



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

**JOINT PARLIAMENTARY
COMMITTEE**

on

PUBLIC WORKS

Reference: Development of operational facilities for RAAF Base Darwin

DARWIN

Tuesday, 22 October 1996

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Development of operational facilities for RAAF Base Darwin

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Present

Mr Andrew (Chair)

Mr Forrest

Mr Hatton

Mr Hollis

The committee met at 9.00 a.m.

Mr Andrew took the chair.

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing into the proposed development of operational facilities at RAAF Base Darwin, Northern Territory. In my opening statement I should apologise for the local member, Mr Dondas, who sought that his absence be recognised. He has commitments in other parts of the electorate. I should also apologise for the fact that the senatorial members of the committee are unable to be here because the Senate is meeting; however, we have a complement of House of Representative members representing both government and opposition sides of the House of Representatives.

This project was referred to the Public Works Committee for consideration and report to parliament by the House of Representatives on 21 August 1996. In accordance with subsection 17(3) of the Public Works Committee Act 1969:

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

Yesterday afternoon, the committee inspected RAAF Base Darwin and the sites proposed for the components of the works in this reference.

Today, the committee will hear evidence from the Department of Defence, the Aircraft Noise Abatement Group, Retain Aviation in Darwin, the Northern Territory Greens, Mr David Smith, the Northern Territory government, Greening Australia and the Darwin Chamber of Commerce.

[9.02 a.m.]

GRAY, Group Captain Norman Arthur, Director, Aerospace Systems Development, Director-General Force Development—Aerospace, Department of Defence, Russell Offices, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

HAMMOND, Wing Commander Owen James, Project Director D, Director-General Facilities—Air Force, Department of Defence, Campbell Park Offices, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

KAVANAGH, Group Captain Brian Lawrence, Officer Commanding, 321 Air Base Wing, Headquarters 321 ABW, RAAF Base Darwin, Darwin, Northern Territory

KENNEDY, Air Commodore James Frederick George, Director-General Facilities—Air Force, Department of Defence, Campbell Park Offices, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee has received a submission from the Department of Defence dated July 1996. Do you propose any amendments?

Air Cdre Kennedy—Just the one, Mr Chairman. Paragraph 57 of the statement of evidence states that an environmental certificate of compliance was issued in July 1996. The actual date of issue was during October. Paragraph 57 should therefore be revised to read:

An Environmental Certificate of Compliance was issued by the Department of Defence in October 1996 to cover the proposal.

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

The document read as follows—

CHAIR—Would a representative of the Department of Defence now read the summary statement?

Air Cdre Kennedy—The construction of new facilities to improve the operational effectiveness of RAAF Base Darwin is advocated under this proposal. RAAF Base Darwin forms a chain of defensive airfields across northern Australia and is vital to the air defence of Darwin. Together with RAAF Base Tindal, it is used for operational training of the air elements of the ADF in northern Australia, often in conjunction with regional air elements.

Defence planning envisages RAAF Base Darwin continuing to remain an operational base and even though the relocation of the airfield has been suggested Defence does not envisage that such a relocation would take place until well into the next century. In the meantime, the base must continue to perform its designated functions.

The proposed facilities are needed primarily to provide the base with the facilities needed to perform its operational role in a safe and effective manner. The lack of ordnance loading aprons presents constraints in the manner in which aircraft can operate at the base and requires risk waivers to be issued. The provision of a complex of 10 ordnance loading aprons would overcome the present deficiencies but the site selected requires relocation of the existing airfield fire station and the airfield equipment lighting room.

Squadrons deployed to Darwin lack suitable operational and technical support facilities to perform their operational functions. Such facilities are best located in proximity to the proposed new ordnance loading aprons where the squadron's aircraft are to be parked. Aircraft placed on alert lack an appropriate sheltered facility with rapid access to the main runway for take-off. Such a facility is required to improve the air defence potential of the base. The existing aviation fuel storage tanks are unprotected and the available storage capacity is insufficient. Command and control of the base is a critical function which needs to be managed from a secure, central location. The lack of a suitably secure facility means the command of the base and its environs cannot be guaranteed in contingent circumstances. Engineering services have to be extended to service any new facilities to be constructed. In addition, the existing central emergency power station needs to have its capacity increased to meet essential emergency operating demands and its existing generators replaced as they have reached the end of their economic life.

The proposed works comprise the provision of an ordnance loading apron complex, a new fire station, two new airfield lighting equipment rooms, an operational technical support facility, an aircraft quick reaction alert facility, additional aviation fuel storage, a base command post, upgrading of the central emergency power station, and associated site works and engineering services. The outturn estimated cost of the works is \$59.5 million including professional fees and charges, furniture and fittings and a contingency provision.

Subject to parliamentary approval of this proposal, tenders are planned to be called

in January 1997 with the objective of having construction completed by the end of 1999.

The proposed development works would enhance the operational effectiveness and capability of RAAF Base Darwin as a forward operational base and an air defence base for Darwin, rather than its operational capacity. Of paramount importance is the improvement of safety associated with ordnance loading activities.

The airmen's recreational and canteen facility needs to be replaced and such a proposal has been included as a separate item in Defence's medium new works program at a ceiling cost of \$3.7 million. This proposal has been referred to the PWC, as it is being undertaken in the same time frame as the operational works for the base. Replacement of the facilities is required because of the deteriorated condition and their poor layout to meet contemporary lifestyle parameters. Moreover, the present recreational facility is inappropriately located relative to on-base married quarters.

An Environmental Certificate of Compliance has been issued for the operational works and a separate certificate will be obtained for the airmen's recreational and canteen facility when that proposal is sufficiently advanced. No direct adverse environmental effects are foreseen and measures to contain any possible environmental degradation are being incorporated into the design of the facilities, including safeguards to prevent the possibility of contaminants affecting Marrara Swamp and Rapid Creek. The number of military aircraft operating from Darwin is not seen as increasing as a result of the implementation of the proposed works. Ordnance safety aspects would be improved.

No heritage implications are evident in respect of the operational works. However, the airmen's recreational and canteen facility is to be located in the heritage precinct and measures are being taken to ensure its compatibility with existing buildings in the area.

Consultation has occurred at Commonwealth, state and local government levels. The Heritage Commission will be consulted regarding the design of the airmen's recreational and canteen facility.

CHAIR—Thank you, Air Commodore. If I were a Darwin resident, having been told by the Wran committee that the airport ought to be relocated, I would be a bit testy at the thought of spending \$60 million on increased activity on the airport. Can you justify this activity?

Air Cdre Kennedy—If you refer to the Wran committee report, in paragraph 229 it states:

If the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments wish to attract—

and I emphasise the word attract—

the type and scale of Australian and foreign defence activities to the Darwin region that seem in prospect, this report recommends that the phased development of a new international airport commence as soon as practical.

This proposal does not intend to increase the level of operation and attract further activity from foreign forces. So I believe it is in concert, in step, with what the Wran report was advocating.

CHAIR—If there is not a proposal to attract increased activity, has there been an increase in activity over the past five years?

Air Cdre Kennedy—For the last five years, military activity of this base has been in the order of about 13 per cent of total movements. I think the minimum percentage is 12.8 up to about 13.5. So an average of 13 per cent of all movements at the RAAF Base over the last five years have been military. There has been no increase, over the last five years, in military movements.

CHAIR—If that is the state of play over the last five years, what are you predicting? Should we approve the upgrade?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—The predictions for major activities at RAAF Base Darwin in the next two years are that there will be no increase at all. In fact, the predictions based on what we call our PMSA, which is program of major service activities, indicate that for 1997 there will be approximately nine major exercises or deployments causing the base to be activated for about 7½ months of the year in direct support of those exercises. This is almost exactly the same as this year and is even less than last year.

Our current predictions for 1997 are that there will be no increase. For 1998, our planning at this stage is for only four exercises; we have not planned any more than that. There no doubt will be more exercises, but, as far as our planning is concerned, under the PMSA we have planned for four exercises and three months activation. That will obviously be subject to change. But, as far as we know in our planning right now, there is no intended increase in activity for RAAF Base Darwin.

CHAIR—If that is the case, how do you then expect me to recommend to the parliament that \$60 million be spent on what is effectively a static activity?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—I believe that it is static in that there is no increase in the exercise, deployments or movements, but what we are doing here is improving the capabilities of the base. I think that is where the major concern has to be looked at. It is not so much that we are improving the number of movements or the number of major activities such as exercises; we are in fact just improving the capabilities of the base and giving it an ability to be able to do its job better.

CHAIR—Are there risks in the base operating as it is now?

Wing Cmdr Hammond—The ordnance loading operations are conducted in an area that is safe under NATO standards. However, it entails us closing off taxiways. That has a further impact on civil operations and military operations in the airfield. What we are able to do with this development is have a dedicated ordnance arming area that again meets the NATO standards but frees up the taxiways for their true and proper operation.

CHAIR—But it is not only the OLAs that are part of this submission, we have also got submission for, for example, relocation of the fuel storage. From what we saw of the fuel storage yesterday, it would certainly pose a threat if Darwin were under attack. Does it pose a threat to the civilian population in its present location?

Wing Cmdr Hammond—The fuel farm is subject to a risk waiver, more for the requirement to have fuel to service military operations at that airfield than if we lost it we would have no fuel. So the fuel is considered to be a critical asset. The distance that the fuel is located from our boundary is very safe.

CHAIR—So the relocation of the storage is more in anticipation of it being safe under attack than posing any threat in its present form.

Wing Cmdr Hammond—Yes, we are supplementing the fuel storage. Sixty per cent odd of the fuel is stored at the fuel farm 4. Fuel farm 4, if we lost it, we have smaller fuel farms, fuel farm 5, fuel farm 6 and fuel farm 1, but they are not enough to support our operations at the airfield. So that fuel farm 4 is a critical asset to us. The new fuel facility, two megalitres under the ground, gives us a redundant fuel capability so that we could, if we lost fuel farm 4, still prosecute any campaign in Darwin.

Air Cdre Kennedy—It is basically a matter of increasing the security of our assets and our operations on the Darwin area. That is really the basis of this proposal.

CHAIR—It is obvious from the evidence that has been presented to the committee that there are a number of residents in Darwin understandably concerned about aircraft noise. Are you the noisiest operators on the airstrip?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—I would suggest that the military is probably the noisiest. We do have some noise complaints that relate to civilian aircraft, but certainly the majority of complaints would refer to military aircraft.

Mr HOLLIS—Australian or overseas?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—We do not discriminate nationalities. The aircraft are the same. An F-18 belonging to the United States Marine Corps make the same amount of noise as an F-18 belonging to 75 Squadron out of Tindal. So we do not necessarily

discriminate in that way. About three per cent of total movements at the base are foreign military, so there is a level of foreign military noise, but that is about three per cent of total operations.

CHAIR—Can you modify the flying pattern for an F-18 in order to minimise the noise?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—Since 1993, when the management at the base was fairly well allowing military aircraft carte blanche operational profiles, since the Fisher report of 1994 we have now implemented new noise abatement procedures. For the last two years they have been operating fairly successfully at the RAAF base. They are quite stringent and they are some of the most stringent noise abatement procedures in the country. We have changed the attitude of aircraft, how they do their flight approaches and how they do their flight departures; we have limited their ceiling so they are limited to 2,000 feet; we have limited their power settings on take-off and landing and we have cut out what we call initial and pitch procedures except on major air defence exercises where we require that particular procedure. That procedure is a means of getting large packages of aircraft back on to the ground in the shortest possible time. We have introduced curfews and we only operate from 0700 to 1900 out of exercise and up until 2200 or 10 o'clock at night during exercises. We have introduced PR campaigns to let the local community know what is going on as far as noise and we have had a major reduction in noise complaints in the last three years.

Mr FORREST—Is there a procedure or consultative process for making a complaint?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—People who want to make a formal complaint can ring the switch. The procedure is that they have to give some sort of identity as a bona fide recognition that they are a serious complainant. We can then get back to them and give them feedback as to what the reason for the problem was. We will take the details of the complaint, we will investigate it and we will report back to the people and tell them what has resulted from that.

The other day we had a classic example when we had a noise complaint about a Garuda aircraft. We did an investigation into it and found that the pilot had, indeed, breached noise abatement procedures so we submitted what is called an air safety incident report on this particular pilot and sent it back to his company. We rang the people back and explained to them that the pilot was in error and that we had taken some sort of action against him.

CHAIR—If this is the style, Group Captain, then you must have some tangible evidence of the number of complaints received five years ago, three years ago and last year. Can you indicate to the committee the statistical trend?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—In 1993 we had a total of 300 formal noise complaints for the year. In 1994 we began to implement our noise abatement procedures and that reduced them to 120. Last year we had a total of 32 noise complaints but I might add that last year we did not have an Exercise Pitch Black which is our major air defence exercise and which usually creates most of our noise complaints. This year, to date, we have had a total of 72 noise complaints of which 14 were on the RAAF open day and I must admit that on the RAAF open day noise abatement procedures were minimised. We also had a total of 30 during Exercise Pitch Black for the total three weeks. Also, of that 72, 14 have been relating to civilian aircraft.

An example of noise reduction is that in one night of Pitch Black 1993 we had 84 complaints. This year in Pitch Black 1996 we have had 30 total complaints in the total three-week exercise.

CHAIR—As the public will be aware, the Public Works Committee has looked at Tindal and at Tindal we heard about the Delamere range. What strikes me is that there may well be tasks that are flying out of Darwin that could be flying out of Tindal—particularly practice runs at Delamere and activities like that. Could you comment on the air force procedure and why greater use is not made of Tindal and less use made of Darwin?

Group Capt. Gray—The issue with exercising out of Tindal and Darwin is that what we attempt to do is maximise the use of Tindal for all our exercises. Wherever possible we will put people into Tindal. However, for major exercises, Tindal is limited by its size. If we exercise the way we expect to go to war, we will fill Tindal with our assets the same way that we would in a wartime situation. Consequently, if you have an adversary to defend against, that adversary has to be based somewhere and Darwin provides the other end of that threat axis. So we can operate the defending aircraft and attacking aircraft from different bases to give exercise realism.

Also, because Tindal is the key to our defence of the north, there are some times when, for national security reasons, we do not wish to allow foreign military aircraft into Tindal while we have other activities of our own going on there. But our philosophy is that we will maximise the use of Tindal and only use Darwin for those sorts of exercises when there are good reasons for not being able to use Tindal.

CHAIR—Couldn't we use Darwin as a civilian airport that, in the event of war, would be occupied by the RAAF, rather than having you sitting here waiting for what we are told is an unlikely event?

Group Capt. Gray—In a way that is what we do now. We only use Darwin to exercise the sorts of activities that we would have to exercise in wartime. Darwin is quite a unique environment with the weather and the operating area, and the type of air defence activities that have to be undertaken from Darwin can only be undertaken from Darwin.

All our other activities are pushed south deliberately for security and also to minimise our impact on the Northern Territory population. But, given the proximity of airfields that can be used against Australia and the speed of modern aircraft, the only effective place to provide air defence of Darwin or its approaches, or the offshore resource extraction platforms, is from Darwin. Consequently, our crews have to exercise those alert procedures and air defence procedures from Darwin.

