge piece of land—871,000 hectares. It is bigger than Monte Carlo, Liechtenstein or Slovenia. It is almost as big as Tasmania. The Chairman alluded to this. Why do you need so much? You say in your submission here it is envisaged that only about one per cent will actually be impacted upon by Defence activities, so 10,000 hectares, roughly, will be used out of a total of 871,000. That is one question. The other one is that it is not an insignificant distance from Darwin. Why does it have to be so far away? Why could you not have found 10,000 hectares closer to Darwin?

Brig. McCann—I will start off by addressing the issue of the size of the training area. It might not surprise you, but we have been asked this question many times by

bureaucrats in seeking departmental approval of the proposal. And it has been an issue that has been investigated and debated at some considerable length. But the decision on size has been based on careful analysis of the 1st Brigade's training requirements, and on other issues such as the fragility of the environment and the requirement to rest and rotate certain parts of the training area.

One of the other difficulties is associated with the period for which we would gain access to the area. We think that access would only be available for training purposes for about 27 weeks of the year, but the 1st Brigade's training requirement requires about 64 weeks per year access for major manoeuvre deployments. So what we need is some concurrent activity by a number of major units in the brigade. So there is a requirement immediately for two, if you like, separate manoeuvre areas to allow for concurrent use to meet the training requirement of 64 weeks per year, noting that we can only get access for 27 weeks a year because of wet season limitations.

There are also requirements I mentioned to avoid certain environmentally fragile areas, heritage sites, so not all of the area is suitable and I think the overflight yesterday with the committee demonstrated that much of the area will in fact not be accessed for training. Particularly on the western region, there would be limited use of that particular area.

The requirements for a major training unit have been calculated based on 1st Brigade's organisation—the types of equipment it operates, the guns, the range of the guns, the fact we are talking about a highly mobile organisation with artillery firing extended range projectiles up to 30 kilometres, and a requirement to actually redeploy your artillery during the manoeuvre. You start to arrive at fairly considerable space requirements for a unit like the cavalry regiment or the armoured regiment. And those calculations for a manoeuvre area for a major unit have been estimated at some 350,000 hectares.

Senator CALVERT—I wonder how the Swiss Army get on when they want to do something.

Brig. McCann—I read the Swiss Army still have the motorcycle battalions. The basic requirement is probably not as great as for cavalry and tanks.

Senator CALVERT—The other part of my question was about why the distance from Darwin.

Brig. McCann—The distance from Darwin was driven more by a judgment on training effectiveness, if you like—and the cost. The 1st Brigade on the road is a pretty fuel hungry organisation and it consumes time, and time is a resource. Judgment was made that the training area should be acquired within two days travelling time and a number of sites were looked at throughout the Top End which were located within two

days travelling time. Bradshaw fits within that; in fact it is about one day's travelling time to Bradshaw. Other training areas, existing training areas like Yampi in Western Australia, are about four days travelling time. Shoalwater Bay is five or six days travelling time; Townsville, five days. That can be a considerable expense.

For example, we think that if we had to send the 1st Brigade from Darwin to Yampi, the cost—talking now only about the direct cost of taking a convoy—is something like a \$5 million cost penalty per year, just going the extra distance. So there is a direct cost of about \$5 million a year penalty going to Yampi. But more important than that is what we lose in time. And time is very important in the Northern Territory because you have really only about 27 to 29 weeks of the year where an organisation like the 1st Brigade can train; obviously we don't want to spend valuable time just travelling along highways.

Senator CALVERT—The other thing, of course, is it would seem that this training facility will virtually be for the exclusive use of the 1st Brigade. Why? Is it not more of a general purpose facility?

Brig. McCann—The training area is not for the exclusive use of the 1st Brigade. Certainly the 1st Brigade will be the major user of the facility, but clearly the facility will be a Defence facility used by the air force and to a lesser extent by the navy. It will be used by other Army units and formations other than the 1st Brigade. I would expect brigades from southern Australia to train on Bradshaw and we would expect some foreign force usage.

Senator CALVERT—I know that other countries use Delamere range. Is it possible to recoup some of that cost by renting it out to other countries?

Brig. McCann—In present arrangements with other countries training in Australia there is an element of cost recovery. For example, the exercise Tandem Thrust at Shoalwater Bay with American marines earlier this year was, in fact, based on cost recovery. And certainly the US forces paid their way.

Senator CALVERT—I remember seeing a documentary on the Tandem Thrust exercise. One of the things the Army prided themselves in that was, after the exercise, the small impact on the environment. Will you be continuing to have those types of plans to enable correct use of the environment in this particular area?

Brig. McCann—Exercise Tandem Thrust was useful to us because that is where we first attempted to establish a more structured environmental management information system, one which can actually monitor the impacts of training in real time. It is very important to look at the situation before and after training so that the impacts can be judged in a more scientific way. We intend to further develop the environmental management information system which we used at exercise Tandem Thrust here on

Bradshaw. In fact, Bradshaw will become the next major area where we wish to pursue this further. There is interest from overseas countries, the Australian Defence organisation is presently part of a trilateral involving Canada and the United States, looking at environmental impacts of Defence activities.

We are very keen to progress the environmental management information system so that we have a better and more scientific way of monitoring Defence use in real time. So I think Shoalwater Bay has been a valuable experience with Tandem Thrust, and particularly now we have very keen interest from the Americans and the Canadians that will allow us to apply further skills that we might not have been able to apply on our own.

Senator CALVERT—You said earlier that Defence would consider allowing access to smaller groups, whether they be for cultural purposes or for recreational purposes—and I think that is one of the major things that was raised yesterday at the public meeting. Obviously there are some good fishing spots there that the locals want to get to and also the commercial companies that trade in tourism. Is there not a conflict there with your unexploded ordinance? How do you in such a large area of land expect to be able to control unexploded ordinance that may happen to be left lying around from time to time with the possibility of people straying into that area?

Brig. McCann—At the moment the rules will change if we acquire freehold title of the property. But under a pastoral lease there are certain access rights to fishermen on the rivers; so while ever the pastoral lease remains there will be that right to access of the rivers. That has been taken into account in our planning, and impact areas are going to be located well away from the rivers. The impact areas have a fair amount of buffer zones built into them so as well as having a specific target area, there are splinter zones, additional safety zones, to cope with ricochets, which are low probability events, and other buffers. All of those buffers will be contained completely within the training area boundaries. The two major rivers mark two of those boundaries. There will be no target area within 20 or so kilometres of a major river. So the target areas will be well remote from those areas. But there will be still a duty of care obligation for us to exercise some controls. And in respect of the siting of impact areas and the control mechanisms, I would ask Lieutenant Colonel Lans to provide us with some more information if you need more information.

Senator CALVERT—If you do, further down the track, convert the lease to freehold, is there a likelihood then that you may ban access to certain groups?

Brig. McCann—That would not be the intention, Senator Calvert. I was merely implying there that rights to access on the rivers under a pastoral lease is something that, while ever we only hold the pastoral lease, we will observe. At this stage we are not sure whether we will move to freehold title; we are just waiting to see what the outcome of some present negotiations is. We would always intend that controlled, and I emphasise controlled, access be allowed for small groups who have a specific and a good reason for

wanting to access the range—Aboriginal heritage groups, scientists, and we would hope that National Parks and Wildlife staff may be contracted by us to undertake research. They are the sorts of groups we're talking about. But their access would be controlled, they would probably be guided by one of the military range control staff to make sure that they did not wander into impact areas or were kept out of the way of exercising troops. So we are certainly talking about controlled access, we just would not accept random access.

Senator CALVERT—If for argument's sake you were having a firing exercise, throwing shells 30 kilometres into an area, before you commence that operation you would obviously send in a reconnaissance group to ensure that there are no people in that area?

Brig. McCann—I will pass that on to Lieutenant Colonel Lans to respond.

Lt Col. Lans—Senator, the Army has a number of set procedures for clearance of impact areas prior to the commencement of live firing and these will be instituted in all cases. And they are designed to ensure that there is nobody in the training area. There are safety procedures which will be used in addition to the normal procedures of warning signs and remoteness and fencing, et cetera, to ensure that there are no unauthorised people in the impact area itself.