Mr HOLLIS—I would like to return to what the chair was saying about the Wran report—and this question may be better addressed to the Northern Territory government, so if the government representatives are in the audience they have forewarning. To your knowledge, are any studies being done on a possible site for a new airport? Are you aware of any studies or has a site been selected or earmarked?

Air Cdre Kennedy—Not officially at this time. We would expect that a site some 50 kilometres or so out of Darwin would seem appropriate. But no official siting studies have being conducted at this time.

Mr HOLLIS—If we were talking a long way into the future, how would it work for the RAAF if there was an airport, say, 50 kilometres out of Darwin? You would almost be at Tindal then, wouldn't you?

Air Cdre Kennedy—Not quite.

Mr HOLLIS—But would you still be able to serve the same purpose that you serve here now? Would the activities that would be carried out at that airport all be able to be carried out from Tindal?

Air Cdre Kennedy—In terms of what Group Captain Gray said there is a significant need for the two-airfield concept. Certainly an alternate airfield to the Darwin airport would fulfil the same role as the current airfield at Darwin. The real issue would be that it would be a very costly exercise at this time. We are talking, from a military perspective only, of the cost of relocating being well in excess of \$300 million, excluding the civil international component. That certainly would create a very significant cost to the Australian taxpayer. You need to compare that to the issues of concern to some elements within the Darwin community. We believe the noise one is the prime issue and we believe that is quite manageable.

Mr HOLLIS—On a different tack, during Pitch Black, overseas defence personnel will participate. During the other times of the year, are there other overseas forces defence personnel participating in training exercises here?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—That is correct. The Singaporeans come in here for deployments—unilateral deployments, we call them—where they do their own training. They operate from Darwin. The United States Marine Corps do the same on an exercise

called Southern Frontier. They are here for anything from two to five months of the year. Both of those organisations use the Delamere air weapons range. They transit in and out of Darwin to operate off the Delamere air weapons range.

Air Cdre Kennedy—Could I just make a correction? I mentioned that paragraph coming directly from the Wran report. I was referring to the ADI supporting report that was commissioned by the Wran committee. That is where my statement came from.

Mr FORREST—I am interested in the master plan. Obviously, this is an airport or a base that needs to be developed logistically, knowing that some time in the future it could be relocated. When was the master plan last upgraded and how firm is that plan? Do all of these proposals fit with it?

Air Cdre Kennedy—The master plan was updated this year. It was based on strategic planning guidance being developed within the Department of Defence, endorsed by the Air Force Development Committee. That then formed the basis for real estate reservation studies. Environmental studies as well were conducted. The plan was finalised this year.

Mr FORREST—I am just a bit concerned that now we have to relocate the fire station. Obviously, there has never really ever been a plan.

Air Cdre Kennedy—Yes, there has always been a plan. We update these from time to time, usually about every 10 years or whenever some significant redevelopment is going to take place. We are in the process of going through the updating of all master plans for all our Air Force establishments across Australia at this moment.

Mr FORREST—The power station is another concern I have. This is a power station for emergency purposes. What has been the history of the old power station? Why is it inadequate and why does it have to be upgraded with a significant amount of money being spent on it?

Air Cdre Kennedy—The power station has been there for a long while. The generators and the control equipment in it are very aged. It has reached its useful economic life. Spares are extremely difficult to obtain. The capacity of the powerhouse is nowhere near significant in meeting the emergency power demand or essential power requirements of military activities when there is an outage of power. This is quite normal. Since the powerhouse originally went in there has been significant change in the policy associated with the emergency power requirements for forward air bases.

Mr FORREST—Is there a history of it not meeting the need when it has been required, or is it just an assumption that it will not?

Air Cdre Kennedy—The generators and the control equipment need to be

upgraded and it is an opportune time to increase the capacity. At the same time, it is a very marginal cost in terms of going for a higher generating capacity. But we would need to replace the generators about this time frame.

Wing Cmdr Hammond—If I can reflect on the time when I was the Base Facilities Officer at Darwin operating that power house during power outages: at that time, because the lightning strikes made the Northern Territory government power system quite unreliable, we regularly had to run the base power house. We also had to trial how we would use it in the event of a cyclone.

In this climate you have a large refrigeration requirement to support messing facilities and the people in the married quarters. We were forced to cycle through into the married quarters to give people two hours of refrigeration every six hours because the capacity of the power station was inadequate. As you pointed out yesterday, we look after the rationing for army, navy and air force in large cool stores on the base and we need to keep the refrigeration up to those during those periods. We have to maintain a redundant power supply to the air traffic control systems and all the navigational aids, and they must be fed first before the refrigeration.

So we had periods where the complaints that I received from the married quarters, from the wives because their food was going off, were remorseless. The capacity, at that stage, was not up to scratch. It has only become worse as we have increased the loads on the base with further airconditioning. In 1987, when I was here, most of the facilities were not airconditioned, but with occupational health and safety regulations, we have airconditioned the office and working environments where people are. This again provides a cyclic load which we have to put through so that those places are comfortable to work in.

Mr FORREST—So the major investment in the power station—the master plan—does not require it to be shifted some time in the future to the right spot?

Air Cdre Kennedy—No, it is in the right spot. In fact, we intend to retain the same building; we will be replacing the equipment within it. There may be some extension required—we have not designed the final thing and there may be some minor extension—but the existing structure is adequate.

CHAIR—Is there ever any occasion when it is economically justified to crank up the power station rather than tap into the Northern Territory power supply?

Air Cdre Kennedy—From time to time this is done, particularly if there is a key activity going on, if they believe there is some risk of there being outage. But the normal approach is to rely on the mains power from the local authority, with the emergency power system being there in case an outage does take place.

CHAIR—It is never cheaper to generate your own; that is the question I was asking.

Air Cdre Kennedy—No.

CHAIR—One could observe that Wing Commodore Hammond, between aircraft noise and refrigerator complaints, must have broad shoulders indeed.

Wing Cmdr Hammond—The worst was when the married quarters were not cleaned properly and I had the wives complaining about that. My replacements do not have to look after that anymore.

Mr FORREST—I am interested in the whole concept of the way the ordnance operation works. Could it occur that an aircraft might has a default and has to return with an armed weapon still on board? How would that be handled here if it has to return to Darwin, and is there a risk to the city of Darwin if that occurs?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—We have had these circumstances on the odd occasion. Aircraft returning with what we call a hung-up weapon will do a normal landing and taxi to the ordnance loading area which, at this stage, is on the end of strip. Those ordnance loading areas have been licensed to handle weapons loading and unloading whether they are in an unsafe condition or not. As soon as the aircraft lands and has stopped taxiing, the weapon will be made safe by the ground crew. The aircraft will actually stop on the runway, the ground crew will drive out to the weapon, put what we call the pins into the weapon to make it safe, and then the aircraft will continue taxiing to the ordnance loading area, where it will be normally unloaded.

Mr FORREST—So none of the proposed works actually improve the handling of that situation?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—They will because the new OLAs—Ordnance Loading Areas—which are fully revetted will allow the aircraft to taxi into that area and be unloaded within that revetted area.

Mr FORREST—Right. It is disarmed on the runway, but—

Group Capt. Kavanagh—Made safe on—

Mr FORREST—Made safe on the runway—

Group Capt. Kavanagh—That is correct, and it disarmed within the OLA.

Mr FORREST—Right. I did have some questions about the use of the base by foreign aircraft and I am just wondering if there are any investments by foreign air forces

in this base, as well. If they are using the base, are they making a contribution to its use?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—They certainly are, Mr Forrest. They are paying full cost recovery for everything they use on the base. They do not contribute in excess of that, but they pay their way.

Mr FORREST—Thank you.

Mr HATTON—I would like to return to the Wran committee report. Air Commodore, could you outline your understanding of what the full terms of reference of that report were?

Air Cdre Kennedy—It was commissioned by the Northern Territory government. I think that it is probably in a better position to answer that when it is called a bit later.

Mr HATTON—Then did the Department of Defence make a direct submission to that inquiry?

Air Cdre Kennedy—It was consulted, certainly, by the ADI who prepared a supporting report to the Wran committee. I know that I was consulted by the gentleman preparing that report.

Mr HATTON—Were you consulted specifically in relation to your view of the future of the airport, both the civil and military use of that?

Air Cdre Kennedy—Yes, and others within the department were, as well.

Mr HATTON—Would you see a possibility in the future of the military moving from Darwin airport but the airport still being used on a civil basis?

Air Cdre Kennedy—I cannot comment on that, but I would suspect that it is a very expensive activity to conduct aircraft operations from two separate airfields. There are a significant number of military airfields around Australia that are joint user type airfields. Darwin is just one of them. There is, certainly, a significant economy of scale in terms of joint civil and military aircraft activity from the one airfield.

Mr HATTON—So, on that basis, in terms of one of the key problems identified by the Wran report, there is the fact that the airport was pre-existing and there has been encroachment from the city. There is a difficulty in terms of how the city of Darwin can develop in the future. If there were a co-relocation of both the civil and the military use airport to 50 kilometres out from Darwin, you would then have a situation that when the people of Darwin needed to use that civil airport they would be making a 50-kilometre trip, instead of being able to just go down the road. That would have, therefore, impact on people's ease of use, would it not?

Air Cdre Kennedy—It would certainly cause a lot of inconvenience and would be costly, as well. These would be issues that would need to be taken into account in terms of any economic study that was undertaken. You would need to consider, not only economics, but all the other issues as well, before you arrived at that decision. Certainly, that would be a very important criterion in terms of the timing of such an event. We predict, and we have discussed this within a consultative committee between the Department of Defence and the Northern Territory government—the committee that is jointly chaired by both organisations—and it is envisaged that it is unlikely that a requirement would exist to relocate until well into the next century.

Mr HATTON—Do we have any idea what ‘well into the next century’ means—2025 or 2050?

Air Cdre Kennedy—I would think probably 40 or 50 years.

Mr HATTON—In military terms, a key problem with the way the base is used now is obviously noise difficulties when you are having exercises. In those exercises you have to use Darwin as the base for aircraft that are pretending to be the enemy; they are doing sorties out of here against Tindal. What might happen in the future if the airport were relocated? How would those military exercises be operated so you could still run them out of that relocated airport? Would there be a difference in terms of the defence of Darwin with an airport located further away from the city of Darwin?

Group Capt. Gray—I cannot go into all the numbers here, but the further south you move from here the more it complicates the air defence problem, not so much of Darwin itself but of the shipping approaches and the offshore resource platforms. So the further south we go the harder the problem gets.

Mr HATTON—Part of the criticism has indicated that a lot of this activity should be moved to Tindal. Is it your opinion that Tindal is too far south for the proper defence of Darwin and for those assets?

Group Capt. Gray—It is impossible to do it from Tindal, physically impossible.

Mr HATTON—You need both airports operating, not purely for exercises, but for the defence of Darwin itself.

Group Capt. Gray—That is correct, yes. The proposed developments we are doing here are not being done for exercise purposes, they are being done purely to give the base the operational capability it needs to be able to conduct its role in the defence of Darwin.

Mr HATTON—So any future relocation of that military activity—you have indicated sometime in the middle of next century—would not be well to the south but

would be still close to Darwin itself, and off to the side, I would imagine. Otherwise you would have a strategic problem in terms of the defence of those assets.

Group Capt. Gray—That is correct.

Mr FORREST—In an exercise, the taxiway apron has to be used for ordnance loading. That delays commercial aircraft. If the ordnance loading is taken out of the way and put into the areas proposed in the plan, then this whole concept has the tremendous possibility to reduce aircraft noise because commercial traffic are not waiting in the air circling. Is that a proper observation?

Air Cdre Kennedy—That is correct. One of the greatest advantages of this proposal is the reduction in terms of ground running noise as well; the impact of ground running noise exterior to the base and internally on activities within the base will be reduced. I cannot give you any statistics in terms of what that really would be; Group Captain Kavanagh may be able to do that. The other important aspect is that ordnance handling activities on unrevetted taxiways is certainly less safe in terms of the lack of revetments in particular.

Mr FORREST—I do not know whether some sort of analysis has been done so that noise could be reduced by some percentage. Are you able to technically assess whether that is—

Group Capt. Kavanagh—I am not an engineer so I could not say whether we could or could not. It is fairly reasonable to say that because you do put up bunding around aircraft that would be running on the ground, it is certainly going to attenuate some noise; as to what percentage or what levels, I could not say. Certainly the way that we have the new OLA's plan, in relation, particularly, to the way we have them at the moment, makes for a much more efficient running of an air base and an airfield. Aircraft can clear the runway and taxiway areas quickly, disperse into their OLAs and load up with more weapons, or unload or whatever, and do their ground runs; overall it is much safer and it is much quieter.

Mr FORREST—Getting back to the list of complaints that you gave us, most of those would be take-offs and landings. They would not be ground noise, would they? Would they be circling aircraft?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—No. Generally they are aircraft that are taking off more so than landing and they are aircraft that are flying over particularly the western end of the runway and over one particular area like the Ludmilla-Coconut Grove area which is where we get the majority of our complaints from. It is generally aircraft taking off—either military or civilian aircraft.

Mr FORREST—Is Coconut Grove on the seaward end?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—That is correct.

CHAIR—I would like to turn to the fire facilities. Did you want to address something to Mr Forrest's remarks?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—Not really.

CHAIR—Air Commodore Kennedy, I notice that the proposal is to spend \$2¼ million upgrading the fire station. Presumably then the RAAF accepts responsibility for aircraft fire safety for both civilian and military movements. Is that right?

Air Cdre Kennedy—The responsibility in RAAF base Darwin for that belongs to Airservices Australia. Their facility is currently located to the south of the runway/taxiway system in the area that is required for the development of the ordnance loading aprons. In fact, it is the only area available for the development of the ordnance loading aprons. You may recall at the committee hearing last year we discussed the relocation of the air traffic control tower which is now being built to the north of the base. That was for a number of reasons, not the least of which was to vacate the site for the OLAs. The fire station and the airfield lighting equipment rooms are in the same situation. They need to be relocated because of their proximity to the OLAs that would be unsafe.

CHAIR—Yes, I appreciate that. The reason for my questioning was really if the RAAF basically is supplying a fire support for all aircraft movements on the base, is there some contribution for a better facility and the provision of that better facility coming from the civilian air operators?

Air Cdre Kennedy—No. It is normal procedure that if we have a requirement to relocate a facility that is owned by another government organisation that we will pay for that relocation. The responsibility for fire services for aircraft operations remains with Airservices Australia but we will pay for relocation of the facility. We have scrutinised the content and extent of the replacement of that facility to ensure that it is compatible with what is already there. That scrutiny has taken place.

CHAIR—So the improvement will occur because it is being built in 1996.

Air Cdre Kennedy—Exactly. It will be a contemporary facility.

CHAIR—It is a bonus that civilian aircraft will get.

Air Cdre Kennedy—Yes.

Mr HOLLIS—One of you mentioned that Darwin was one of a number of joint users of the airfield. This must surely increase danger. Has there been any record of near misses? I know there has been no actual collision between a military and a passenger aircraft but is there any record of any near misses, to your knowledge?

Group Capt. Kennedy—To my knowledge, in the last year or so there have been two reported incidents in the press. I am not aware of any other instances. There was one near miss which was not in our immediate control area, it was in the Tindal control area. It was between a Qantas 747 and two F15s from the United States air force. Within our own controlled air space, which is out to 60 nautical miles, I do not have any exact records with me. However, I am not aware of any instances apart from the one where a Singapore aircraft was required to divert and go around and do another approach to a landing because he had encroached into the air space of a civilian aircraft, but I would not consider it a near miss. In the two years that I have been here there have been no near misses within the 60 nautical miles.

CHAIR—Mr Hollis would be too modest to interrupt here but presumably the Hollis Memorial Tower—I am not being entirely facetious about this—would improve the safety of the area anyway. Is that a fair observation? I was not part of that hearing so I am not sure what is going into the tower.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—It certainly will. The new tower is a vast improvement on the old tower. It is primarily the equipment that is inside the tower that will make all the difference to flight safety in the Darwin region.

Mr HOLLIS—You mentioned that there were two reports in the newspapers about the near misses. Surely, as the commanding officer here, you would be aware if there were any near misses. You would not have to rely on newspaper reports.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—That is correct. I am aware of only the one within our controlled area, and I would not consider that a near miss.

Mr HOLLIS—Let us return to the sensitive area of Marrara Swamp. Having been to a couple of hearings here, I feel I am a little familiar with that area. If that work proceeds there, will that have a detrimental effect on that water? As I understand it, that is the headwaters of Rapid Creek, is it not?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—That is correct.

Mr HOLLIS—I am aware from a couple of the hearings that I have been involved in that there has been some concern over that area. It is claimed that it is a very sensitive area. It would seem to me that if we proceeded with this work that quite a lot of engineering work would be done on the airfield so obviously there will be additional run-off. Is that going to impact on that sensitive wetland area?

Air Cdre Kennedy—No. A very detailed environmental assessment has been carried out for this proposal which formed the basis of the compilation of the Certificate of Environmental Compliance. We are very conscious of the sensitive ecosystem in the waterways, particularly the waterway of Rapid Creek and provision is made to ensure that no contaminants will enter that. I will ask Wing Commander Hammond to elaborate.

Wing Cmdr Hammond—The majority of the run-off from the area proposed for development will flow into Sadgroves Creek.

Mr HOLLIS—Where is Sadgroves?

Wing Cmdr Hammond—Sadgroves is to the south of the base. The Marrara Swamp area is to the east and slightly to the north.

Mr HOLLIS—You have told me where the creek is. Can you now tell me about the environmental measures that you are taking to control the run-off. The water just does not run-off there; does it?

Wing Cmdr Hammond—No, it does not. We have proposed that in the major area where we will put pavement that we will put a retardation basin in to capture the water from up to 100-year return period storms. Ideally, we will put in a single retardation basin and it will all flow into the Sadgroves Creek. Water does not run very well uphill and we may be forced to put in two retardation basins.

This gives us a control over the flow that goes through the drains leading into those catchment areas. All open drains directing water to these catchment areas will be shallow, wide and vegetated to minimise scouring and reduce sediment loadings. Where necessary existing drains will be stabilised and revegetated to minimise scouring erosion and weed invasion. All disturbed areas will be rapidly revegetated and watered to encourage growth where necessary.

Major earthworks have been scheduled for dry season construction to avoid siltation. During construction silt fences and sediment traps will be provided to contain run-off and run-off diverted around disturbed areas. Disturbed areas will be rapidly revegetated. Fuel interceptor pits will be incorporated on all drainage lines.

Mr HOLLIS—That is very interesting. Tell me, who controls the swamp area there? Is there a management committee, or is it the RAAF, is it Darwin City Council or is it no-one?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—There are a number of interested organisations who have environmental interests in the whole of that Rapid Creek area. In the last 12 months the RAAF base has also been interested in setting up some environmental management plan for that area. All the groups have come together and we have currently formed a

steering committee for the environmental control of the Rapid Creek headwaters and there are about 12 organisations now involved in that. The RAAF Base Darwin is currently chairing that committee and we have developed a three-tiered plan for fire control, weed control and water quality control. That is being implemented at the moment and, as I say, there are 12 organisations including Greening Australia, Water Watch, Landcare and so on who are involved in this particular committee.

CHAIR—Are we dealing with a catchment of base water or airstrip water?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—This is a natural run-off flowing—Rapid Creek is the only freshwater creek remaining in the Darwin metropolitan area. We are talking about control of the quality of that water to maintain the natural environment.

CHAIR—Base run-off.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—Base run-off, yes, or run-off from that swamp headwaters area.

CHAIR—Just a touch of irony in this—you can understand the committee's confusion. We came from—not this year—a hearing at Maralinga where the principal asset was seen as the capacity to catch all of the airstrip water without which Maralinga would not survive. It seemed like it was a huge rainwater catchment, like a big roof.

Air Cdre Kennedy—I think it is important, Mr Chairman, to note that the environs of RAAF Base Darwin is not the only catchment for Rapid Creek. There are other areas that feed Rapid Creek.

Mr HOLLIS—That is true, and I accept that, but it would also be true to say that the combined airstrip, RAAF and civilian air, would have the potential to be the most pollutant agent. I did not say it was the most pollutant, but I said it would have the potential to be the most pollutant agent to those headwaters.

Air Cdre Kennedy—If there was a fuel spill.

Mr HOLLIS—If there was just ordinary run-off. You would not have to have a fuel spill, just from planes coming on there, there is oil around on the ground.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—Yes, if poorly managed I believe it would have the potential.

Mr HOLLIS—Are you and other people satisfied with the measures that have been put in place to protect that?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—I believe so, not only with the environmental plan but also with the way the base has been laid out. Also, the developments there at the moment restrict any further development. The explosive ordnance storage area there protects the environment by disallowing any development in that area.

Mr HOLLIS—Politicians are loathe to answer hypothetical questions. It is a good out when people hit you with a difficult question to say, 'That is a hypothetical question and I don't answer hypothetical questions'. Let me ask you a hypothetical question. We have heard for the last two days how important it was to have both Tindal and RAAF Darwin but what if Tindal did not exist? Tindal has not been in existence all that long. As I understand it, there was an argument when the RAAF returned from Butterworth that it was going to go into Darwin. Then, for some reason, it was decided not to go to Darwin, it was decided to go to Tindal.

I have been involved with this committee for the last 10 or 12 years. When I first went to Tindal there was practically nothing there but now we are being told it is unique in how it is so important that we have both Tindal and Darwin. Are we not just constructing this to tally with a reality, the reality being that we have got Tindal and Darwin. I cannot believe that it is necessary to have these two duplicating functions.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—Rather than speaking hypothetically could we speak—

Mr HOLLIS—I knew you were a serving officer and you do not speak hypothetically!

Group Capt. Kavanagh—We could speak historically and look back at the only time that this particular area has been under threat of attack from another foreign force and RAAF Darwin played a prominent role in that particular contingency. Not only that, we had a number of other rear bases. If you look back south of here there were anything from 10 to 20 support bases to back up RAAF Base Darwin. In reality, we have already done it; we have proved the theory that we need support bases. We cannot just operate on one base alone. We are only talking here about two whereas in World War II we were talking about 20.

Mr HOLLIS—Fair enough.

Mr FORREST—Mr Hollis' questions about Rapid Creek and so forth have raised some queries in my mind. I understood that the ordnance storage was not in the swamp, it is actually on high ground, sort of in the swamp area. Is that correct?

Wing Cmdr Hammond—That is correct, but the ordnance storage project is not part of this development, it has been previously cleared.

CHAIR—Mr Hollis introduced that from his past experience on the committee.

Mr FORREST—Okay, so for all intents and purposes it is not a part of our brief for this inquiry. However, the overall environmental impact is and I was interested to note there was an audit. In fact, I understand there was an audit of all RAAF bases across Australia. How did Darwin perform in that audit? Are there any concerns and if there are, how are they being addressed? Is there a plan? Does it fit the master plan how those environmental concerns will be addressed?

Air Cdre Kennedy—The best way to answer that is to indicate that there is a requirement to develop environmental management plans associated with our military establishments. One is being intended to be developed for RAAF Base Darwin. We have one for Tindal already which was done as part of the major Tindal development. But the RAAF is in the process of developing environmental management plans for all its bases. The audits that you are alluding to are a normal course for looking at environmental impacts right across Australia. But I think the more important aspect is identifying the environmental concerns on a particular establishment and, in particular, identifying how you are going to manage those environmental concerns which will form the environmental management plan.

Mr FORREST—Here in Darwin, what are the main environmental concerns the audit identifies?

Wing Cmdr Hammond—Apart from noise and water, we also looked at the vegetation and the ecology, the wildlife including mosquitoes, because they are a problem here, Aboriginal cultural heritage, European cultural heritage, and soils and land capability.

Mr FORREST—With regard to water, it looked at the quality of run-off?

Wing Cmdr Hammond—Yes.

Mr FORREST—The procedure is to use retention basins to collect run-off, settle it and then release it at a targeted quality or something like that. Is that the present approach?

Wing Cmdr Hammond—It is not so much the quality that we are targeting at that point. What we are talking about is controlling the flow so that if there is any problem with that water the vegetation barriers can handle it and any run-off that ultimately reaches that Rapid Creek system will be at an acceptable level. Can I just emphasise, though, that we do not see at this point of time that we are going to feed any water from this development into the Rapid Creek. It is looking as though it will all go through Sadgroves.

We are not at the 100 per cent design stage so I cannot say under oath that that is

what is going to happen. We may be forced to have a second retention basin but, at the moment, we are looking at having one and feeding Sadgroves. We also think we have an equal responsibility to Sadgroves as we have to the Rapid Creek. That is why I outlined those measures that we have programmed and costed into our development.

CHAIR—There are no further questions. I thank Defence for appearing. As the principal proponents of the project, you will be recalled following other witnesses.

[10.03 a.m.]

HOWELL, Ms Kerry, Coordinator, Aircraft Noise Abatement Group, GPO Box 4456, Darwin, Northern Territory 0801

MIDGLEY, Ms Katharine Elizabeth, Coordinator, Aircraft Noise Abatement Group, GPO Box 4456, Darwin, Northern Territory 0801

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee has received a submission from the Aircraft Noise Abatement Group, dated 20 September 1996. Do you wish to propose any amendments to that submission?

Ms Howell—No.

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

The documents read as follows -

CHAIR - Does either of you wish to make a short statement before the committee proceeds to questions?

Ms Howell—Yes. The Aircraft Noise Abatement Group was formed in 1993 in response to the dramatic increase in military air traffic, due to increased foreign training exercises held out of Darwin. We represent the residents and workers, including RAAF personnel, of noise affected suburbs and we have regular discourse with these people. In a petition we circulated in 1994, approximately 1,300 people agreed that the health and safety of residents was at risk. We would like to state that these people were directly affected by the exercises, and we continue to represent them. Since then, the number has significantly increased. Furthermore, ongoing inappropriate planning decisions only serve to increase our numbers.

We would like to stress that we are not anti-military. We can see the strategic reasoning for the focus of Defence to move north. However, the resulting increase in facilities and personnel needs to be carried out with sensitivity to the local population and to long-term town planning considerations. We are disappointed that, rather than address our full details submission, the Defence department chose merely to address our two final recommendations. We are not advocating the relocation of the RAAF base to another state, merely to a more appropriate area within the vicinity of Darwin, such as the site already designated by the NT Department of Lands, which is a site at West Arm. We believe that only minimum essential work should be carried out at this stage. The bulk of the money being spent is on ordinance loading aprons in order to reduce the unsafe practices which are currently occurring as a direct result of the increase in training exercises. It is essential that permanent long-term alternative arrangements are made for foreign pilot training.

In conclusion, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to present our areas of concern to the Australian Parliament. There is a serious conflict of interest in having a fully operational pilot training base alongside an international airport in the centre of a growing town. We believe the current problems will only increase unless sensible long-term planning occurs now. We also believe that the core function of RAAF Base Darwin must be clearly defined, either as a forward base or as a training facility.

CHAIR—Thank you, Ms Howell. Without in any sense being patronising, I can say that you have been very fair in your comments, because you have not sought to ask this committee to shift the RAAF base before it proposes the expenditure of \$60 million dollars. I am sympathetic to your comments about aircraft noise. My comment would be that surely this immediate proposal in fact makes things safer for residents in Darwin, rather than more hazardous. Would you agree, or do you think that is too simplistic a view of the \$60 million expenditure?

Ms Howell—We believe that the present arrangement is unsuitable for that

location and that any work that will support this present arrangement is also inappropriate.

CHAIR—I have to say I have a problem with that, because it seems to me that is what currently happening at RAAF Base Darwin is not something that should continue to happen, in that it poses a greater threat than I as an Australian would like to sustain. That is to say, I think it would be safer to have loading ordinances behind retaining walls; and, for that reason, I felt this proposal had something to commend it.

Ms Midgley—We were actually talking about the original existing arrangement of having foreign pilot training within the town. What you are doing is going onto the next step and saying: let us make that foreign pilot training safer by having the ordinance loading weapons. We want to go back a step and say that it is inappropriate to have foreign pilot training in the centre of a growing town; it is a totally inappropriate activity to be held on the base.

We have always been told that it was a forward operational base, and we have not got an argument with that. The reason this group formed was the dramatic increase in military jet pilot training; there was never any EIS, environmental impact statement, done at that time. It is just totally inappropriate to continue that arrangement by doing other things to make that marginally safer. The original idea is not appropriate in the first place; alternative arrangements should be made.

CHAIR—As you have heard, Defence have given evidence that their activity is about 12 per cent of the total airport activity in Darwin. Do you get complaints about civilian activity as well as Defence activity?

Ms Midgley—Over the time we have, and that is why we have shifted somewhat because we even have had complaints from RAAF personnel themselves over the domestic flights. We thought that obviously we have a big problem here; everyone has a problem, RAAF personnel have a problem. At the time we did our petition we were approached by RAAF personnel and people from Coonawarra; that is why we have always maintained that we represent those people. They really do not have a voice; I know they cannot say anything themselves, but we know they came to approach us.

CHAIR—I was referring to the proportion of civilian complaint.

Ms Midgley—There is a proportion. Mainly we get overwhelming complaints on military jets. Our recent complaint was that this man's louvres fell out and that is why he joined our group; we do not have such a group, that is why he is helping us actively.

CHAIR—I would presume that his louvres were at least horizontal or open when they fell out. But we will not go into that.

Ms Midgley—The noise is tremendous at Ludmilla Coconut Grove, it really is and

it really has to be addressed. Until it is addressed it is just going to be a scourge on this town and it will go on and on. This group may fade away, we may leave town, but another one will pop up because it is an existing problem and it has to be addressed.

CHAIR—You are not unique, I am sure you will find groups in Sydney with a similar proposal and I am a South Australian so I am very familiar with the Adelaide exercise. But I should also comment that as a South Australian I actually find the Adelaide airport very conveniently located. It is not a military activity, and in that sense is unrelated to the submission that the committee is currently considering, but I do find it very conveniently to be able to land, as it were, 10 minutes from Rundle Mall, instead of at Salisbury.