In an area such as Bradshaw, the location of the impact areas—we have already looked at some preliminary areas which have been considered as suitable as impact areas—has been well selected in order to be away from any potential areas of conflict with potential, if you like, unauthorised access or even authorised access in terms of the small parties that we might allow onto the area. That does not mean that some people, through determined efforts, may not find their way into these areas. But as you saw for yourself yesterday, the remoteness of the area is such that it would take a most determined person to get into some of these remote impact areas. I believe that the safety procedures which we employ and which we have employed at all ranges throughout Australia, and many ranges which are under far more pressure from civilian unauthorised access, will, in fact, hold up well here at Bradshaw.

Senator CALVERT—How do you intend to protect the kidney eating little people up in the western area?

Lt Col. Lans—By not going there.

CHAIR—Brigadier McCann, before I hand over to Senator Ferguson and Mr Grace, can I just elaborate on one of Senator Calvert's questions. In response to one of Senator Calvert's questions you implied that our allies in the Swiss army with Vespa motor scooters could defend an area almost the size of Bradshaw, and we as a committee recognise—everyone in this room does—that we are talking about defending an area more akin to the size of Europe than the size of Switzerland. And so the training area of Bradshaw has, as a result of its huge size, a number of variable terrains that make a

familiarity with conditions in the north more replicated in Bradshaw than anywhere else. I recognise and I want this on the record that while we could have purchased a smaller property, the capital costs of the purchase may not have been reduced by any more than, say, a maximum of twenty per cent, probably reduced by buying a smaller property. Can I therefore ask, Brigadier McCann, if you would be prepared to confidentially make available to the committee secretary the cost of the original capital purchase of Bradshaw, so the committee can be aware of that as a proportion of the total outlay in this \$53 million project.

My specific question, however, is that, looking at the cost estimates for the Bradshaw development, if the road access to the North Angalarri and the manager's facility at the North Angalarri were not proceeded with as part of the project, then something like \$8 million could be saved. That is obviously a loose figure because these cost estimates are not for general information. My question therefore is how anxious are we to develop that area of the Bradshaw field training facility, given the savings which could be incurred by delaying that development or by constructing the road using Army engineers and Army road equipment over a period of time.

Brig. McCann—Mr Chairman, the response to that goes back to the original calculation of the space required for a major manoeuvre training exercise by elements of 1 Brigade. And that has been calculated based on the characteristics of the vehicles and weapon systems. We need a training area about 350,000 hectares to allow a major unit to conduct live fire and manoeuvre. Then you have the calculation of time available, only 27 weeks a year, to fit in with the 1 Brigade training requirement to have 64 weeks a year access. And that leads you to a requirement for concurrent use of two training areas. The terrain is such that the training areas tend to be limited to a couple of the valleys, and we can point those out on the map to you.

It is really necessary to look at a training area in its entirety, that is, the Angalarri manoeuvre area if you like. To not complete the roads in that particular sector does not allow its use as a training area. And the access roads, I might add, are there for environmental management purposes. They are there for administrative support. The exercising troops might not necessarily use those roads, but the roads are part of the environmental management infrastructure as well as access and support. I might, if you agree, Mr Chairman, ask Lieutenant Colonel Martin to explain that in some more detail if you like.

Lt Col. Martin—Mr Andrew, in addition to what the Brigadier said, we also have duty of care responsibility to all soldiers operating in that part of the training area, which is relatively remote. There is therefore a requirement for access and essentially this is for vehicles that would provide not only logistic support but also safety, and that includes a means of evacuation of personnel operating in that area.

Essentially what we're talking about is a road equivalent in length from Canberra

to Goulburn and if we have got soldiers operating at that distance, particularly if they have limited means of logistic support, it is important for us to have the ability to get to them quickly to support them, not only for training purposes but in the event that there is, for some reason, an injury resulting from training.

I have been up in that area and the only means of communication we had at that time was satellite phone, which unfortunately was not working at the time; and I quickly realised that if I was bitten by a snake or broke my leg, it was a four-hour drive over a rough track just to get to a telephone. And I think that was an important consideration when we determined the infrastructure requirements for the training area.

Brig. McCann—Mr Chairman, could I ask the commander of the 1st Brigade, who is the man who is going to use this area and he is the expert in these matters, to just brief the committee on some of the training requirements—the space requirements, and the infrastructure requirements?

CHAIR—Yes, that would be helpful, because as you would have gathered in the preface to my question, we recognise the need for the space in general terms but it struck me that a staged development excluding part of the space would be a way to save some of the resources.

Brig. McCann—As I mentioned earlier, the department in its review of the proposal looked very closely at staged development. In fact the scope of works which we have presented to the committee is not the full scope of works we sought. For example, our proposal to you involves the construction of two C130 airfields; we asked for three. We also asked a third 500-man camp; the proposal is for two. We also proposed construction of a road up the Yambarran Plateau. Those items were deleted by departmental review of the proposal because they have, as you quite rightly say, the prospect to be undertaken later, possibly even using Army engineers.

One of the criticisms of the EIS process at the moment is that we are only looking at the short term requirements. I would like the committee to understand that the EIS is looking at what we thought was the total requirement: three airfields, three camps, other roads. So the EIS is considering an impact of military use greater than what this proposal involves. We have tried to predict the ultimate military impact on the area, so that the EIS is not just looking at short term use.

And we would wish to gain some experience with the training area, after we have had a few exercises there. In fact, it might well be that with some years of experience what is proposed in this proposal is quite adequate. But if our experience indicates that, yes, we do in fact need a third camp or a third airfield, then we have gone through the environmental impact process, which means that they can be added at a later stage in the future, if ever we determine we might need them. I'm not saying for a moment that we will construct a third airfield. What I'm saying is that we'll look at the environmental

impact if that did happen; but we will gain some years of experience on the training area before we consider some additional works. So there is an element of phasing in there already.

CHAIR—Thank you, Brigadier McCann. As you'll understand, what I was seeking was some indication of the need to develop what is an expensive area, and that is the North Angalarri area. That is what I was happy to have Brigadier Wallace elaborate on.

Brig. McCann—Yes, Mr Chairman, and that relates to the integrity of a training area.

Brig. Wallace—Thank you, Mr Chairman. From my point of view, the Angalarri Valley offers the best potential for fire and manoeuvre exercises—particularly at brigade level—in the exercise area. If we were not to develop the access right through that particular area, we'd really be under-utilising the facility and severely limiting, I think, the scope for us as a brigade to operate.

I think it's important to point out that the limitation for the brigade, in how it manoeuvres, whether it is in operations or in training, is really not the mobility effect on its combat vehicles which obviously are designed for off road manoeuvre, but it's the mobility effect on its logistics vehicles, which are essentially the civilian equivalent in their mobility. So they need some sort of access roads that we can move them along and as I say that's a consideration either in war or in training. So, not to be able to move, not to have that road, as has been described going up the Angalarri Valley, would severely limit our ability to manoeuvre the brigade. And that's a realistic consideration, whether it's in training or operations.

I would like to endorse too the point that has been made, from my point of view as a commander, about safety. I certainly would not want to see soldiers operating in the areas that they would be, remote within the training area up the Angalarri Valley to its north, without a main road that we could quickly get people out of in the event of an incident.

I think it needs to be said here that the nature of the training, of fire and manoeuvre training, particularly with the type of weapons that we're using, means that there is potential for injury and if we do have an accident, there is the potential to have multicasualties. Therefore we do need to have guaranteed routes to get people out, and that's a very important reason to have that road.

There is also an element of economy in this too and that is that if a component of the brigade is using that particular remote area of the training area because it's best for the type of training that it's doing, then it is important that we're able to take the tanks in particular, the tracked vehicles, up that road to the training area, rather than running the tanks all that distance. We do more damage and it's certainly more costly for us to run the

tank up that distance than it is to run the tank on a wheeled vehicle, the tank transporter.

I think the other aspect, too, which is important is that one reason for placing that range control element up the northern part of the range is that that is the only other area through which access can be obtained to the range, as has been explained, by someone who is determined to get in there. Being able to place someone up there will just provide that additional bit of confidence for us that we haven't got unauthorised access to the range, that people are not violating the range during firing. Thank you.

CHAIR—I would want it on the record that the cost savings being alluded to are not only the savings we are making as part of the road construction, but also with the backup facilities that were also mentioned in the costs currently before the PWC committee.