Ms Midgley—That is right, and I am sure that the growing rural area would also appreciate being able to access an airport in the same way. It will not be that far away, but it will be more even for all of us. But the most important thing is that, as it has been confirmed that it will move sometime in the future, planning must take place now. There is no sense, in say 40 years time, saying that we are going to shift the airport but all the rural area is taken up and there has to be massive buy backs. What we are really pushing for now is that we all talk about it as a community to identify this area. There has been an area identified: what does Defence think about it?; let us start planning now. That is one of our main points in this. Given that it has been identified that it will move, let us talk about it openly in the community.

CHAIR—That is entirely reasonable, but am I misreading you then if I suppose that the present proposal is not opposed by the noise abatement group but that they would not want it to extend the life of the airport? Is that a fair summary, or is that being too generous?

Ms Howell—We just believe that this proposal really only serves to support the foreign pilot training exercises and that without them Darwin would go back to being a manned forward operational base, so in that capacity it would have a lesser need. It would still need to do part of these works but I do not think it would need to actually increase the ordnance loading aprons. So at the moment, as far as I believe, Tindal is our focus in the north.

CHAIR—I think it is fair to say it is the hub.

Ms Howell—Then we have Curtin and Scherger and they are the bare bases, and then there is Darwin. It is curious that Curtin and Scherger cannot be utilised more in exercises and that Darwin has to be the focus of where the enemy aircraft are situated, and that they continue to go back and forth over most of the population. There may be another way to design the exercises so that there is less impact on the population, but our major concern is that these exercises were started not too many years ago. There was a decision made to begin these exercises and to increase them. Before that we only had Pitch Black

exercise which was for a short time of the year. So we really want them to be planned properly so that the local population is not put at risk. It is not just noise, of course, it is also safety. We have had planes that have crashed—

Ms Midgley—I do have a photo—cockroach eaten and all—of a plane that crashed in Kululuk, which is Aboriginal land.

Ms Howell—It is just near Coconut Grove.

Ms Midgley—That was in 1984.

Ms Howell—No, 1988.

Ms Midgley—No, it is 1984—it was on the back of the photograph. I know that they will try very hard not to let that happen, but what we are saying is that people live there. They fly over the top of people. It has happened and we really should not have regular pilot training exercises over a population. I understand they are flying out of Darwin but, on flying out of Darwin, they are flying over people. I have witnessed myself two lots of jets flying over the houses down at Coconut Grove. I have sat up and just looked at them flying over. I ring up the base and they say, ‘The pilots didn’t get told how to go in properly.’ There is always a good excuse; there is always a good reason, but the end result is that they fly over people.

CHAIR—Air Force have also indicated to us, as you have heard, that they have taken steps to reduce the noise and to try to accommodate you. I would have thought you ought to feel that it is something of a credit to your group that they have said, ‘Yes, this group is expressing a concern that we need to address.’ Have things improved?

Ms Midgley—I would say that Group Captain Kavanagh has tried his best. He has been quite pleasant to deal with and he is quite cognisant of our concerns, but there is only so much he can do. F18s fly over people, so there is only so much he can do, even though he has been trying his best. They still make the noise, they still fly over people and there are breaches every now and again. He can only be reactive in those circumstances. It has already happened.

Ms Howell—I think also at that time in 1993 they were also flying over a really heavily populated suburb. That has now stopped and the flight path has come in a little bit, so the number of people who are affected have been diminished. But still, those people are affected and they live there and, unfortunately, planning continues to develop these areas. There is now a new suburb that has just been developed and already there have been complaints from those new residents. I think that they have only been in their houses for less than 12 months. It will just continue and it is not going to be something that actually goes away.

Mr HOLLIS—It is a little bit of a chicken and egg argument. No-one forced those new residents who have only been there 12 months to buy in that suburb. If there were noise potential or noise, they must have been aware of that before they went there.

Ms Midgley—We would hope that they would be made officially aware on titles of houses. We have a statutory declaration here to say that Group Captain Kavanagh did tell one of our people in Harney Street to sell up now because it was going to get worse. These other people have just sold their house and they are really happy that there is not much noise happening at the moment because the sale has gone through, but who know what is going to happen next year? People do come in not really knowing what is going on and, if there are no jets flying over then everything seems fine and people say, 'It is not too bad. You get a bit of noise, but it is okay.' These exercises only increased in 1993 and no-one knew this was happening. The people were already living there and it happened afterwards. This is what the problem is.

It is a very easy and convenient argument to say that you should not live near an airport, but people did not have a problem before that. There was the odd plane going over and there was exercise Pitch Black which used to annoy people, but they lived with it. Then, all of a sudden, we had it 10 months of the year. That is why we formed. Of course, since then, they have modified it but, in fact, the potential is still there.

We do not know what is going to happen next year. Group Captain Kavanagh is going go away and someone is coming again next year, so I hear, so we do not know what is happening. It can just shift and change depending on current thought at the time.

Mr HOLLIS—The plane that crashed in 1984 looks remarkably like an Australian plane.

Ms Midgley—It was an Australian plane. It was a Mirage.

Mr HOLLIS—I thought that you were saying that the danger was from foreign planes.

Ms Midgley—As we say, it does not matter who crashes; they crash.

Mr HOLLIS—Let us be realistic here. There is one crash that you have this photograph of in 1984 and you are saying that there has been a significant increase in activity, especially in 1993. That is not a bad record. I am not justifying one crash. A crash is a crash and, obviously, the potential is there, too.

Ms Midgley—I suppose that if you do not live under it, then it is not a problem.

Ms Howell—Up until last year I lived under the flight path and I had lived in that house for seven years. I was a bit away from the civilian commercial aircraft flight path,

but I found that I was directly under the military flight path, and the difference was quite remarkable.

Mr HOLLIS—Were they lower?

Ms Howell—No. The difference in the sound was quite remarkable. You could hear the base in your body, it was so deep, and you could feel the reverberation in your own body. The louvres would shake; my children would be quite alarmed because the aircraft go over three at a time. If there were other people there, they would become quite alarmed, also. It was more than just having to stop a conversation for a few minutes. That risk of having a plane fall out of the sky was actually quite high. It was something that was constantly on your mind and you kept telling yourself that it probably would never happen and that is right, the amount of safety requirements and that type of thing. But it was still something that you could not deny. I was there because I was in a housing commission house. I had been given that house, I did not buy it, I did not choose to live there.

I ended up, thank God, getting a transfer. I can still hear them in the background and they do not cause me that much trouble in another suburb. I can quite understand people who do not live under the flight paths not being affected and not even really being that concerned with that type of noise happening or that risk also happening in the background. But when you are underneath it, you cannot do anything about it, you feel actually quite powerless, because you are kind of thinking, 'I cannot go up against the whole of the Australian Defence Department to do anything about this.' So it just leads you to a point where you feel absolutely frustrated. So unfortunately even noise abatement procedures cannot take away the reality that we do have suburbs underneath that flight path. That is why any increase or any support to those exercises is something that we oppose, and we really would call for part of this money to somehow be diverted to a feasibility study to look at a more appropriate site.

Mr HATTON—You have talked about the difference between foreign exercises and Darwin as a forward operational base. What amount of activity would you expect there to be if the foreign exercises did not happen? If it was a forward base, can you see any difference between a forward base and a forward operational base?

Ms Midgley—A few months of noise and safety concerns, that is the difference. You see, it has now gone from 10 months to seven and a half months, but that is still a substantial amount of time, especially when it is in the most beautiful time of the year that we all live for, which is the dry season. As a lay person, that is the big difference, that we do not have to put up with those extra months of noise and safety concerns from pilot training.

Mr HATTON—Do you see any connection between the base being a forward operational base and the exercises that are done simply by our RAAF in terms of working

towards defending the city of Darwin and the assets we have got there?

Ms Midgley—I think the RAAF, I am not sure now, because it is a changing world at the moment, but there are only a few little exercises that Australian planes come in for. I am sure Group Captain Kavanagh can outline them. There used to be a four-day one at the end of the year towards October with the navy, they used to come and do one. But it is very rare, as opposed to this Singaporean deployment and the US marine deployment which you all know about. Really that is why we formed, in response to that increase. As I said, people used to put up with the three weeks of pitch black, but three weeks is very different from seven and a half months or 10 months the way it escalated to.

Mr HATTON—But there has been a change in philosophy in terms of Australia's forward defence and a concentration on Darwin. We have had over the last 10 years the building of Tindal, so the Defence Department perceptions and Australian perceptions of what is necessary for the defence of this area I think have changed over that time.

Ms Midgley—Right. There are no Australian planes based in Darwin, military jets; they are in Tindal.

Mr HATTON—But exercise out of Darwin.

Ms Midgley—Very rarely. I do not know what it is this year but very rarely, because we knew, we used to get a list of what was happening. Very rarely did they come. I know there was one at the end with the four-day exercise and I think there was another one this year. There is Singaroo, now we are doing it with the Singaporeans; that is a new one this year. See, it is just a changing world. But when all this was happening we very rarely use it. We are based in Tindal. We come up here to use it with the navy, I think. This is not very professionally describing what exactly it is. They would be able to tell you. But we do not know what it is going to be this year or next year. We have no idea. There are no Australian military jets based up here. They only come for those little exercises. It is the US Marines and the Singaporeans who do their pilot training. We have nothing against US Marines or Singaporeans. We just do not see why we should be underneath them while they are doing their pilot training.

Mr FORREST—I would like to know a little bit more about your organisation. How is it managed? Do people pay a membership to give you a few funds? Tell me a bit about your organisation.

Ms Howell—In 1993 there were a few public meetings and there were a few hundred people at each one. Out of that, a group formed which was led by three coordinators. The group agreed that these three coordinators would be the spokespeople for the group, that the rest of the group would work in other ways—perhaps write letters, ring people, or whatever their particular interest might be—and that there would be no

formal structure, no membership and no hierarchy. It would only be this group of people who continued to agree that the coordinators represented them, and that is how it has continued.

This year we branched out and started to form another group, called the Community Consultative Forum, which attempted to bring together other players in this story. We wanted to bring in the Defence Department, the NT government, the Australian government, environmental organisations, any Aboriginal organisations and us, as well as general aviation, the chamber of commerce and the real estate institute. We wanted to have a community group which would look at the relocation of the Darwin airport. We started on the premise that it did not matter whether it was going to be decided in five years or 20 years that we should move the airport, but that it was a good idea for us as a community to start to talk about it and to say the types of things that we wanted.

We did not necessarily want to say where it should be, but we wanted to be able to speak about things such as health, safety and noise and also to speak about things from other people's points of view, such as Aboriginal concerns, environmental concerns, general aviation concerns, and so on. A fellow came from the general aviation club one night and spoke quite strongly about views they had from working alongside the military which we were not aware of at all. That is what we are trying to focus on now—trying to bring in every group in the community to be able to discuss how this can happen with the best intentions for Darwin, so that we can all benefit. We believe we have a unique opportunity now to be able to plan for something which will be of benefit to everyone and the town will be able to grow.

At the moment, there is pressure to develop around the harbour and that is causing concern amongst environmentalists. We believe that it would free up real estate. We also believe that the RAAF base is compromised by where it is. They cannot do the types of activities that they would like to do because of where they are. If they were in a better location, they would be able to operate to a 100 per cent capacity if they wanted to and they would compromise no-one in doing that. We think it is a good time to start planning for the future so that both Defence and the local population can grow at a good rate and that we can work towards this goal of living together. At the moment, it is a bit of a bunfight.

Mr FORREST—You keep saying 'we': I am trying to get a feel for how many people are represented by your organisation.

Ms Midgley—We represent all noise affected people.

Mr FORREST—I know, but that is a brand statement. How many people are in your organisation?

Ms Midgley—I think another group has been formed which is called Retain Asia Aviation in Darwin. They would probably have a similar situation to us where we have

people who hold correspondence and who have constant dealings with people at government levels. They have to be able to keep that contact going. They write, ring and do all those sorts of things.

The main thing is that we are used as a counselling organisation, which is something that is quite stressful for us because we all work. We get the population ringing us up saying, 'What you are you doing about it?' We are starting to say, 'Hang on a minute! What are you doing about it?' They see us as the people who are doing something about it. There is that element that everyone is busy and sometimes they forget about it in between the exercises. As soon as the exercises come on they ring us up and say, 'What are you doing about it?'

I cannot eat dinner during exercise nights because the phone is running hot. That is why I have asked if the RAAF can bring in a proper complaints mechanism, which they do not have, because people ring us in absolute fury and anger and frustration wanting to know what we are doing about it. This is the way it operates. We are here and people know who we are. At the moment it is us, it was another couple of coordinators a few months ago. People study and change and shift. So long as we have the folder, and all the information, and we have the figureheads, that is what matters. We are the focal point for all those people who are noise affected and we get many phone calls.

Mr FORREST—You cannot say numerically how many people you represent?

Ms Midgley—No. I do not think anyone could.

Mr FORREST—I was interested in your comment there. I asked a question before and I was assured that there is a consultative process for noise complaints. You are saying something else?

Ms Midgley—Absolutely. There is a real problem. I did take note of that and I have had that from Group Captain Kavanagh before. All I can say is that he knows that I have rung him on several occasions to say that people are saying that nobody gets back to them. That has happened many times. I cannot say that they have never got back to me; they always get back to me.

We ring Squadron Leader Iwanowski and if he is not around someone says, 'We will get back to you.' If he does not know you, he is very polite. He is very polite to me, but if it is someone who is very angry, they get angry and it is just awful. People do not ring us to have a chat, they ring because they are going stark raving crazy. You almost need a counsellor on the end of the line or someone skilled in taking these complaints. If you ring at night, it is far better because the RAAF people on the end of the line are very professional. They just take your complaint and that is fine.

Mr FORREST—Do you have a record of these people who have made a

complaint but have had no response? Do you keep a record?

Ms Midgley—Yes, I have books and tomes at home, of all my notes and things. When someone rings I just make a note. Usually what we are trying to do these days is put it back on them and say, ‘Look, it’s not just us, it’s the community. You also must ring and do something, you can’t just see us as the people who are doing it.’ We just say, ‘Ring Brian Kavanagh, tell him. I am sure he’ll be happy.’

Mr FORREST—How many people are in that position, have made a complaint and had no—

Ms Midgley—To me, probably this year I have had—last Pitch Black was the busiest time. It has been quite quiet at the moment. I would say there have been five people that rang me in absolute anger and distress saying, ‘We’ve finally got your number’—which is good because the RAAF does give it, or I do not know how they get it, I do not know who they ring, but they find it somehow and they say, ‘Well, no-one’s rung me back.’

Mr FORREST—Five people did.

Ms Midgley—Yes. When you think about it, you think it is not very many, but it is quite a lot. These are people who are at the end of their tether, who are really desperate. Then what we can do is give them all the phone numbers, we say, ‘Well, you can ring the Chief Minister, you can ring here, you can ring there,’ and give them an outlet for their frustration.

CHAIR—We are fairly familiar with that because in our own electorates in the same sort of circumstance people who are frustrated obviously get our numbers and ring in a less than ecstatic mood.