Senator FERGUSON—You repeated on a number of occasions this morning the fact that this facility is only going to be used for 27 or 29 weeks of the year. There might be a simple answer to something that has been puzzling me, and that is that obviously all the training is going to be done in the dry season out on this facility. Does this mean that the Army has made the judgment that in the Defence of Australia, any future conflict will only take place in the dry season?

Brig. Wallace—No, that's certainly not the case, although we do recognise that anyone who was to consider attacking Australia would be more likely to do it in the dry season, because obviously while the wet season affects our mobility, it also affects his mobility and his ability to generate operations.

However having said that, given the nature of operations we perceive at this stage as most likely against Australia, a low level threat, then obviously someone could use the wet season and we'll be aiming to operate in the wet season as well. Our concern is that we will not operate in the wet season at the sort of scale that would cause environmental degradation to the range area. And so while we will look at using the range to some degree during the wet season, we'll be limiting that, mainly because of our concern for the environment and our continued use of the range. I do anticipate for instance that we'd hold what we call tactical exercises without troops there, where we'd look at problems with command teams going out and assessing problems and doing some planning. We would hold limited mobility tests to see just what was the effect of the wet on our vehicles and our ability to manoeuvre, but we would not do it in scale, so that, as I said, we don't reduce the range, or degrade it environmentally.

Senator FERGUSON—One of the advantages of the size of the range might be that a small area might be set aside where if damage was to be done to the environment it could be confined. The size of the area ought to make it possible to use it possibly for more than 27 weeks of the year provided it was in a confined area.

Brig. McCann—Those are certainly matters to be considered in the environmental assessment process.

Mr TED GRACE—I notice that you say in your submission to us that the decisions that have been made have been based on earlier white papers, one in 1987, Defence of Australia, and then in 1991, the Force Structure Review, then in 1994. One of the documents is 10 years old and the other one has been around for a fair while, and they were prepared by the former government. Is it likely that particularly because of the Defence Efficiency Review there would be a re-examination of the direction Australian Defence policy is taking, which could have a bearing on this project?

Brig. McCann—There's been since 1976, when we had a major white paper, a remarkable consistency in the development of Defence policy as we started to think about the Defence of Australia. The 1987 and 1994 white papers carried through that same theme. So there has been that consistency. The Defence Efficiency Review is really about cutting costs and overheads, removing duplication and being able to provide additional resources to the sharp end, in an environment where outlays to Defence will not increase. Having said that, the minister has commissioned a new strategic assessment. This assessment, I believe, has just been finished, or is certainly almost finished, and the minister will then look again at this government's approach to Defence policy.

At this stage, I have not been privy to any of the strategic assessments that have been going on, but I think it's pretty safe to assume that we have had this remarkable degree of consistency over the last 20 years. There will always be an emphasis on the Defence of Australia and the best way to gain experience and to be prepared for such a requirement is to actually live and operate and train in the north, which is what the move of the 1st Brigade is all about.

I would certainly see a long-term future for Defence presence in the north and therefore a very long-term future for Bradshaw Field Training Area. I might add the Bradshaw training area, if we go ahead and develop it, would be attractive for some foreign force usage—and that is consistent with the present government's policy objectives which emphasise regional engagement and strengthening our existing alliance arrangements.

Senator FERGUSON—Is it fair to say that it's your assessment then that the Defence Efficiency Review is likely to have little or no impact on anything that's likely to happen at Bradshaw?

Brig. McCann—The Defence Efficiency Review won't, because it's all about saving costs at the blunt end. In fact, the Defence Efficiency Review makes possible the allocation of resources to a project such as this. This proposal is certainly about the sharp end, and is certainly seen in a departmental context as very high priority. The last thing we want is for the 1st Brigade to have moved to Darwin—at considerable capital cost I

might add—and suddenly we don't have an adequate training area. Now the time is fast approaching when the brigade will be totally located in the Northern Territory and in terms of the capital costs alone we'll have spent something like \$600 million. There are a lot of other extra increases in operating costs as well as that investment. So if we did not proceed with this proposal we would certainly not be making best use of what is already a very large capital investment.

Senator FERGUSON—In the confidential cost estimates you have provided to us, there is an item under approval costs. Is it possible for you to tell us what the cost of the community consultation process was?

Brig. McCann—Yes, that information is available on the public record. We'll get that cost of the Turnbull Fox Phillips consultancy. That is available on the public record, it's been published in the Government Gazette. We'll get that cost to you.

Senator FERGUSON—I'm curious to see what proportion it is of the approval cost.

Brig. McCann—That was a minor cost. The major cost of the approval cost relates to environmental assessments. Baseline studies which are underway at the moment and follow on environmental assessments are expected to cost about one and a half million. So the bulk of that is purely environmental assessments.

Senator FERGUSON—When you're selecting people to do your community consultation process, do you use the same people all the time or do you let it out to tender?

Brig. McCann—Again, it depends on the size of the consultancy, but if it's a consultancy we would expect to cost more than a \$100,000 we are obliged to go through a totally open public process, a two-stage process where we have to issue invitations to register interest. So the whole of the consulting industry can register their interest, then based on some pre-determined selection criteria we will determine the short list, and those short listed consultants, normally numbering about four, would then submit a request for tender.

For lesser size consultancies, and where there's a certain degree of expertise or we have used an organisation with some success, then a financial delegate, like me, has the ability to make a purchasing decision based on a restricted tender process. But such a decision by a financial delegate must withstand public scrutiny. But we will get the contract value for the community consultation program provided to the committee before the day is out.

Mr TED GRACE—One of the problems with batting down the list is of course that most questions have been answered. So you will have to excuse me, Brigadier, if I just go back on some of the questions. The first one I was going to go back on of course

was the cost of the consultancy. You have given a satisfactory answer to that one, but could you or one of your board today explain to me personally, for the record, how the community consultation program operates.

Mr Easter—We commissioned this two-consultant firm to come up first and to search out issues. To do this we undertook a campaign of information; we put notices in the paper, we sent out a newsletter, we undertook a series of visits around a lot of the Northern Territory, explaining to the Northern Territory government, local government and interest groups just what we were doing and how we intended to do that.

We went to the Northern Territory government, we went to Kununurra, we went to Katherine, we went to Litchfield, we went to Palmerston; and as a result of that, and as a result of the response to newsletters and to the advertisements and to a freecall phone line we set up, we began to then get a fairly clear understanding of what the issues of concern were for the project. Each of those issues has been followed up and we have tried to address almost all of those. We have had something like 250 people on our mailing list, which is an indication of the fact that people have asked questions and we have responded, and we continue to use those lists.

Mr TED GRACE—Some of us were surprised yesterday that the indigenous local people did not seem to know what it was all about. Are there reasons why they were not consulted privately or publicly?

Mr Easter—In terms of direct discussion with Aboriginal groups, we have 12 groups that we have had a lot of contact with, people like the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, the Aboriginal land commissioner, the ATSIC groups in Katherine and at Casuarina, the Binjari Community Aboriginal Corporation, the Garrak Jarru Regional Council Support and so forth.

Brig. McCann—There's an extensive list here of the names of the Aboriginal communities we have consulted with. I suspect it was more an issue of a reluctance to speak at a meeting at which there was a lot of very imposing politicians and senior military officers. That may have inhibited questions or discussions.

Mr TED GRACE—The next point I'd like to touch on is going back to the question of accessibility to the site regarding exploration permits, realising that there are some on this site. For the record I'd like to know how will Defence, if they want to, deter other exploration rights being explored; and has the Northern Territory government got the right to refuse exploration rights? In other words, how are we going to deal with it in the future?

Brig. McCann—To start with, Defence does not own mineral rights to Bradshaw Station and there is in fact a Commonwealth policy on access for mining exploration and mining to Commonwealth properties. In fact, a major exercise recently was the

debate over sand mining in Shoalwater Bay, which resulted in an environmental commission of inquiry. The Commonwealth policy is one of multiple land use policy and we would permit access for exploration and mining activities where such access was not going to prejudice significantly the Commonwealth use of the property and such access would be subject to conditions which protect the Commonwealth's interest and particularly the environmental values, and that was the case with sand mining at Shoalwater Bay.

As to the other part of your question about the exploration leases; yes, there are three current exploration licences on Bradshaw—two on the western hills sector, and one offshore on the Bonaparte Gulf. The western hills sector is an area which we don't assess we'll use much for military training; it's pretty inaccessible except by air. The three ELs are due to expire in 1999. We don't expect them to give us much of a problem. In addition to those, there are another five EL applications on Bradshaw. Four of these lie in that western hills sector; and again that's an area which we would not expect to use greatly. The Northern Territory Department of Mines and Energy are looking at declaring some of the area as a reservation from occupation, but that is not a Defence activity, that's a local authority response to how it might manage applications.

Mr TED GRACE—Basically, the question was asked because I just want to know to what extent those licences would impede manoeuvres and stuff like that. The other question Brigadier, in view of what we did pay for the pastoral leases, is can you inform us without secrecy who did the evaluation and what is the value of the lease post Wik?

Brig. McCann—Well, I'll certainly provide the purchase price of the lease to the committee, the confidential price. But before purchase took place, there was a fairly detailed evaluation exercise undertaken. That was undertaken on our behalf by the Australian Property Group and negotiations on acquisition were influenced by obviously that valuation.

Mr TED GRACE—My last question, probably irrelevant, is what is the future of Bradshaw Homestead?

Brig. McCann—That will be considered as part of the environmental impact assessment and there are historical and heritage aspects associated with European settlement that the EIS requires us to investigate. I would expect that, on parts of the Bradshaw Station, there might be a requirement as a result of environmental assessment to retain some of those facilities. If that were the case, obviously Defence is going to honour any obligation under the EIS.

Mr TED GRACE—So it could come under some heritage control?

Brig. McCann—The heritage aspects, again, will be considered fully in the EIS. And one of the issues raised with us before is that a number of sites have been nominated for inclusion on the register of the national estate. There's a statutory process for that

under the Australian Heritage Commission Act, and if any site gets listed, then we will manage the site accordingly.

Mr TED GRACE—Would the present use of the homestead completely cease?

Brig. McCann—The present use of the homestead will cease. The—

Mr TED GRACE—They're not going to run any barbecue steaks on it?

Brig. McCann—Well, that might be up to Commander 1 Brigade, but the present lease expires on 1 February 1999, by which time destocking would have taken place and the lessee's presence would have ceased at Bradshaw.

Senator FERGUSON—Where is Mount Bunday?

Brig. McCann—Mount Bunday is south-east of Darwin, approximately 120 kilometres. Mount Bunday training area is of the order of 114,000 hectares. That contrasts with 871,000 hectares at Bradshaw. And you can see now our concern with getting the Bradshaw proposal developed.

Now, 114,000 hectares is still a large area. It's twice the size of Puckapunyal, but we're talking about a totally different environment; very fragile and also much of the space is not suitable for training. We explained earlier that to allow the 1st Brigade to manoeuvre and live fire, one of its major elements, requires about 350,000 hectares. So Mount Bunday does not fall into the category of a major field firing and manoeuvre area for someone like the 1st Brigade. Mount Bunday is really only suitable for field firing of some weapons systems, but this is just static firing, you're not manoeuvring and firing at the same time. It does allow some manoeuvre training, but only for small groups up to what we call sub-unit size.

Senator FERGUSON—Do you envisage keeping it, is it necessary to retain it?

Brig. McCann—Mount Bunday will be retained to meet exactly those requirements for the live firing of weapon systems and for some minor sub-unit training. It will need to be retained because it is obviously much closer than going all the way to Bradshaw. There are time and cost penalties associated with conducting that sort of training at Bradshaw. So, yes, we will retain Mount Bunday for the long term.

Senator FERGUSON—The other question is to do with Bradshaw itself. It would be a bit unusual if there were not a number of feral animals on the place.

Brig. McCann—That will be addressed during the environmental impact study, and the Northern Territory government has already raised this issue with us. They are particularly keen that we assess very carefully the controls of feral animals and noxious

weeds. So that's a major part of our environmental assessment exercise at the moment, and feral animal control will be an activity which we will undertake.

Senator FERGUSON—So you're not aware of what is there at present. Are they likely to be in the most inaccessible areas of Bradshaw? That's the problem.

Brig. McCann—Well, what's present there at the moment is of the order of 1,100 horses and about 1,200 donkeys. This is not unusual. Feral animal control, particularly at the large training area at Yampi in Western Australia is a fairly major exercise.

Senator FERGUSON—What about feral pigs?

Brig. McCann—Feral pigs do exist, but the environmental baseline studies are still addressing their exact numbers.

Senator CALVERT—Are there any water buffalo?

Brig. McCann—No.

Senator CALVERT—No, I was just asking because another committee I'm on was looking at the control of brucellosis and also another committee concerned the aerial shooting of wild horses, and I presume that comes later, perhaps.

But there is one problem we have, when you have got a situation like this, where you're asking the committee to approve something before you have an EIS. Is there anything in your studies so far that has shown up that could be a problem down the track? You are asking us to approve this today, prior to an environment impact statement identifying future problems, and I just wonder have you any indications yet of possible future cost to the government. For instance, noxious weeds have already been mentioned. Another thing that has not been mentioned, and I thought you may have mentioned that when you were talking about the road situation, is access for fire control. It was pretty obvious yesterday that fire, wildfire or deliberate fire, is something that you will have to take into account in your EIS. Are there any major things that you have foreseen already that we haven't talked about?

Brig. McCann—So far we have undertaken studies which enabled us to submit a notice of intention, but the notice of intention was reviewed by Environment Australia. They directed an environmental impact statement. Since then, we have commenced baseline studies. So we're still in that scientific data gathering stage, so it's probably too early to comment, but there's nothing so far which might indicate anything unique or different about Bradshaw.

There are certainly issues that will need to be addressed, and those issues will generally relate to the long-term management of the training area. The committee has

received a submission from the Northern Territory government where they are generally fairly happy with the proposal, but, of course, the processes associated with environmental assessment will need to run their due course.

The protection for allowing some works to commence before the environmental studies are totally completed, we addressed earlier. The bridge will be the subject of a notice of intention and environmental assessment in its own right, and

we have in addition to that certain other range construction management plans. And, as normal with all our contracts, the contractor will be required to comply with certain environmental management aspects during the construction stage. So we believe there is enough protection there.

Senator CALVERT—When you say so far yet there's been nothing unique, I would have thought these so-called little people out in the western hills are unique if they exist. A few people have mentioned them during our discussions here—are they a myth or—

Brig. McCann—We would hope that the baseline studies confirm or otherwise the presence of the little people. It's thought at the moment that it's the myth.

CHAIR—Thank you. Any other questions? I only have one other question for Brigadier McCann, and that is that a significant part of the cost of the proposal is, as we know, the bridge over the Victoria River. It would seem that the Northern Territory government has a monopoly on the construction of this bridge. Could you comment on that monopoly?

Brig. McCann—I would not describe it as a monopoly, Mr Chairman, but we would certainly see that the Northern Territory government has special expertise in that area. After all, it's the authority that's constructed all the similar bridges along the main road between here and Kununurra. We have already engaged them to undertake some preliminary design and feasibility studies and site investigations, and while we say they will build the bridge, they will let contracts for the bridge to be built after they have designed it, and they will let those contracts in a competitive way. So the Commonwealth will still be getting competition and value for money during that process. In fact, what we have been really using the Northern Territory government for is as a design agency and a project manager, but there will still be competition. Tenders will be called for the construction of the bridge.

CHAIR—We have now completed Defence, and I propose to call the witnesses from the Northern Territory government after morning tea.

PINNEY, Mr John, Deputy Secretary Lands, Northern Territory Department of lands, Planning and Environment, GPO Box 1680, Darwin, Northern Territory

CHAIR—Mr Pinney, the committee has received a submission from the Northern Territory government. I understand you seek leave to make a statement on the submission, and I wonder, although I'm not aware, whether you wish to propose any amendments.

Mr Pinney—Only amendments in terms of typing mistakes, which I won't detail in a way that I heard Army detail theirs. But on roads and other infrastructure we're talking about convoys, not conveyes, and I see there's a repeat of the phrase also in that same paragraph.