Ms Midgley—The problem here, though, is that they do get the runaround. The NT government says, ‘It’s not our problem, ring the RAAF,’ the federal members say, ‘Hang on a minute, that is the RAAF,’ and the RAAF say sometimes, ‘Well, talk to the politicians because it is their decision.’ So you do get this runaround, which is a little bit annoying, but we understand that that is the reality.

Mr FORREST—You are talking to the politicians now. The other question I have is on a comment that you made about an alternative site, I think you said West Arm. Has that got any sort of official status?

Ms Howell—It is on the Darwin land use regional structure plan. It came out in 1990. It is marked on that map.

Mr FORREST—And how far out is West Arm?

Ms Howell—It is just near Berry Springs, it is on the harbour from Berry Springs.

Mr FORREST—How many kilometres is that from the city?

Ms Howell—We have been told by a person in planning that with a very fast road it would take 30 minutes to drive from there into the city. But I cannot say how many kilometres that is.

CHAIR—We can seek that information and also seek the information that you offered about the number of Australian and visiting allied force activities out of the airport at Darwin.

Ms Midgley—The only reason we brought that up with the NT lands department having designated that area in 1990 was that we found that it was there. We discovered it. We found the document and it was there, so we thought, ‘Okay, let’s look at this site. What does defence think about it, what does everyone think about it?’ We are not saying that it should be there, we are just saying, ‘Let us start there.’ We are seeking more experienced people to give an opinion on that.

CHAIR—It must be understood that, while I have not sought to reduce the participation in this line of questioning at all, this is not part of our brief either. Our brief is to say, ‘Do we make the existing facilities safer?’

Ms Midgley—What we are saying is—

CHAIR—I understand. We are happy to receive all that. I am just indicating that we are not going to advance that cause, but you will be here.

I have only one other question, and that is: presumably, if Ansett or Qantas were proposing an upgrade of the facilities existing in the civilian air movements in Darwin and there were some form of inquiry, you would appear and make a similar appeal?

Ms Howell—Yes. However, primarily our group was formed in direct response to the increase in military aircraft training. It actually was not formed to include civilian aircraft. Since then it kind of includes it, I guess, because people do talk to us about it being a concern, but our primary focus is still military aircraft.

CHAIR—The question was asked simply because, with 88 per cent of the activity being civilian, it seemed obvious that there would also be some concern about civilian activity over the same houses and posing precisely the same risk of—to use your term—dropping out of the sky.

Ms Howell—If it was seen by the vast majority of the people whom we talk to regularly that that was a worthwhile thing, then we certainly would.

CHAIR—As there are no other questions, can I thank you for appearing before the committee this morning and for your submission.

[11.05 a.m.]

MARTIN, Mr Lex Stephen, Public Officer/Spokesperson, Northern Territory Greens, 10 Becker Place, Rapid Creek, Northern Territory 0801

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Martin—As a person who has a workshop in the Coconut Grove area, I am appearing here in my own capacity as well.

CHAIR—Thank you. The committee has received your submission. Do you propose any amendments to that submission?

Mr Martin—No, but I do have some supplementary evidence. Will I be able to table that later on?

CHAIR—You certainly will. If there are no modifications or amendments, it is proposed that the submission and the Department of Defence response be received, taken as read and incorporated in the transcript of evidence. Do members have any objections? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The documents read as follows—

CHAIR—Mr Martin, if you wish you may make a short statement and submit any additional evidence you may wish to submit.

Mr Martin—Thank you, Mr Chairman, for providing the opportunity to attend here today. In 1984, Senator Ted Robertson called for a full public inquiry into RAAF Darwin after a Mirage hit a treetop in a suburban schoolyard. Every year when fighter jets exercise out of Darwin airport people become distressed. The level of anguish and anger is directly related to the level of activity. Since the opening of RAAF base Tindal, fast military jet activity out of Darwin airport has been mostly foreign. Planned exercises to the year 2005 out of Darwin will be mostly foreign. I seek leave to table evidence from the Australian Defence Industry supplement to the Wran committee report which gives figures for projected exercises over the next 10 years.

CHAIR—The committee has no objection to receiving that evidence, Mr Martin.

Mr Martin—The RAAF freely admit their current operational safety shortcomings at Darwin airport. Despite two near miss incidents involving foreign military jets and passenger aircraft on or near the western end of the runway last year, these exercises have continued. I do not believe the completion of the control tower currently being built or today's proposed new works will entirely prevent similar occurrences in future. Indeed, risks will continue to rise exponentially with increasing air traffic. In relation to Air Commodore Kennedy's comments addressed to me, he said:

There was no significant increase of participating air elements in 1993.

This morning we all heard Air Commodore Kavanagh also say that there had been no increase in air traffic over the last five years. These statements are patently false. I seek leave to table evidence from Air Vice Marshal Fischer's recent report and collaborating evidence from the recently completed Darwin committee report.

CHAIR—The committee has no objection to receiving that evidence, Mr Martin. I presume you understand it will then be referred to Defence so that they can comment on it in their summary?

Mr Martin—For sure, yes. There are excerpts there from Air Vice Marshal Fischer's reports with regard to air movements which have been conducted over Darwin. Air Vice Marshal Fischer said:

The increase in the number of military movements at Darwin has been dramatic over the past two years.

This statement was made in 1994. In the period April 1992 to March 1993 there was a total of 8,346 military movements. In the following 12 months—April 1993 to March 1994—the total was 14,318.

The Darwin committee quantified military traffic growth at 71 per cent, and some 25 per cent of military movements were at night. The above figures show clearly that Commodore Kennedy is not giving the committee an accurate representation of the increased volume of military air traffic at Darwin Airport.

In 1994, Commander Mac Cotterell opposed a development proposal for a McDonald's fast food outlet on Bagot Road. In a *Bulletin* article published at the time, he was quoted as saying that he did not want bits of aircraft falling on the restaurant. Foreign aircraft heavily laden with bombs and fuel regularly take off directly over the Juninga special care unit which accommodates elderly Aboriginal patients. Could you please seek to determine, Mr Chairman, if the Defence Department has ever considered drawing a distinction between the value of a frail Aboriginal life and that of your typical McDonald's patron?

On the issue of sacred sites within the proximity of the proposed development area, I would like to express disappointment in Defence's failure to provide a legible site plan prior to today's hearing. However, as a resident of Rapid Creek, I know people fish, hunt and camp along the creek daily. They are doing today as they have always done. The creek system as a whole is significant. The proposal appears to take up a bit of area. I feel the locals would appreciate a more direct approach than that which is currently being taken.

One of Defence's stated objectives in the move to the north is not to create another Townsville in Darwin. This proposal flies in the face of recommendations set out for the future of Darwin airport by the Darwin committee. If I can once again table some evidence here.

Fast military jets cannot operate out of Darwin without impacting on residents' health and safety. That is a fact. Commander Brian Kavanagh has admitted to me that there are problems associated with operating out of the city but his orders are coming from above, of course. The Defence Department is called upon to destroy people's lives during wartime. It is a mark of Defence's professionalism if they fully protect all Australian lives during peacetime. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you. You did also indicate that you wished to table some material or at least have it as material for exhibition. I am happy for that to happen and so I believe are all other committee members but I did not interrupt you earlier in your speech to clarify that.

Mr Martin—Thank you.

CHAIR—Mr Martin, in Defence's evidence this morning they have indicated that the level of military activity has in fact decreased post-1994. Would you concur?

Mr Martin—Post-1994?

CHAIR—Since 1994, yes.

Mr Martin—That may well be the case, yes. I would say that could well be the case. They have the figures.

CHAIR—I simply wanted to clarify that because in your evidence given you have been concerned about the 14,318 movements you said that occurred in 1994. You had also maybe unwittingly suggested that Air Commodore Kennedy may in fact under oath not have been as frank as he could have been with the committee. I just wanted to indicate that it was post-1994 that I understood Air Commodore Kennedy had indicated a fall-off in the number of defence movements in and out of Darwin airport.

Mr Martin—No, not at all. His statement relates to air movements in 1993. If you look at the evidence that I have tabled there, the facts that he sent me state quite clearly that there was no significant increase in air movements in the year of 1993 in Darwin, which is totally contrary to his superiors' figures.

CHAIR—We will take that up with Air Commodore Kennedy. I would maintain that on the evidence that has been submitted to the committee to date, all that we are being asked to comment on—and I freely concede that we have allowed this to range widely in order to allow Northern Territory, particularly Darwin people, to express a concern about the location of the airport. I have no problem with expressing that concern. But in all the evidence that we have seen to date, the proposal to spend \$59 million in Darwin is in order to make the airport a safer place for both air force personnel and Darwin residents. Would you agree?

Mr Martin—No, I would not.

CHAIR—Of the works we have outlined, which would you say should not go ahead?

Mr Martin—All work on Darwin airport that is associated with continued fast military jet activity out of Darwin should cease because on take-off fast military jets generate noise levels which are hazardous to people living in the vicinity of Darwin. You can draw an analogy: if you have a car with four bald tyres are you going to put a new tyre on the car? Is that car safe? The answer is no, it is not. Darwin airport will never be safe in its present form because of the location and nature of the city in relation to Darwin airport.

You are being asked to make a decision which will impact on the compatibility or otherwise of the operation of RAAF Darwin out of the centre of the city of Darwin. My contention is that it is totally inappropriate. Whether the RAAF decide to move their

activities elsewhere is entirely up to them. The continued operation of fast military jets out of RAAF Darwin constitutes a hazard to the health, wellbeing and the lives, indeed, of Australian citizens.

CHAIR—Do you agree with RAAF's contention that in order to adequately protect the north they have to have a base somewhere in the Darwin region? I use the word 'region' obviously loosely, recognising that previous witnesses have identified alternative sites.

Mr Martin—No. The interest in Darwin has only come with the closing of Clark air base in the Philippines and the closing of the Crow Valley bombing range in the Philippines. Since that time in 1993, there has been an increase in the interest in Darwin through the Americans and other people such as the Singaporeans. Up until that time there was no need for this activity out of Darwin apart from a two- to three-week exercise each year which was Exercise Pitch Black. That was an exercise which, I might point out, caused considerable anguish for and anger in people over the years. This is not something new; this has been going on for many years.

As I pointed out this morning, Senator Ted Robertson called for a full public inquiry back in 1984—you can go back to the state reference library and through all the newspapers. I have lived here since 1984 and I have experienced the noise and I have seen the way that incrementally the RAAF are increasing their operations here. What is happening is that by stealth and by increment we have an environmental disaster on our hands here.

As I said in my statement this morning, the stated intention of the air move to the north is not to create another Townsville in Darwin. You have a Townsville in Darwin right now; you have a problem. You do not need to worry about creating Townsville because you have it here now.

CHAIR—You may have misunderstood my question, which was: are you opposed to the presence of the RAAF in the Darwin region? I use the word 'region' loosely because there are alternative sites identified by previous witnesses.

Mr Martin—Not at all. It has always amazed me that you have an airstrip such as Fenton outside Adelaide River which is in quite good condition. It has a heritage and a history of being involved in clearing the Japanese out of Java during the Second World War; a lot of Americans lost their lives down there. It is a very significant World War II site in terms of Australia's history. It is in quite good condition. Sixty million dollars spent on Fenton would give a training facility out of that area. If you put up a control tower, put a fence around it, resurfaced the tarmac, and put some lights and a power station in, it would give a basic operational base.

If they wanted to interact with Tindal there would be no problems; it is only 100

kilometres away from Darwin and 250 kilometres away from Tindal. Exactly the same function could occur. People from RAAF could commute to Fenton. There would be no problem there. They could continue on where they are. The commercial activity could continue as it is but the \$60 million you are going to be spending around RAAF base Darwin is inappropriate and it could be spent elsewhere quite successfully with no problems whatsoever.

CHAIR—I understand that, but the reality we face, as a committee, is that our job is not to relocate the air base but to determine where the \$60 million is wisely spent—the point you just made in your response to my last question. The evidence we must weigh up in making this decision is how long it will be before there is an alternative site and, therefore, how wisely is the money spent, given that no matter what we do and no matter who the government is, there will continue to be air activity out of RAAF Darwin for at least the next 20 years.

Mr Martin—Well, it is about time the Australian government started thinking about clearing some of the city of Darwin which they have just completed building because you cannot mitigate against noise. You have a special care centre directly under the flight path. You have bomb laden aircraft flying over it at 300 feet. This is the situation at the moment and you are being asked to consolidate this situation. That is what you are being asked today. Once they throw more good money after bad then we cannot do anything because we have invested too much money in this great environmental disaster that we have here in Darwin. It is crazy, it is ongoing, and you are being asked to make another decision in relation to consolidating the problem here.

CHAIR—That is true, and it is the situation that we face as a committee with Sydney Airport expenditure as well, if I were to draw something of a parallel, particularly running into the Year 2000 games. But that is not what the hearing is about, I am just indicating that noise abatement is something the committee is relatively familiar with because of the other inquiries it has conducted.

Mr Martin—Sydney is in a better position. There are new generational aircraft being introduced.

CHAIR—It is not a military base, that is quite right.

Mr HOLLIS—Mr Martin, you kept referring to an environmental disaster. Could you outline what you mean by that?

Mr Martin—I am talking about an urban environmental disaster, Mr Hollis.

Mr HOLLIS—Why? You have just used the phrase ‘environmental disaster’. Are you talking about the noise, the run-off or what?

Mr Martin—I am talking about the environmental impact of the operation of the RAAF out of an urban environment.

Mr HOLLIS—You mentioned this care centre under the flight path. How long has the care centre been there?

Mr Martin—It has been there for about six years or seven years.

Mr HOLLIS—What is a care centre?

Mr Martin—It is a health care centre for elderly Aboriginal people. They bring frail people in out of the bush and then they put them under the flight path and terrorise them with aircraft noise.

Mr HOLLIS—But the flight path was there before the care centre was there. It seems to me a little bit of poor planning to stick that care centre under a flight path and then complain.

Mr Martin—It was poor planning I must admit.

Mr HOLLIS—You can hardly blame the RAAF for that. There was a mistake made in putting the care centre there. They put the care centre there knowing that they were putting it under a flight path and it is a bit rich to then blame the RAAF for flying over.

Mr Martin—I agree wholeheartedly. However, let me also point out that when the RAAF completed an upgrade on the airport back in the 1960s, they also built a suburb known as Ludmilla alongside it. Since the 1960s when people flew around in Canberra bombers and Vipers and Vulcans and the like the type of aircraft have changed somewhat. The type of aircraft operating out of Darwin these days generate a heck of a lot of noise, as much as 120 on take-off.

The suburbs have been there for over 30 years. However, the environmental criteria are being exceeded in Ludmilla and, in fact, it is approaching the occupational noise levels there. Parents and children should be, during the course of these exercises, putting ear protection on their heads for the day. For as long as these exercises continue, people should be wearing ear protection. Regardless of the duration, any noise over 80 decibels creates sensory neural hearing problems.

Mr HOLLIS—It interested me that you kept saying you do not want to create a Townsville in Darwin and you actually said you have got a Townsville situation.