Chairman, this submission that you have received really is a brief outline that might be best addressed by the committee asking questions to elaborate on issues. But first let me say that the Northern Territory government supports the development of the Bradshaw field training proposal. We are quite pleased with the degree of consultation that has occurred, both with the Northern Territory government agencies and with the public in general. In fact the public consultation process probably sets a model for future consultation processes for similar works.

The submission I have made to you is in two parts. One addresses the issue of the Bradshaw Field Training Area specifically and the other has two or three points of a more general nature dealing with Defence and the support and the development of Defence issues in the north. The Northern Territory government is agreed with the arguments for the need for a training facility and we're satisfied that the option of Bradshaw is a good one. We have some environmental concerns but, as has already been pointed out in evidence before you, those concerns are being handled in the environmental impact statement process. But I'm sure we might want you to deal with one of those, two of those specifically.

In general terms the Northern Territory government has a history in land administration of dealing with unexploded ordnance and it is for that concern I wish to be put on the record. However, we are satisfied in the case of Bradshaw that the Army, too, is aware of that concern and is dealing with it appropriately. We have already in previous evidence before you talked about how local business would be supported, and it is clearly a concern of the Northern Territory government that local business gain from such developments. And finally, the training of foreign forces is not opposed by the Northern Territory government and, in fact, is welcomed.

So overall, Chairman, we support the proposal to develop the full infrastructure of the Bradshaw Field Training Area, subject only to the outcome of the environmental impact statement. I might add that we see the outcomes of those environmental impact statements as being a plan of management for the area which will deal with any issues arising that are found in the baseline study.

CHAIR—Thank you Mr Pinney. It is proposed that the submission from Mr Pinney and the Northern Territory Government be received, taken as read and incorporated in the transcript of evidence. Do members present have any objection? There being no objections, it is so ordered.

The document read as follows -

CHAIR—I will now open the meeting to questions from the Parliamentary Public Works Committee to Mr Pinney. Mr Pinney, you have indicated that your approval of what is proposed by Defence at Bradshaw is subject only to the EIS. Is the Northern Territory government unhappy that the work has proceeded thus far without a completed EIS and do you have reservations about further work at this stage without a completed EIS being on the table?

Mr Pinney—Perhaps I can mention the history of the EIS a little bit and then how those issues are being dealt with. In November last year the Northern Territory government minister responsible for environmental assessment determined that there should be an EIS in January this year. Senator Hill, who is the relevant Commonwealth minister, agreed and directed that an EIS be undertaken under the Commonwealth legislation. He agreed to a joint assessment with the Northern Territory and agreed to the Northern Territory taking a leading role in that assessment. The draft guidelines for the EIS were developed jointly with Environment Australia and the Department of Defence. Those guidelines were made available for public review and there was, in fact, only one submission received and that was from the Northern Territory Environment Centre. That submission goes to, I think, the question you have just raised—that is, works commencing without the EIS necessarily being completed.

As we heard in the Army evidence to you, and in particular relating to the bridge across the Victoria River, that works and any other works that are to commence before the EIS process is finished will be the subject of independent notice of intention which in fact triggers its own environmental assessment. Whether it ends up as an EIS process or some other form of environmental statement is a matter for assessment of that particular notice of intention. So far as the bridge across the Victoria River is concerned, we would expect that to be dealt with as are all other bridges of a similar nature in the Northern Territory.

The continuing development of the EIS is being done in close cooperation between Defence and the Northern Territory and Environment Australia. In fact, there has been an EIS coordination committee set up with representatives from each of those bodies to work together. We expect the statement to be available I think by September. So yes, we are satisfied with the process and we believe that construction which may occur before the EIS process is completed will be dealt with, with individual assessments as we proceed.

CHAIR—On the same subject, though, the committee has received a letter from Environment Australia expressing their concerns that the work undertaken to date may ‘unnecessarily compromise some of the areas of environmental value.’ Are you telling us, Mr Pinney, that the Northern Territory government is generally happy for the work to proceed at its present rate and for the EIS to be delivered on time, and on the assumption that the EIS finds nothing extraordinary at Bradshaw am I right in then understanding that from the Territory government’s point of view they will, in fact, endorse not only the proposal, but the environmental study to date.

Mr Pinney—I was given a copy of that letter this morning, Mr Chairman, and I find it interesting, I think the word is. I understood that we were working together with Environment Australia in this environmental process, that the minister had made us the lead agency. Therefore I am surprised that this concern has not been brought to our attention directly. However, in dealing with it I have already suggested that the notice of intention process and the assessment of that will deal with the works.

The letter asks that the bridge over the Victoria River be specifically addressed in that way, and it is being addressed; not because of this letter but the process is already under way and ongoing. So far as the heritage considerations are concerned that could be threatened, I think those too are part of the EIS; and finally in that letter there is reference to the national wilderness inventory map, and I would have to say to you that if that map classifies Bradshaw as a wilderness area, then I am somewhat surprised because Bradshaw, as you are well aware from your inspection yesterday, is operating as a pastoral lease and it would seem that pastoral leases and wilderness are not necessarily the same sort of country.

Equally, the roads referred to are there in terms of pastoral access tracks already. We're talking about, if you like, formal construction and upgrading. And finally I would have to say to you that, having seen that map in other contexts, the Northern Territory has major concerns with the map if that is being used as the basis for this letter and our concerns go to the core of its credibility.

CHAIR—The letter also refers, Mr Pinney, to the bridge construction as you've indicated and makes something of a feature of the bridge construction, I suspect because the bridge will be early on the list of priorities for Defence in order to gain adequate access to Bradshaw Station. In the final question to Defence, I put to Brigadier McCann precisely why had your government, the Northern Territory government, been engaged as the bridge constructor. Would you like to comment on what the Northern Territory government sees as the potential for Bradshaw to the Territory, and specifically to the Territory government's construction arm as a result of bridge and road development?

Mr Pinney—The Northern Territory Construction Agency, which is part of the Department of Transport and Works, is a project management agency rather than a physical builder. As Brigadier McCann said in his evidence, the works themselves will be let out for public tender. The Department of Transport and Works is concerned about several aspects of roads and road infrastructure in this area, all to do with the increase in traffic and whether the roads are adequate to deal with that, and are working towards resolving those issues.

So far as the bridge itself is concerned, it seems from the Northern Territory government perspective a particularly proper practice that its Construction Agency be the project manager; and calling tenders, for a start, will enable us to have some influence over the ability of local contracting firms to have at least an equal say in the process.

CHAIR—Your comment, Mr Pinney, has actually lead into my next question, which was whether you were happy with the consultation process—and you had indicated in your opening remarks that you certainly were and thought it should be something of a benchmark for other consultations. That prompted me to make a note about the convoys and the concern that, as the government, the Northern Territory may feel about the additional road usage and the inconvenience to the tourist traffic of convoys moving between Darwin and Bradshaw. Have you spoken to Defence about this and is the government generally reassured that Defence's techniques for moving large numbers of Defence vehicles will not disadvantage Territorians or their visitors?

Mr Pinney—I personally haven't spoken to Defence, but our Department of Transport and Works has. So far as convoys are concerned, the type and numbers of vehicles are of particular concern to the traffic design engineers. And we think that there will probably need to be further upgrading of the national highways, that is the Stuart Highway and the Victoria Highway. This might be passing lanes or some other arrangements. Our Department of Transport and Works is working with the Army in working out the necessary data that will be used for that evaluation. And I am quite sure under the national highways program we will begin with the Commonwealth in future if there are necessary upgrades.

Mr TED GRACE—Thanks Mr Chairman. What procedures are you going to put in place regarding the unexploded ordnances. You state in your submission that you were unhappy with the procedures of the past. As a matter of fact, you go so far as to say that you have no proper results from dealings with the Army. What procedures is your government going to put in place to make sure in the unlikely event that the land would be reverted to public use?

Mr Pinney—There are a couple of aspects to that. Most of our concerns relate to World War period activities of the military and perhaps up into the 1950s. That has left a lot of unexploded ordnance in the Northern Territory, often in unrecorded places. That has given us great concern. And while I do say that we haven't yet yielded results, that's not to say Defence is not putting in place coordination with us. We have begun working together. In the case of Bradshaw I think we're quite confident that the Army will be recording the areas where it uses live ammunition and where unexploded ordnance is likely to be a risk.

There is, too, the aspect of future land tenure—it does not matter of which particular type. But in many of the areas where we have problems the military, was, whichever arm, was not necessarily the land holder. Somebody else has come along later and tried farming and blown up the plough or we have found unexploded ordnance in other areas. In this particular case, it's not on anybody's plan that Bradshaw should ever become publicly available again for such activities. So there is a different situation there again, in terms of future use.

Mr TED GRACE—A lot of the 80 sites you mentioned, in fairness to the Army, would be the result of activities by enemy forces during the war, wouldn't they?

Mr Pinney—In fairness to the Army, I suppose the result of enemy activities is one way to put it. Some of the ammunition is not enemy ammunition. But it's certainly war activity. A lot of it is Second World War, some of it is going back before the Second World War and some of it is from immediately after the Second World War. In fairness to today's current Defence Force, it's not just the army. They have recently become quite concerned about this and are beginning to work with us on it.

CHAIR—Mr Pinney, you might not be able to answer this question because I just noticed it in this letter from Environment Australia. I'm not too well up with the latest environmental terminology, but what are wild river values? You may or may not be able to help. There is reference to the wild river values of rivers and streams in the area.

Mr Pinney—My understanding is that the Australian Heritage Commission, as part of Australia's heritage, is trying to identify where there might be some wild rivers left, whatever a wild river is. One assumes that it is, if you like, still fitting the wilderness definition. They are working with the Northern Territory government at an officer level, but it's work mostly being conducted in Canberra. At a policy level it hasn't yet reached us.

CHAIR—So we are not quite sure what wild river values are yet. I will pursue that elsewhere, I think.

Mr Pinney—I might add that we might have a different view, too, on what a wild river value is.

CHAIR—They're all pretty wild. I questioned the previous witnesses about feral livestock. You have made in your submission reference to feral populations of donkeys and horses, and how the removal of cattle may actually increase the opportunities for expansion of those animals. I guess that's only an assumption rather than something that may necessarily happen. I would have thought the property was big enough that even with cattle there these feral animals, if they were able to, would increase in numbers.

Mr Pinney—No, that's not necessarily so. I heard the discussion about size before, and did the Army need the size of the property. The view of size in this part of Australia, not just the Northern Territory, compared to down south, is radically different, and the yield or productivity of the country is radically different. At the moment the numbers of cattle that have been carried on that property have controlled, if you like, the availability of feed and grazing range for the other animals. Removal of the cattle gives a greater grazing range, and one would expect then that there is room for an increase in the numbers.

However, I must say that in my submission I do say that we see that as being part of the environmental management program arising from the EIS, and whilst we put it on record that this could happen, we will be working with Defence and Environment Australia to have this as part of the management plan to control it.

CHAIR—You talked about the species of weeds that are a concern. I'm familiar with noogoora burr, I'm not familiar with parkinsonia. Is that mimisa or mimosa?

Mr Pinney—No, mimosa is a different one again.

CHAIR—That's mimosa pigra, is it?

Mr Pinney—Yes. There are three weeds that we're concerned about. One is noogoora burr, one is parkinsonia, and the other is mimosa pigra. We are concerned that the management plan properly contain procedures for controlling the spread of the seeds of those on the machinery, particularly the trucks and the tractor machinery that would be travelling from one place to another. As you saw yesterday, Bradshaw has a range of country from the river, the places where mimosa can grow, to the drier country where noogoora burr and parkinsonia grow, and it would be—I was going to say easy, I'm not sure if that's the right word—quite feasible that the spread of those weeds could occur without proper management.

CHAIR—The spread of noogoora burr would be more readily facilitated by carrying by livestock, wouldn't it?

Mr Pinney—Yes.

CHAIR—So the removal of livestock should actually reduce the instance of noogoora burr.

Mr Pinney—Yes, but what is there could be spread to areas where it isn't now. And bear in mind there is still some livestock in the country.

CHAIR—Of course, the chances are, although you say that all cattle are going to be removed by the owners. There is a chance that they won't get all of them.

Mr Pinney—There is that chance, particularly in that country. So yes, we're concerned about it, but we think that the management plan will probably accommodate it.

CHAIR—With mimosa pigra, hasn't the CSIRO developed some sort of a biological control?

Mr Pinney—The CSIRO might have developed that, but there is still a rapidly

expanding problem with mimosa pigra, and I invite you, if you have the time to drive out towards the Adelaide River on the way to Kakadu, to have a look out there.

CHAIR—If there are no other questions, Mr Pinney I thank you for your appearance before the committee today.

EASTER, Mr Bryan, Project Director, Facilities and Properties Division, Department of Defence, Campbell Park Offices (CP3-2-20), Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

LANS, Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin, Staff Officer 1 Training Area Design, Army Headquarters, Russell Offices, (G-3-28), Army Headquarters, Department of Defence, Australian Capital Territory

McCANN, Brigadier Raymond Leslie, Director General Accommodation and Works—Army, Campbell Park Offices (CP3-2-15), Department of Defence, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

MARTIN, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph John, Staff Officer 1 Combat Support—Force Development Land, Headquarters Australian Defence Force, Department of Defence, Russell Offices (B-3-08), Army Headquarters, Department of Defence, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

TWEEDIE, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Marshall, Commanding Officer, Darwin Logistic Battalion, Department of Defence, Robertson Barracks, Palmerston, Northern Territory

CHAIR—I will now recall the Department of Defence witnesses, thank you. Welcome Brigadier McCann, Brigadier Wallace and representatives of the Department of Defence. You heard the evidence given by the Northern Territory Government, and you're familiar with the letter from Environment Australia referred to by the Northern Territory government, and there are some questions that obviously you'd like to respond to, following the evidence given. So I invite you, Brigadier McCann, to make a response, and there will be some further questions from the committee.

Brig. McCann—Thank you, Mr Chairman. I thank the Northern Territory government for their cooperation and support in the development of the Bradshaw proposal. I am confident that Defence will be able to put into place effective feral animal and noxious weed management regimes. Specific attention is being paid to these issues in the EIS, and also to road convoys and future unexploded ordnance management at Bradshaw. I would add in regard to the noxious weed control that our proposal does include some fairly extensive vehicle washing facilities at the site, and I suppose that illustrates, in a way, that much of the infrastructure being provided is really being provided for environmental management reasons.

In response to the Northern Territory government's concerns over the 80 or so non-Defence sites known or suspected to be contaminated by UXO, I'd like to make the following comment: the Department of Defence does maintain a register of sites known or suspected to be contaminated by unexploded ordnance, UXO. The identification of UXO contaminated sites is difficult because few records were kept of activities during World

War II. Defence proposes to develop a coordinated national approach in cooperation with the states and territories for the management of UXO information, which will assist local authorities in the assessment of future land use options. Such assessment will indicate the nature and extent of UXO contamination, and the options for remediation works as required. This process of consultation and information exchange is now just getting under way with state governments, particularly in Queensland and here in the Northern Territory.

The Commonwealth's policy on the management of land affected by UXO is aimed at protecting the public from the hazards associated with UXO, and to increase public awareness of these hazards. However, the Commonwealth's policy limits the Commonwealth's liability to reduce the hazards of contamination. The policy states that the Commonwealth is under no obligation to commit resources to reduce known hazards of UXO contaminated land, where it never had a legal interest or has disposed of it.

The Commonwealth may, however, determine the level of UXO contamination is to be reduced, depending on the extent of operations required, cost sharing arrangements and legal liabilities. If we become aware of a public safety risk, then Defence will react as it does now in dealing with the removal and destruction of any UXO found by the public. Future land use decisions need to take account of potential UXO contamination, and recognise the difficulty and costs associated with decontamination, particularly since 100 per cent clearance cannot be guaranteed.

In response to the Environment Australia submission, I very much appreciate the support of the Northern Territory government in explaining both that government's and Defence's processes with this particular proposal. We are agreed that what we want is an outcome which is going to be useful. I mentioned earlier the considerable cost of some of the environmental assessment studies, and in this particular case an environmental assessment will amount to more than \$1½ million. We wanted to make sure that we were going to get some return. So we are interested in an outcome which is useful and can be applied to the ongoing management of the property.