Mr Martin—I did say I did not want to create a Townsville in Darwin. I said it is a the stated objective of Defence not to create a Townsville in Darwin. It is one of their

guiding principles.

Mr HOLLIS—What is the problem with Townsville?

Mr Martin—They had social problem with Townsville years ago.

Mr HOLLIS—It was not a noise problem?

Mr Martin—No, they had social problems between the presence of the military and the local inhabitants.

Mr HOLLIS—I do not know what happened years ago, but I have served on this committee for 10 years. I would say that I go with this committee to Townsville on average at least three times a year and we have quite extensive public hearings. Over the last 10 years I have attended some 30 public hearings in Townsville. I would have chaired 20 of those 30 hearings. I have to tell you on oath that at no time in the last 10 years—and you can go through the transcript of evidence—has anyone ever brought up a social problem in Townsville created by the military presence there. In fact, it has always been the reverse. We asked everyone from the council to local groups. I can only talk about my personal experience.

I actually thought you were talking about noise because in the 30 hearings that I have been involved in I have never—and they have not all been to deal with aircraft obviously—ever once had the question of aircraft noise come up in Townsville. At the risk of going on a little bit, over the last 10 years I have visited every defence base in Australia and the closest we ever came to a question of social dislocation because of military presence was a couple years ago when we were talking about putting Robertson Barracks in at Palmerston. Someone came there and said that rape and vandalism would increase and the telephone booths in Palmerston would all be vandalised. I am not sure who we asked, whether it was the police, the military or someone, to produce all the court records. Although there had been a slight increase in telephone booths in Palmerston being vandalised, there had never been one military personnel who had ever been convicted.

As an avowed pacifist myself, I must say I reject utterly from my personal experience the idea that a military presence in any area causes the social problems that people tend to throw up every so often. There is just absolutely no evidence and if you have got the evidence, I would like you to produce it. If people cannot produce the evidence, I wish they would stop making these statements.

Mr Martin—You will have to talk to our local politicians because they talk about creating a Townsville type of situation here in Darwin. I am not talking about it.

Mr HOLLIS—The local politicians could do well to visit Townsville.

Mr Martin—They are making reference to a situation that arose in the sixties.

Mr HOLLIS—We are in the nineties now, for God's sake!

CHAIR—Can we refocus a little on the development at RAAF Darwin?

Mr HOLLIS—I am just responding to what people are saying. I have no more questions on that one.

Mr HATTON—You see no future for the RAAF in Darwin then?

Mr Martin—I see no future for fast military jets to fly out of Darwin without causing serious problems for people who live here.

Mr HATTON—And when do you consider the problems reached the level of causing real concern for the people of Darwin? Was it 1993, 1994 or prior to that?

Mr Martin—The operations of RAAF Darwin have always caused concern within the community—always—and letters to the editor attest to that. I have been to the state reference library and it has always created problems and anguish. We have had aircraft operating over our heads at three o'clock in the morning in Darwin. We have had vertical take-offs and landings of Harriers at 11 o'clock at night here in Darwin. The RAAF have given over the control tower to the Yanks and the Yanks do vertical take-offs and landings constantly in the middle of the night in the middle of the city. This happened in 1993 during spring training, if I remember correctly. It could possibly have been in early 1994.

The behaviour of the RAAF has been atrocious in Darwin over the years. Lately they have tidied their act up because obviously they have long-term plans for this place. They are asking the Australian taxpayer to build facilities for the benefit of US aircraft here. This is what is happening, because the ratio of foreign aircraft that operate in Darwin as opposed to Australian fast military jets out of Darwin is very low indeed. It may have increased over the last 12 months because the RAAF is very cognisant of this criticism as it is being made on public radio and around the town. The RAAF have done everything they can to bolster the numbers to get Australian aircraft into RAAF Darwin. It is embarrassing to them because the place has been handed over to foreign forces.

Mr HATTON—Operationally it would be quite easy for the RAAF to simply take those foreign forces to Tindal, which is much more sensitive strategically. They could base them there and they could then take one squadron of Australian aircraft and put that into Darwin. Would that still be a problem for you in terms of the noise, given they are Australian rather than foreign forces?

Mr Martin—If Australians were here rather than foreign forces?

Mr HATTON—Yes.

Mr Martin—If aircraft take-off can generate excessive noise levels, they are a problem. These days the new generation passenger aircraft, the 737s and the like, only generate about 55dB. More and more around the world people are appreciating that noise is a hazard, whether it be aircraft noise or any other form of noise. More and more people are focussing on the impact of noise as a pollutant within our society. To make long-term decisions over a 30 or 40-year period concerning the effect of noise, I simply say that it is a disaster waiting to happen.

Mr HATTON—The RAAF has indicated that most of what they want to do here is to make the base safer operationally. I think theirs is a different definition of ‘safety’ to what you are using. You are virtually using occupational health and safety and community safety in regard to noise, whereas they are talking about making the base safer in terms of those exercises by providing OLAs so that there is no greater danger than exists now in terms of changing munitions and so on. So there is a very big divide between the two different definitions.

Given that the minimum cost for relocating just the RAAF part of the base at this present time would be at least \$300 million, the RAAF is proposing to spend \$60 million—if we are to believe them—to make the base safer. If you look at the infrastructure demands of an entirely new base, they are way over the \$60 million. We are looking at that money being spent, because in the past 10 years Tindal has been developed and the resources have been poured into Tindal as the main base for the north. You would see no money being spent on RAAF Darwin and that money being put elsewhere. You are really calling for the total relocation of it as soon as possible.

Mr Martin—Yes, to keep that money in the cookie jar and ask them to go back to the drawing board and for the Department of Defence as a whole to give serious thought as to what is happening in Darwin. The problem is not going to go away; it is only going to be compounded.

Mr HOLLIS—Correct me if am wrong, but you said that it seemed to you that the RAAF were handing the base over to the Americans. I think you actually said ‘to the Yanks’. You may have the figure, but what do you estimate to be the percentage of flight movements at Darwin airport? I am talking about the military aspect of it.

Mr Martin—Fast military jets.

Mr HOLLIS—Yes. What percentage of flights are foreign planes versus Australian planes?

Mr Martin—The vast majority, from my observation. I have a workshop in the Coconut Grove area. I very rarely see an Australian F18. They are easily recognised by

virtue of their camouflage or their colours. They are easily identifiable. Very rarely do you see an F18 and very rarely to I see an Australian F111. The proportion of Australian to either Singaporean or the US is—

Mr HOLLIS—Ninety per cent?

Mr Martin—Yes. I do not think there would be 10 per cent of fast military aircraft that fly out of Darwin which would be Australian.

Mr HOLLIS—It is interesting though that you said you would very rarely recognise one, but if you are working in your workshop you would not run out every time you hear one, especially if they are going over so frequently. You would obviously only hear the sound. You would not go out and visibly sight them each time.

Mr Martin—Yes, I do.

Mr HOLLIS—You do?

Mr Martin—Yes, I do. They are quite close. They are virtually overhead.

Mr HOLLIS—If they are going over that much, you must not have time to do work. The point I was trying to make is that I thought Group Captain Kennedy answered me quite correctly this morning when I asked him a question about the noise of an Australian and a foreign aircraft. They were talking about the noise. I do not know if you were here then. I asked, ‘Is that noise Australian or foreign’ and they said, ‘The ear knows the F111 and all that. It doesn’t matter whether it is Singaporean, Australian or American, it is the same noise, the same plane.’ So that was why I wanted to be sure when you are complaining about the noise of one of these planes going over. But you claim that you actually sight each one, can see the markings on it and identify it.

Mr Martin—That is right; they are within a few hundred feet of my workshop.

Mr HOLLIS—Yes, I know. It just surprises me that you have the time to—

Mr Martin—I seek leave to table more evidence which gives you a table from Air Marshal Fisher’s report on the aircraft type that were flown out of Darwin during 1994, the time of his report. There are FA18s, C130 tankers, Prowlers, F15s, F111s, F14s and F16s—aircraft that do not belong to Australia at all. Do you want me to give you that?

I think the RAAF have attempted to give you the impression here this morning that RAAF Base Darwin is a RAAF base. While RAAF people do run the base, and we can appreciate that, the fact is that the activity out of Darwin is, most definitely, predominantly foreign aircraft. Australian citizens are being asked to bear the effect of the operations of US aircraft out of Darwin. I think that is an unreasonable ask, personally.

CHAIR—The committee is happy to have that material tabled, or at least submitted as additional evidence; there is no objection.

Mr FORREST—Mr Martin, in your evidence I was alarmed to hear you report to us—and I will just read what you have stated:

In recent years, on four separate occasions, ‘near-miss’ situations have occurred between fighter and passenger jets in the Top End to my knowledge.

Can you document those incidents? I am a bit concerned that there are alarmist statements made like that that have no substantial fact.

Mr Martin—Wing Commander Brian Kavanagh this morning talked about the two FA18s and a passenger aircraft over Tindal, earlier in the year I think it may have been. And some two or three years ago there was an incident involving a Royal Brunei aircraft, I think—I am not sure it was a passenger aircraft—somewhere over central Australia. I did not take the newspaper report at the time.

The other two incidents at Darwin airport involved an FA18 which had a wheel fall off on the runway. It was parked on the runway with the wheel off and the RAAF put a barricade up—a bit of pink plastic around it, I would imagine—and a landing 747 came in and clipped the barricade; that was in the middle of last year. Then, within a three-month period, a Singaporean A4 Skyhawk became disoriented—I actually saw this incident myself—and had a problem negotiating the end of the runway. It was flying a little too low and a little too slow so it had to put on some power and come around the suburbs. The passenger aircraft coming from behind—a 747 if I remember it correctly—had to abort its landing and take off in the opposite direction. You virtually have the Ferraris mixed up with the buses, if you know what I mean.

Mr FORREST—In aviation terms they are not near misses; they might be incidents. These things are rigorously controlled by air traffic controllers and to describe them as near misses—you should get your terminology right.

Mr Martin—If a 747 comes in and clips a plastic barricade close to a disabled FA18, that is a near miss situation.

Mr FORREST—You have submitted no evidence that these are actual incidents or whether they are just newspaper reports.

Mr Martin—Brian Kavanagh is not refuting my claims.

CHAIR—Defence will be recalled and they will have the opportunity to respond if they wish.

Mr Martin—He discussed these incidents here this morning.

Mr FORREST—I was interested in another comment you made about \$60 million being spent somewhere else. I am just wondering about your experience in building airports, because \$60 million to start a new airport facility goes nowhere: just a power station site costs about \$5 or \$6 million. Sixty million dollars goes nowhere in terms of creating new airports; how could you suggest that \$60 million be better spent?

Mr Martin—What I am saying is that it is incremental—\$12 million on the control tower last year, \$60 million this year. Obviously I have absolutely no experience in building airports. However, I am suggesting that good money is being thrown after bad, because we have a situation here which is unsafe and untenable in the long term. If the RAAF have come here this morning saying, ‘Okay, we are going to operate here for the next 50 years,’ they are going to have 50 years of aggro and problems.

CHAIR—I would just remind committee members that our brief is not to determine where the base should be located, but whether the \$60 million is being wisely spent on RAAF Darwin. Are there any other questions?

Mr HOLLIS—Yes, I have one. Mr Martin, as with all things, no-one lives in a perfect world or a world where everyone agrees. Not everyone in Darwin, I would suggest to you, takes the somewhat negative view of RAAF presence in Darwin that you take. That is not a criticism of you for making that point. But there must be quite a few people, be they business people or other people, who are somewhat pleased about it because of the various inputs into the community and into the economy of Darwin.

Mr Martin—Yes, absolutely—you will get no argument from me on that. There are a lot of people who love the RAAF here in Darwin.

Mr HOLLIS—You are not one of them?

Mr Martin—I have no objection to the RAAF, or the Americans or the Singaporeans. It is just that the Australian government has a responsibility to its citizens and to protect the lives of its citizens, and it is not adequately addressing that at the moment. That is my contention.

CHAIR—That is understood. One may reasonably observe, however, that the only reason that the RAAF is in the north—forget about Darwin—is to protect the lives of Australians.

Mr Martin—Yes, sure.

CHAIR—As there are no further questions from committee members, I would like to thank you, Mr Martin, for appearing before the committee this morning.

Mr Martin—Thanks for the opportunity.

[11.43 a.m.]

SMITH, Mr David, Managing Director, Vysrose Pty Ltd, GPO Box 2898, Darwin, Northern Territory

CHAIR—Welcome. Is there anything you wish to say about the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Smith—I am appearing as a concerned citizen of Darwin.

CHAIR—The committee has received a submission from you, dated 27 September 1996. Do you wish to propose any amendments to that submission?

Mr Smith—No.

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

The documents read as follows—

CHAIR—Mr Smith, do you wish to make a short statement before the committee proceeds to questions?

Mr Smith—Yes, I do. I am appearing before this committee to express concerns in a similar vein to what we have just heard from Mr Lex Martin. My concern with Defence proposals to spend a further \$60 million at Darwin airport is that it would appear that the monies are actually being spent to facilitate the training of foreign military and it is being put across to the people of Darwin that it is essential to have RAAF base Darwin here for a strategic role.

I have no problems with foreign military training. I admire the work that the RAAF does. However, I believe that the Department of Defence is totally ignoring the recommendations of the Wran committee report and the Australian Defence Industry consultants to the Wran committee to have a feasibility study and further investigation of the environmental consequences of foreign military training from Darwin airport.

I believe that the funds that are being proposed to be spent at Darwin airport could be used in part to undertake some sort of parliamentary inquiry or something of that nature to ascertain the full implications of foreign defence training for Darwin. I have heard you mention already that you are not here to ascertain whether or not the airport should be moved—I understand that—but there have been several calls recently for a joint consultative committee to be formed to ascertain the appropriate use of Darwin airport, the most recent being the Wran committee report recommendation 33. I feel it is a gross misappropriation of taxpayers' money to provide further facilities for infrastructure whilst that question has not been considered by government.

I believe that we need a process of community consultation and feasibility to consider the environmental consequences, not of developing some more infrastructure, but of entrenching the current site. This incremental development of Darwin airport really seems to be a way of avoiding the issue which was raised by the Australian Defence Industry consultants to the Wran committee themselves in recommending, as condition 2 of the planned increase of the defence training concept, to relocate the airport.

CHAIR—Mr Smith, in your original submission to the committee, I have the impression—and please correct me if I am wrong—that part of your frustration with Defence activities in Darwin was that there had been difficulties in development proposals that you or a company that you are associated with had in hand. Am I right about that?

Mr Smith—Yes, that is correct.

CHAIR—Do you feel that the presence of the air force has in some way frustrated those proposals? Would you care to elaborate?

Mr Smith—Yes, the presence of the RAAF has frustrated those proposals. The

RAAF want their cake and eat it as well. The attitude of the ex-Group Captain Mac Cotterell was that they should be able to fly over the Aboriginal community's land and maintain the integrity of the airport flight path for their own usage, which was contradicted by the Department of Defence's attitude which was to allow development to take place within the guidelines of AS2021.