Not only this, but Defence is interested in establishing a strategic relationship with the Northern Territory government that allows Defence to manage Bradshaw consistent with how other adjacent land holders might be managing their properties to meet Northern Territory government requirements. I mentioned before the environmental management information system which we are planning to develop and trial further at Bradshaw, and this would provide a common database which the Northern Territory government and us would be able to access.

These comments, I believe, give some confidence that the Northern Territory government and Defence are adopting a responsible and practical approach to the issue of environmental assessment, and the more important issue of ongoing management. In responding to Environment Australia's letter and their first comment regarding the bridge, I confirm that the Department of Transport and Works are only preparing and submitting

the notice of intention. It is in fact the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment who will undertake the assessment.

In regard to undertaking works before the EIS, we have addressed this before. We will be preparing a range construction management plan to cover all the environmental issues associated with construction practices. That plan will be assessed by both the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments. Defence is working within an endorsed program, and are confident that its management practices will ensure protection of sensitive areas.

In regard to possible future development, I explained that the EIS is in fact addressing a requirement which exceeds the scope of works put to your committee, Mr Chairman. So we are in fact looking at the long term, not just the short term, as implied in Environment Australia's submission.

Environment Australia were concerned about sites which have been nominated for inclusion on the register of the National Estate, and I confirm that Defence is aware of the nominated sites and will factor these into any infrastructure development plans and operational management plans. I also confirm that sacred sites and Aboriginal archaeological places and objects will be protected and managed accordingly. Defence will be guided by local authorities for advice on appropriate protection measures, which will include Aboriginal custodial advice.

In respect of Environment Australia's concern over standing orders, Defence agrees to Environment Australia's statement concerning standing orders. In relation to the wilderness and river values comment, I would say that is why we're having the environmental impact statement. The baseline studies are designed to ensure the EIS can address impact assessment and subsequent protection and management scenarios. This will include identification of sensitive environmental areas. Again I would explain how Shoalwater Bay was purchased by Defence as degraded grazing area, and 30 years later such has been the recovery of the area that it is now included on the register of the National Estate as the last major wilderness area on the east coast. Thanks, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR—Thank you, Brigadier McCann. Brigadier McCann, you have, perhaps not surprisingly, addressed what were the major issues that had been raised in the evidence given to the committee. The letter from Mr Gerry Morvell, the assistant secretary of the environment assessment branch of Environment Australia in many ways accuses Defence of being, one could say, all but dismissive of the environment role, by suggesting that Defence has proceeded regardless of the EIS. I have two issues to raise. One is the Defence standing order, which you have yourself addressed. In addition to that, I quote one of the sentences from the letter, where Mr Morvell says: 'The Department of Defence submission provides no evidence that potential impacts on wilderness and wild river values have been considered thus far during the planning process, although the final guidelines for the EIS require this.'

I understand from what you have just said to this committee that you would dismiss that accusation out of hand, and want to reassure us that in fact the environmental demands rightly expected by the government would always be met by Defence.

Brig. McCann—Mr Chairman, I think Environment Australia are really stating the situation that exists at the moment. They are really saying that we have not finished some of the baseline studies and environmental assessments. We accept that. We are only at the proposal stage. But I would assure the committee that Defence is not dismissive of any of the EIS requirements, and in fact I would go as far as to say that Defence is probably as supportive as any agency in meeting its environmental obligations. We have a good track record which we would want to protect.

I again emphasise that scientific baseline studies are under way at the moment. Those studies are costing us something like \$800,000 worth of taxpayers' money, and it is a little bit disappointing under those circumstances to hear it suggested that maybe we are not doing as much as we should be. We are doing everything that is required of us. The baseline studies will be supported by further environmental assessments, and the aim of that, of course, is to produce a management plan which will be useful in the long term to both Defence and useful to the Northern Territory government, in a practical way.

CHAIR—Am I right therefore in supposing that should the final EIS discover that the location of one of the 500-person camps was inappropriate in October—I obviously pluck the month loosely out of the air—then Defence would be happy to redesign its Bradshaw proposals to accommodate a more appropriate site?

Brig. McCann—Mr Andrew, I can give that assurance. In fact, the planning undertaken so far, our own planning, has been very broad. But we have adopted a different approach based on our previous experiences with the Townsville Field Training Area, which the committee looked at last year. With Townsville, we undertook environmental assessments first, then tried to fit a military requirement to meet the environmentalists' concerns. The outcome there was that we had to so drastically change what the military wanted to do that we then had to undertake another environmental assessment. That cost a lot of money, and it cost a lot of time—something like \$4 million and three years. What we are doing with Bradshaw is first of all articulating as best we can for the environmentalists what the Defence requirement will be. Then the environmentalists consider their baseline studies and make judgments on impacts. We, as part of that process, go back and review our requirement. So we are into an iterative process, rather than the linear processes of the past. We believe this is a much more sensible and efficient way to go about environmental assessment.

CHAIR—The other related question concerns the matter of unexploded ordnance, which was raised by Mr Grace. Mr Grace raised the question with Mr Pinney, who was representing Northern Territory government, about UXOs. Mr Pinney, as part of his reply,

said that one of the reassuring things he felt was that it was presumed that Bradshaw would not be public property again. I am taking this one step further, and suggesting to you that that is probably not an adequate reassurance for the Australian public in 1997, and the Australian public in 1997 would like to think that if in the year 2037 Bradshaw was public property again, the public could wander around it. As you are aware, in my own electorate I have a proof range which the public has no access to because during two conflicts, two world wars, pollution occurred that is now difficult to clean up. Could you comment, Brigadier McCann, on Defence's attitude to UXOs and their identification, and the possibility of Bradshaw remaining an area which the public could move more easily than they can at the Port Wakefield proof range?

Brig. McCann—Mr Chairman, the Defence policy needs to be viewed in context of present ownership. The policy is in fact quite different in relation to non-Defence sites and contamination on Defence sites. Bradshaw will be a Defence site, and every attempt will be made in the design of the training area and the management regimes and the training regimes followed there to limit and contain UXO contamination.

It was an issue yesterday, as we discussed earlier this morning, that impact areas will be sited in such a way that we will avoid environmentally sensitive areas. Impact areas will be selected in terrain which will allow easier identification and recovery and disposal of UXO. Impact areas will be kept to the minimum size possible, and management controls will be put in place that will maximise our chances of identifying and disposing of unexploded ordnance. Even with all those management procedures in place, there will still be some UXO. Not always will it be possible to identify the location or the fact that we had a UXO, particularly where there are live firing long range weapons, or where we might get a ricochet from a tank gun. But we believe that those circumstances will be very minor.

I go to the example of the tank gun. The probability of a ricochet in fact is very low. The probability of that ricocheting piece of ordnance malfunctioning and not exploding is very low. So the probability of a UXO occurring as a result of a ricocheting tank gun, as a product of those two independent events, is very low. So, we are certainly not talking about the levels of contamination which existed up until the early 1950's. But there will still be some UXO contamination. We believe that will be minor.

Impact areas will be closely marked and while there cannot be a 100 per cent guarantee of total decontamination of those areas in the future, they will be known—not like at the moment where many of the sites are suspected sites. They will be recorded and future land use planning will then be able to be undertaken in an environment where we have more accurate data.

UXO contamination is no different to any other type of contamination. Decisions on future land use need to take account of decontamination and you need to balance the costs of decontamination against the cost of an alternative use. So it really gets back to, in

many ways, a business decision. But we are certainly not going to see again the levels of contamination experienced as a result of our involvement with World War I and II.

CHAIR—So that while it is highly unlikely that it would become a public area, given the present scientific information at Defence's fingertips, I am presuming we could if necessary—though it is highly unlikely, I restate—fence off the contaminated areas and once again have Bradshaw available to the public?

Brig. McCann—That is an option, Mr Chairman. A future land use, in the unlikely event that the Army left Bradshaw in the long term, might be to revert to pastoral use. If that were to be the case, grazing could occur without any decontamination. We have numerous grazing leases on our ranges throughout Australia where sheep and cattle graze quite happily—on Puckapunyal range, for example.

CHAIR—Oblivious, one could say.

Brig. McCann—Maybe they could end up in oblivion. But, again, this is looking at an appropriate land use for a site.