You have read my submission. There are a number of planning issues which obviously are outside the scope of this committee and that is why I have not raised them. The Aboriginal community under the airport flight path are currently investigating these issues. Potentially there is a big public relations mistake for the Department of Defence brewing, connected with Aboriginal health and safety issues related to the increased foreign military activities. I would doubt also what the Department of Defence has stated in evidence. Whilst it may be true at the present time, I would be very surprised if there are not some fairly large increases over time. Who knows? It is probably secret information.

CHAIR—You mean increases in activity, in the number of flights?

Mr Smith—That is correct. Given that we are constantly reading in the *Northern Territory News* that 10,000 American troops will be visiting Darwin next year and that there is a proposed navy base at East Arm et cetera, it is of some concern that the Department of Defence is saying that there will not be any further increases. I guess time will be the judge of that. I am saying for the record now that I believe that to be misleading.

CHAIR—I should say in the committee's defence, however, that we have not taken a cavalier approach to this. The Department of Defence's evidence has been given under oath just as yours has. What surprised me, Mr Smith, when I read your submission was that I had assumed that someone who had business interests or development proposals for Darwin would have welcomed the presence of Defence because of the number of personnel that were here and the consequent activity.

Mr Smith—Most certainly I do.

CHAIR—That was what surprised me and that was what I was seeking to have you elaborate on at this stage.

Mr Smith—As I mentioned in my opening statement, I have no problem with Defence being here. I just think they should consider the issue of the relocation of the airport. That would be a huge infrastructure development which would have flow-on benefits to the whole of Darwin's economy.

CHAIR—Yes, I understand, but all of the sites that we have had recommended to us have been 50 kilometres away.

Mr Smith—The Darwin regional land use structure plan, as was mentioned early in 1990, has a designated site for a new airport at West Arm. That is approximately 50 kilometres from the city centre and, with the development of roads taking place at the moment through to Palmerston and beyond, that would be a half-hour's drive from the city centre, which really is a luxury in any capital city.

CHAIR—I have a rural electorate, I am fortunate enough to live 50 kilometres from a capital city airport, so I know precisely how long it takes. I can tell you it is a little more than half an hour, but we will not go into that sort of detail as it is unrelated to this hearing.

Mr Smith—My company is proposing to undertake some joint venture developments with an Aboriginal community who are situated directly under the airport flight path. The Northern Territory government, as a consequence of the increased expenditure and continued use of Darwin airport as a foreign military training base, has had commercial consequences. However, that is not the only reason I appear. I have no problems with the RAAF and Americans and whoever it might be training here. I would like to see that continue, but I would like to see it continued in a way which would benefit the RAAF and the whole of the population, not discriminate against particular minority groups.

CHAIR—I have one other question. Given that we are here to consider the wisdom or otherwise of expending \$60 million on the existing facility, principally but not exclusively to the benefit of the RAAF, do you have a difficulty as a Darwin resident with the continuing use of the airport by civilian air operators in its present location?

Mr Smith—No, they do not make as much noise and that is a necessity at this stage. In my report you will have read that the case for relocation would logically be that the noisier problem aircraft of the predominantly foreign military and some Australian defence could be moved over a staged period of time. The subdivision of the Darwin airport land, as outlined in the ADI report, could actually pay as a revenue positive exercise for the whole relocation over a period of time, and that is what the recommendation of the Wran committee report was wanting to outline the feasibility of, or assess the feasibility of, I should say.

Mr HOLLIS—The business venture you are going into, it is a land development, is it?

Mr Smith—Yes, that is right.

Mr HOLLIS—With the greatest possible respect, I am not a land developer, but the last place I would be looking to develop land is under a flight path. We heard before about problems of people building under flight paths. This is always a problem. We were involved in the Badgerys Creek sittings. Part of the thing there was that people were not

going to build there. That land around Badgerys Creek was sterilised in a way. It would seem to me—I am not a business person either, but if I were—that the last place I would be doing a little bit of land development would be under the flight path approaching an airport.

Mr Smith—Is that a question or a statement?

Mr HOLLIS—It is more of a comment.

Mr Smith—I would respond to that, Mr Hollis, by saying that there are guidelines encompassed within Australian standard 2021 for land use compatibility in aircraft affected areas. Those guidelines are fairly well understood by the Department of Defence and planners. I had a report done by a consultative firm, Airplan, who are recognised as being expert planners in their field. They actually usually work for the Department of Defence and FAC.

The actual concept we had for development was fully vindicated by them and it was totally in compliance with AS2021, with all the design standards taken into consideration. That concept is still, even with the new ANEF that has been released, fully able to be developed. From the perspective of the Aboriginal community which we are proposing a joint venture with in that development, this is the only parcel of land that they have left of their traditional homelands for the whole of the Larakia people. I am sure they would not like to hear you say that their land should be sterilised from the socioeconomics of determination aspirations.

Mr HOLLIS—They might not like me saying that but it is the truth. You can look at any airport around Australia—Melbourne is a classic example. All the guidelines that you are mentioning have been met there in Melbourne. People go there and build under those flight paths, knowing fully that planes are flying over them and then they spend the next 10 years whingeing and looking to governments for compensation. Someone is getting it very wrong. It is your decision where you build, but if you build under a flight path, I think it is a bit rich then to whinge for the next 10 years about the noise knowing fully that the noise was there before you even built.

Mr Smith—Have I mentioned noise?

Mr HOLLIS—You might not have mentioned noise.

CHAIR—I think in defence of Mr Smith he was concerned about the fact that the planning approval was not proceeded with, if I understand your submission correctly.

Mr HOLLIS—It was a wise decision that planning approval was not proceeded with. I think that was a very wise decision.

Mr Smith—Are you actually expert in the field of planning, Mr Hollis?

Mr HOLLIS—No. I have been on many hearings. Being a member of parliament, one of the things we do get quite a lot of complaints about is airport noise. We also had the hearing into Badgerys Creek. So I am not an expert on noise or planning, but having served on committees for many, many years and having been a member of parliament for something like 14 years, I do know that noise and planning are two of the issues that all members of parliament have to constantly put up with. We do have a certain amount of expertise in this area. We have heard all the arguments many, many times. Some of us cannot believe the folly of people who deliberately go and build in areas where they should not build and then complain for many years because they have built in the wrong position.

Mr Smith—Is that not what the guidelines for land use compatibility are for? That is what the tables are for, Mr Hollis. If you will let me respond.

Mr HOLLIS—That was perhaps why you were refused permission to build there. I think it was a wise decision.

Mr Smith—With regard to that, the land that the Aboriginal community has is their last remnant land under the airport flight path. The actual land itself is currently zoned R6, which is for community living. That is hardly an appropriate usage under an airport flight path and I agree totally with that. The R6 zoning allows for community living, medium density residential dwellings, cluster dwellings and developments of that nature. The Kululuk community wants to undertake development at the western end of the flight path to fulfil some of their socioeconomic aspirations. The Department of Defence has stated that it has no problems with development in accordance with the guidelines.

Those are the guidelines and we are not proposing to put medium density residential dwellings there. We are proposing to rezone the site in order to have development congruent with the land-use compatibility tables. I really do not think it is very politically correct in this day and age to say that an Aboriginal community's land should be totally sterilised from development when, in accordance with the guidelines, other Australians could undertake development anywhere else in any other capital city in Australia.

CHAIR—I must interrupt there and say that I know Mr Hollis very well and he can defend himself, as is self-evident, but the one thing you would not lightly accuse him of would be being politically incorrect or insensitive to the aspirations of Aboriginal people.

Mr Smith—No, I am not saying that at all.

Mr FORREST—Just on a change of tack, I got a bit confused, having read your

written submission of the evidence, when you introduced yourself as a citizen. Is it not also true that you are a director of Vysrose?

Mr Smith—Yes, that is right.

Mr FORREST—It is as a director of Vysrose that you have made the submission to the inquiry, is it not?

Mr Smith—That is correct, yes.

Mr FORREST—It is stated right throughout the written submission, so I got a bit confused when you introduced yourself as a concerned citizen. Could you describe what Vysrose is? How does it operate?

Mr Smith—It operates as a private company.

Mr FORREST—What does it do, though?

Mr Smith—Tourism and leisure development.

Mr FORREST—But does it act in a consulting way?

Mr Smith—It acts in a consulting way, undertakes developments and invests in real estate.

Mr FORREST—The submission refers to possible joint ventures with the development of land here that you are referring to. Is it a fact that if that land did develop your company would benefit substantially?

Mr Smith—Yes, it is. I make no secret of that whatsoever. Why would I?

Mr FORREST—Could I ask you again why you are here—in the interests of Vysrose or as a concerned citizen?

Mr Smith—Both.

Mr FORREST—For the record, that is the way you should have introduced yourself, to be fair.

Mr Smith—It is outlined here.

Mr FORREST—So you would also be familiar, as a developer, with how much things cost in investment infrastructure and so forth. Do you have any idea of what it would cost to build a new airport and relocate the RAAF?

Mr Smith—I have never been involved in a project of that nature, Mr Forrest. I would like to ask someone from Defence what Tindal cost to construct. Can I ask that question during the proceedings?

CHAIR—I would prefer that that question be noted and Defence can respond if they wish.

Mr FORREST—Could I help by saying that \$60 million is a drop in the ocean.

Mr Smith—I agree with you that \$60 million is a drop in the ocean, but I read a report in the paper recently that Defence is spending \$250 million in Canberra for an office to sit in and make decisions in for the environment of Darwin. What are the Americans contributing to our environment and our lifestyle in Darwin?

I do not mind seeing the Americans coming here, but I think if they can spend billions of dollars on the infrastructure in Subic Bay and places like that, why should they not contribute and throw in \$100 million, which is a drop in the ocean for them, plus \$60 million, plus the redevelopment over a staged period of time of Darwin airport. That would be a revenue positive exercise, as is outlined in the Australian Defence Industries consultant's report to the Wran committee which, as I have already mentioned, recommends the relocation of the airport.

Mr FORREST—Perhaps the Americans might argue that that is their contribution to regional strategic defence, I suppose.

CHAIR—I do not think we should digress at this point. I think we should recognise that, as Defence has already indicated, the Americans do in fact pay what we will loosely call a usage fee. I just place that on the record. As there are no further questions, Mr Smith, I thank you for your submission and for your appearance before the committee.

[12.05 p.m.]

PINNEY, Mr John, Deputy Secretary—Lands, Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, GPO Box 1680, Darwin, Northern Territory 0801

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee has received a letter from the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, seeking leave for a representative to appear before the committee. Leave has been granted. Mr Pinney, would you now please address the committee on the position of the Northern Territory government in relation to the evidence so far presented?

Mr Pinney—Thank you, Mr Chairman. Let me start by saying that, having reviewed the statement of evidence supplied by the committee, the Northern Territory government departments have no major matters of concern to raise before the committee. The proposed developments, as contained in the statement of evidence, appear to have been approached in a manner that gives due consideration to existing commercial infrastructure and operations at the Darwin airport. For the purposes of this committee, I think we are calling it RAAF Base Darwin, and I use those two terms interchangeably. We have been further reassured by the statements to this effect in the evidence document and by the statements here today that developments are not intended to lead to increased air activity and hence aircraft noise.

In terms of the planning and development around the airport, the proposed development is consistent with the approved uses in the Darwin control plan. We have recently advertised the land use objectives which might be applied to land in the vicinity of Darwin airport, and public response to those is limited. The land use objectives, however, have not yet been declared by the minister, and that action is still some weeks off. Nevertheless, I am confident that, on the basis of the advertised objectives and the detailed responses from the public, the proposed development is going to be consistent with them.

In so far as the specific proposal is concerned, we note the expected increase in civil amenity and safety in and around the airport. As none of the foregoing has any negative import, the Northern Territory government did not feel it necessary to make any specific submissions to this committee. In fact, the development proposal receives our full support.

I will go on to talk about some of the evidence given already today, which you invited me to do. In recent years, the Northern Territory government has maintained a strong position on any land that could compromise the future operation of the airport. While there have been some exceptions, in general it has been demonstrated by down-zoning of private and public land around the airport; by the declaring of land use policy at the eastern end of the airport; by the blocking of proposed developments on private land; and by the screening of many proposals for the use of large areas of crown land in the vicinity.

Whilst night and circuit military training exercises have been curtailed recently, domestic and international flights continue to enjoy 24-hour access to the airport. The value to the community and to the economy of such a service, building as it does on the concept of Darwin as a transport hub, needs to be evaluated against the perceived loss of amenity or development potential of land-holders and others in the area. Nevertheless, the government is aware that, at some time, Darwin airport probably will need to be relocated, to that end.

During the late 1980s we did a considerable amount of research as to potential sites and, in 1990, as has been mentioned today, we identified a suitable site that can serve either as a location for a second airport or full relocation of the Darwin airport. It is perhaps a compliment to our planners that the Wran committee later recommended that that work be done. Let me be clear, however, we do not have any plans under way to commence development at that second site, nor do we expect to do so in the near future.

In so far as our relationships with the various Defence arms are concerned, the Department of Defence and the armed forces have an excellent record in working with and informing the Northern Territory government departments. The Northern Territory is cognisant of Defence's needs and that they lead to enhancing the security of Australia. We have always welcomed and encouraged the development of Defence facilities in the Northern Territory and see them as being of a mutual benefit.

The Northern Territory realises that there are times when Defence needs and community needs and the concerns of the Northern Territory government are not wholly compatible and that an atmosphere of cooperation and compromise is sometimes necessary to produce mutually acceptable or at least balanced outcomes. In the past we believe that Defence has paid heed to whatever concerns have been raised both by the Northern Territory government and within the community and that it has made its best endeavours to work within those requirements. This is a most important aspect of the relationship between Defence and the Northern Territory and one that we hope will be maintained.

The cooperation on planning issues around the airport perhaps is a specific example that we can point to. In relation to the Wran committee, and following on from its recommendations, there is now a joint Northern Territory government and Defence structure to work together on strategic planning, including future air facilities. It is a committee jointly chaired at chief executive level by the Department of the Chief Minister and senior Defence officers.

Defence has always been an integral part of the Northern Territory community and a major contributor to our economy, and we hope that that long association continues, in the spirit of cooperation. Where Defence has sought to balance its needs with the concerns of the community and the government, the Northern Territory will continue to provide assistance and support.

CHAIR—You made a point about an alternative airport site and you referred to its location. I was distracted at that time by a comment made by the secretary so could you, for my benefit, restate what you said about the alternative site and its proximity to Darwin. I think you indicated that there were no immediate plans for development so you may care to elaborate on that.

Mr FORREST—Just as a supplementary, is that the site referred to as the West Arm?

Mr Pinney—It is a site that is referred to as West Arm. The planning that identified that site—using the tools, as much as any other, of exclusion of other alternative sites for various reasons—happened in the late 1980s. That site was part of the strategic development plan for greater Darwin that was released in 1990. The planning work that has occurred since has not invalidated that 1990 plan but I did emphasise—this is perhaps when you were distracted—that we do not at this time have any specific plans to commence development of that site nor do we expect to do so in the future. Certainly, from the civil point of view, and I would expect from the Defence point of view, there has to be some driver to that that reflects the benefits to the community as well as the costs to the community.

Mr FORREST—In all of that works, has anybody done an estimate of what it would cost to develop a site at West Arm, even preliminary costs including the infrastructure, the road access and everything else?