Senator CALVERT—I think Brigadier McCann has virtually answered the queries I had. Earlier in the session I raised a matter of some mythical people, but I was really using that as an example. Further down the track, for instance in part of your baseline studies, you might identify a legless lizard, which we on the committee know have, not mythical powers, but powers of moving buildings and costing the Government a lot of money. As suggested in this letter from the environment people, those might be Aboriginal sites. Just say, for argument's sake, you identified quite a significant amount of Aboriginal sites in the Koolendong and Angalarri river valleys where Brigadier Wallace has already said is a most likely and desirable place for exercises. It just worries me a little that these sort of things might turn up, and all of a sudden your 870,000-odd hectares becomes 400,000 hectares or 200,000 hectares or even less.

Brig. McCann—Senator Calvert, we have undertaken some studies already, in that a notice of intention has been produced, last year, for the Bradshaw property. There is a lot of existing data. The Northern Territory government has a lot of data already existing, and a judgment is being made that, while there will be sensitive and significant sites, we can manage around those, and that is really the entire purpose of the environmental impact assessment. We want a long term management plan which protects the natural and heritage values of the site. And even if we found a Tasmanian Tiger there, the principles would still be the same, in that we would determine its vulnerability and conservation value in conjunction with the Northern Territory and Commonwealth authorities. We would establish a management plan to ensure its protection. In the case of military use, it might mean that we change the location of an impact area. We might change a road alignment or a manoeuvre corridor. Or we might place in our standing orders details and locations and very firm rules on what to do with any sensitive site.

It could be as simple as placing signs on the ground, or as complex as fire and weed control, and the monitoring program. The monitoring program, again, will be assisted by development of an environmental management information system. In some cases, areas might have to be declared no go, and that will certainly apply to Aboriginal archaeological or heritage sites. But this is no different to other major training areas. The committee visited Townsville last year. The Townsville Field Training Area has many constraints—public roads, railway lines, numerous mineral leases, Aboriginal sites—yet we are able to manage around those constraints.

Senator CALVERT—This particular letter states: The wild river values of the rivers and the streams in the area would be significantly reduced by the road network. For the life of me I cannot work out how wild rivers would change if you put a road in there.

Brig. McCann—Mr Pinney made the point earlier that there are in fact roads there now. And they were quite visible when we flew over there yesterday. Those roads have been placed there by a grazier with many years experience with the site. Those roads were probably placed as well as they could be located by any engineer or environmentalist. So there's every prospect that we would merely be improving the construction of those existing roads. So how that varies the existing environment is a matter for environmentalists to establish and I'm not competent to comment on that.

Senator CALVERT—The introduction of a reasonable road system will allow Defence to access the area and manage it in a better fashion, particularly in the case of fire and those sorts of things.

Brig. McCann—Much of the infrastructure we will be providing will assist in long term management and will enhance and protect environmental values, there is no doubt about that.

Mr TED GRACE—In answer to Senator Calvert you stated that environment al plans would be in place to satisfy indigenous people. He mentioned sites that might in future be identified. Can you substantiate that by environment plans existing on other sites. I refer you to the reasonably recent discovery of sacred sites on the Holsworthy site. Is there such a plan in place. I understand there is not.

Brig. McCann—I was waiting for someone to ask about Holsworthy and I have not been disappointed.

Mr HOLLIS—We haven't talked about unexploded ordnances out at Holsworthy, we might even get on to that.

Brig. McCann—I await eagerly any questions, Mr Hollis. As to the alleged recent discovery of Aboriginal sites, those sites have been recorded. They have been known to us. We have an environmental management plan for Holsworthy. It is just that. Other

members of the community are becoming aware of the existence of sites which Defence has been aware of and managed around for some time now. I am not saying that we have identified all of them, but certainly that news is nothing new to us at all.

Mr TED GRACE—It is new to the public, it was only brought to the public's attention by a colleague of yours, Brigadier Peter Dunn, who actually highlighted the fact—and allowed, for the first time might I add, public access to these sacred sites. That is recent.

Brig. McCann—Brigadier Dunn, of course, is to be promoted on 1 July to Major General Dunn and perhaps that is the reason for his promotion. And I would add that Brigadier McCann, regrettably, is not being promoted. Mr Chairman, we undertook to provide some information on the costs associated with the community consultation program. The contract with Turnbull Fox Phillips was officially let for \$78,875. Other reimbursable expenses amount so far to \$10,374, giving a total cost of \$89,249.

I have since received some advice on the environmental values identified so far at Bradshaw, in answer to Senator Calvert's question. The Angalarri Valley is almost totally clear of sensitive sites. The escarpment areas are known sites and it's very difficult to manoeuvre a tank up an escarpment. With those areas there will be negotiation; I mentioned the iterative process that we now intend to follow as opposed to a linear process in reaching satisfactory agreements on future use and environmental management.

I have a commercial in confidence minute which I will pass to the committee relating to the purchase price of Bradshaw Station and I also have for the committee a request from Defence seeking the committee's approval to invite registrations of interest and requests for tender for the role of project management for the Bradshaw Field Training Area works prior to the expediency motion on the proposal. This request is on the basis that the Commonwealth would make no commitment whatsoever pending a decision on your committee's consideration of this proposal.

CHAIR—Thank you Brigadier McCann. The committee will consider that request at its next meeting, which will be during budget week, and when it reaches a decision on one of its Thursday meetings, that decision will be of course conveyed to you.

Brig. McCann—This proposal for Bradshaw is also an item to be included in the May budget. Your committee is considering this proposal before cabinet's consideration of the proposal in the context of the May budget; and last year in the 1996 budget, Defence foreshadowed this proposal and sought agreement to its early referral to the Public Works Committee. So government approval or otherwise of the Bradshaw proposal will be a matter for the May budget.

CHAIR—That is the qualification here—the allocation of resources by the government will be a matter for the May budget and approval will be a matter for this

committee.

Brig. McCann—That's correct.

CHAIR—Are there any other questions for Defence, or do any other members of the Defence panel wish to make a comment? If not, as there are no further questions, it is proposed that the correspondence received and the late submission from the Environmental Protection Agency, Environment Australia that has been circulated to members of the committee be incorporated in the transcript of evidence. Are there any objections? There being no objections, it is so ordered.

The document read as follows—

CHAIR—Before closing this public hearing, I should like to record the thanks of the Public Works Committee to all of those who have made this tour of the north so productive from our point of view. As has been said in the evidence presented this morning, Bradshaw is in fact a huge site and the logistics of getting an understanding of Bradshaw's potential for Defence and the difficulties with its development would have been impossible, frankly, for the committee without the cooperation that we have had from both Brigadier McCann, Brigadier Wallace and their officers and troops. I guess I should particularly mention the support that we had from the Army's 173rd General Support Squadron who transported us there yesterday.

The role of the committee and Defence is always a potentially hazardous one. We don't want to be as a committee so separated from Defence that we lose sight of the national agenda, but nor do we want to be as a committee so close to Defence that we are seen to be compromised in the decisions that we are expected to make on behalf of the federal parliament. Can I therefore say that I am grateful to both Brigadiers McCann and Wallace and the members of the ADF for the way in which they allow this relationship to continue, so that there is an understanding on the part of Defence of the committee's role and on the part of the committee of Defence's role. I think that I speak for all committee members in saying that we do not feel compromised by the way in which Defence make available facilities to us, and we feel this cooperation has been in the mutual interests of both the ADF and the parliament.

On that note then, can I thank all of those who have made this characteristic cooperation possible. The committee will of course consider the evidence presented to it over the last two days and make a decision that will, as I said, be then presented to the parliament for approval. In thanking Defence and thanking the officers who have been so cooperative I also want to thank all of those who have provided both bus and air transport and made it in fact possible for us to do what we've done over the last two days. I recognise that APIN has had particular impact inevitably on the Territory, and for that reason I would also like to thank the representatives of the Northern Territory government for the evidence they have given here today.

Can I, while I'm on my feet, express my appreciation to my committee members who make chairing this committee actually something that is a task most parliamentarians would seek rather than avoid and I am grateful to them for their cooperation. Can I also thank the members of Hansard and the committee secretariat for all that was done in preparation for this hearing.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Hollis):

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 11.57 p.m.