Mr Pinney—We have grabbed the figure from the air and it has been based on evidence given to this committee in the past for other sites and from some of the work done in Sydney. Our previous experience of some of our members in Melbourne on the MANS Committee which I think was referred to earlier. It has got to be put in the guest class, we have not done any design work or anything like that but it would have to be in excess of a couple of hundred million dollars.

CHAIR—Was this a joint facility that was proposed: military and civilian?

Mr Pinney—Let me go further and answer that question in a lengthy way. The relocation of Darwin airport would be a joint facility but, if there were to be a second airport with some other driver, there is no reason that it would not be a second airport. If we can look at it and perhaps boast a little, we can say that in the Northern Territory we have had the opportunity that perhaps the bigger cities in Australia have not had. In considering the future growth of Darwin, we have had the opportunity of looking, perhaps, a century ahead in our planning.

We think that Darwin is likely to grow to a city of about one million people. Of course, there will be stresses and strains along the way but, if Darwin grows to a city of one million people just by natural growth with some immigration and those sorts of

things, and using the models of growth of previous Australian cities—Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane, in particular—then there will be a need to relocate the airport in economic and community terms and, in fact, in terms of geographic location within the growth of Darwin. So, to answer your question, it could be joint airport, or it could be a second airport, and it may be both at various stages of its development, but the planning has not gone that far.

CHAIR—You will appreciate that, given the evidence presented to the committee, this is an important question because the wisdom of spending \$60 million hinges to a large degree on the future use of the existing site and, therefore, the period of time it will be used for that purpose. I have little doubt that on the evidence given to us and on what we saw yesterday, the existing facility poses something of a strategic hazard in defence terms. It is therefore irresponsible to do nothing, and it is equally irresponsible to have a large development there if alternatives are there on the horizon.

Mr Pinney—In our planning terms, I would be surprised if all of the drivers come together to shift Darwin airport inside a timeframe when current expenditure would be amortised.

CHAIR—May I ask you, as a Darwin resident, what proportion of the Darwin population is, in your assessment, affected by the noise of the present military activity? Clearly, some people are affected advantageously by the presence of the RAAF so, dealing solely with noise, what proportion of people are adversely affected by noise, or what proportion of Darwinians currently are unhappy about the joint activity that occurs at the RAAF base in Darwin?

Mr Pinney—You ask me that as a citizen of Darwin and not as a public servant representing the Northern Territory government, and I can only answer it in that light.

CHAIR—I understand.

Mr Pinney—Let me say that I live within a couple of hundred metres of the boundary of the airport and not the runway. There has been some redefinition of location terms here this morning. I live parallel to it and not at the ends of it, in fairness. I felt upset that I was being represented by some other people here this morning, but I cannot answer your question as to proportions. If you talk amongst the community it will depend on which groups you talk to.

CHAIR—That is why the question was asked.

Mr Pinney—I would feel that if you read the papers and talk to people, then certainly more than half the people either are not fussed by the airport, or support it. There is a difference between those two things.

CHAIR—Which suburb do you live in?

Mr Pinney—Millner.

Mr HOLLIS—I do not want to labour the point, but I remember being up here once and seeing in the newspaper a whole lot of letters. I think that it was in a period near the exercise time and there was a big debate going in the newspaper about noise. Some were arguing for the airport and some were arguing against it. Even yesterday morning, Mr Forrest, Mr Hatton and myself were at the airport—two abortive take-offs, and we were not the pilots—but while we were there, a couple of military planes took off. I must say, in fairness, that I would not have liked to have been living too close to that noise. I noticed it very much. Whether that was just at the point of take-off or what I do not know, we were out on the airport walking towards our plane but it was very loud.

Mr Pinney—I am conscious of that and that is why I went to pains to point out that I live off to the side of the runway and not underneath the flight path. However,—

CHAIR—Unlike RAAF personnel.

Mr Pinney—Unlike RAAF personnel and unlike people in Coconut Grove and Ludmilla. Instead of using the term ‘under’ I would put ‘close to the side of’ because there are also things other than noise talked about, but noise is certainly an intrusion in some parts. Putting back on my public service hat, we strive very hard to stop further development occurring there. That does not mean there will not be exceptions and I am sure you in all of your positions understand how some of those come about. Generally, there will not be more development within the noise footprints of the airport.

Mr HATTON—In terms of the long-term development of another airport, you have indicated today that there is nothing immediate and I would take the inference that there is nothing in the medium term either. The RAAF earlier indicated they did not think that was a prospect until something like 2050. Is that the case from the Northern Territory government’s point of view? Can I relate this to the specific problem that has come up in some of the evidence in terms of constraints on the development of Darwin, the fact that the airport and the RAAF base are situated in such a way that it places severe constraints on the growth and development of the rest of Darwin. Can you make any comments in regard to that?

Mr Pinney—Yes, I can. The airport is located in a place that is inconvenient to the development of Darwin. If we could have access to that 15 or 16 square kilometres, all of which admittedly is not developable, I am quite sure we would have environmental problems given what has already been said this morning about Marrara Swamp and the headwaters of Rapid Creek. That would serve to isolate a good proportion of the airport from future development.

Even so, Darwin has had to build an infrastructure around that airport which means that it has been more expensive to build Darwin than if we could have done it another way. But the airport is not the only constraint on the development of Darwin and it is not the only Defence constraint on the development of Darwin. Darwin has other geophysical constraints to its development and it has other land use and particularly Defence constraints to its development.

No matter what happens Darwin has to develop somewhere else at some stage in the future. The airport would serve to stop growth for a little while but you can see, for example, that we have now gone to Palmerston. The next stage is across the Elizabeth River into Wardell and the planning for that is starting now. If Darwin airport suddenly became available we would have two things to consider. One would be the costs of getting to the new site, particularly if we had stopped our urban development towards it, and the second point is to fill in behind on the Darwin airport site. Those things will happen but the growth will continue no matter what. It will just have its ups and downs.

Mr HATTON—In terms of the amortisation of the costs, we have had not only the development of RAAF Base Darwin but also the civil aviation development at the airport. How much has been spent in the last 10 years on renewing the civil structure at the airport?

Mr Pinney—You would have to ask the Federal Airports Corporation.

Mr HATTON—To your knowledge has it been extensive? Has there been monies poured into new facilities at the airport during the last 10 years?

Mr Pinney—Yes, all on the north side of the airport. You will recall that was not there a few years ago.

Mr HATTON—That is something else that needs to be taken into account in terms of amortisation of costs and so on.

Mr Pinney—Yes.

Mr FORREST—I will not hold you to that \$200 million—

Mr Pinney—No, I put it in terms where you cannot.

Mr FORREST—I have spent 25 years as a civil engineer; you would not even get 50 kilometres of carriageway out there for that probably.

Mr Pinney—It was a guess!

Mr FORREST—I am a bit concerned about allegations of air incidents that we

have been hearing of today. Has the Northern Territory government ever made any representations to either the federal government or the Department of Defence about concern over safety and, in particular, incidents described as near misses and so forth.

Mr Pinney—Not that I am aware of. It certainly made representations about noise, and commissioned various studies concerned with that, but safety has not been anything that I have been aware of. But I hasten to point out that I am neither in the transport section of the Northern Territory government nor any longer in the central policy area.

Mr FORREST—Is it appropriate to take that question on notice? I would not mind an answer to that. If there are concerns about safety, they would have been raised at an official level, surely.

CHAIR—I would suggest that given the nature of the hearing we can take it on notice and seek that information prior to reporting. We might also be able to find some of those answers this afternoon and incorporate them as part of the transcript of evidence via a witness or a statement from you before the hearing is closed. We will endeavour to find something over lunch; failing that, we will deal with it separately.

Mr FORREST—My other question relates to the operation of the Darwin airport in total. It seems to me that, as a commercial operation paying for itself, even with what people consider is a large amount of commercial activity here, the airport is grossly under utilised. In terms of cost justification, the RAAF use of the facility is needed in order to justify the investment that is there. Is that an appropriate observation and does the Northern Territory government share that view?

Mr Pinney—The Northern Territory government has probably never been asked that question, Mr Forrest, but, as an observation, this airstrip is longer than any other civil airstrip in this country, so they are not the normal facilities that you would build for civil aviation; it has been built for a different purpose.

So far as civil aviation is concerned, the Northern Territory government is working very hard to increase both domestic and international traffic at the airport. You are probably aware from your work that Darwin airport, for example, is not as busy as Alice Springs airport in domestic movements. The Northern Territory government would like to increase those.

Mr HATTON—The RAAF thinks it might be 2050 before we get a development of another airport or before they move. Does the Northern Territory have any view in terms of the probable time frame that we are looking at, considering the Wran committee's report that you would be looking at a new airport or completely relocating the existing one?

Mr Pinney—Not formally, but, as I indicated in my statement, we are working

together with strategic planning with the RAAF and we will question them on their 2050 and no doubt they will question us on our estimates. I am not in a position to give you any estimate from the Northern Territory government.

Mr HATTON—The reason I ask that is if we are looking at spending the \$60 million we need to look at the time frame that both the Northern Territory government and also the RAAF are looking at in terms of using that facility.

CHAIR—Precisely.

Mr HOLLIS—This is not so much a question as a request: the chairman keeps reminding us that we are not having an inquiry into the relocation of Darwin airport, but there have been a lot of geographical references pointed out here today. None of us on this committee is a resident in the Northern Territory; I wonder whether your department or anyone had a map that could magically be produced over lunch so that it could be on the wall. Oh, there is one coming.

Actually, I want it a little bit wider than that because I wanted it to encompass East Arm and various places like that so that at least we have some reference when we are talking about these things. Could you do that? If not, there may be someone in the audience who may be able to magically produce this map—or even the chairman might be able to use his extensive skills to produce a map.

CHAIR—The chairman's experience has been that whenever you are with any one of the arms of the military all sorts of things can be done, so I would be quite confident that we could actually have a map tabled, Mr Hollis, at some stage, and that it would indicate where West Arm and whatever are.

Mr Pinney—I would be quite confident that we could table a map showing both that and the potential development of Darwin.

Mr HOLLIS—Yes, that would be handy. Also, could we look at the airport and the point you are making about what a constraint the airport in its situation is on the development of Darwin.

Mr Pinney—I assume that you would be breaking pretty much after I finish.

CHAIR—It was my intention. I had this feeling that the committee had largely exhausted their questions of the Northern Territory government and I had intended, while I am not cutting you short right now, to break for lunch and not call Greening Australia before lunch, because I felt that it would make them feel as though they were being compressed or interrupted, neither of which was an option that the committee would want. So I intend to break for lunch in a few minutes.

Mr Pinney—As soon as we break perhaps I could talk to you and Mr Hollis about where we might spread a map.

Mr HATTON—I have just one more question. If there were a development at West Arm, I would imagine that there would still be problems with aircraft noise, and that it would not be so far away from future development around the Darwin region. Could you give us some idea of whether or not, even though it is 50 kilometres away, there would still be problems with aircraft noise as far as the government is concerned?

Mr Pinney—I have not unrolled all the plans that were delivered to me about 15 minutes ago, but I may have a hypothetical imposing the current ANEFs for Darwin airport over a new site, which would show that they do not spread into any residential areas at that site.

CHAIR—If there are no further questions, I propose to adjourn and to indicate that the hearing will be resumed at 1.30 p.m. when, in fact, rather than formally reconvening, if it is convenient we would take a quick look at Mr Pinney's maps—and any other people are welcome to share that with us—and then I will reconvene the meeting. We can either incorporate those maps as part of the evidence or, if it is not necessary, simply consider that we have then got the additional information.

Luncheon adjournment

[1.33 p.m.]

CLARK, Mr Alister James, Urban Bushland Manager, Greening Australia Northern Territory, GPO Box 1604, Darwin, Northern Territory

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee has received a submission from Greening Australia Northern Territory, dated 26 September 1996. Do you wish to propose any amendments?

Mr Clark—Looking at it this morning I realised there was one thing I did leave out in the submission. On the second page, the table I have there lists some of the impacts that may be associated with drains and run-off, and some of the solutions. I do not know that I fully pointed out that in the pollutants from aircraft maintenance operations I would also include extra nutrients coming down into the creek system.

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

The documents read as follows—

CHAIR—Mr Clark, do you wish to make a short statement before the committee proceeds to questions?

Mr Clark—Yes, Mr Chairman. May I comment on the comments that the Department of Defence have made?

CHAIR—You can comment on whatever you think is appropriate to your case.

Mr Clark—Thank you. I would like to just go through some of the comments the RAAF have made on the comments that I have made. I recognise the point made in point 2 that the existence of those creek systems probably does rely on the fact that the RAAF base has been there. I might just qualify that to say that that is why they are existing in an undeveloped state.

I would like to go specifically to point 5. The RAAF have mentioned a list of works that they would incorporate to avoid any adverse environmental impacts—

CHAIR—As a point of information, can I interrupt to say that this is point 5 of Air Commodore Kennedy's letter in response to your submission.

Mr Clark—That is right. I commend the RAAF on the measures that they propose. Largely, they seem quite adequate to deal with any adverse effects. I do have a few questions. If, as they say in point 6, the environmental consultants have examined the use of artificial wetlands and advised that they would not be sustainable under the prevailing climatic conditions, how does the RAAF propose to deal with chemical pollutants and extra nutrients entering the creek system? With everything that has been listed there, I do not think I can see anything there that specifically deals with extra nutrients and pollutants that may be coming down off aircraft in terms of the solvents that may be used.

I am not an expert on these sorts of things, but I would imagine that there would be some stuff being washed off aircraft and the surrounding areas into those drains. I mention this from the point of view that the lower areas of the creek are very well used by Darwin residents for swimming and we need to be careful about how that may affect people. One anecdote that was given to me by a resident who had been here for 20 years was that the water in Marrara Swamp was used as a supply of potable water during and after the cyclone. I would like the opportunity to have a look—and they have already expressed that they will—revisit those measures and have an opportunity to comment on those measures. That is pretty much all I have to say about it.

CHAIR—Mr Clark, am I then right in assuming, from the general tenor of your remarks, that you feel that the proposed expenditure will be advantageous to the environment rather than disadvantageous to it?

Mr Clark—I can't see that it could be advantageous. It is basically neutral as long as those measures are taken to ameliorate any adverse impacts. I note that they have said that it will only be disturbed areas where the works will be taken into account and, from what I have been told, that is true. So from a conservation and vegetation point of view, those areas are of little value, so yes.

CHAIR—I thought it may have been advantageous because of the proposed changes to include additional—forgive me for the layman's term—water settling areas and fuel catchment areas to ensure that what was flowing into the creeks was even better than it is now?

Mr Clark—Yes, there is that opportunity during the construction phase and during these works to put in place measures which can, eventually, probably lead to an improvement in water quality. At the moment, the water quality that is at the base of one drain at the bottom of the south-eastern end of the runway, has very high readings of phosphates coming down which are presumably from washing down of aircraft with detergents. So there is an opportunity there to deal with those sorts of things.

CHAIR—And, while not part of the hearing, I would have thought that it is probably—from Greening Australia's point of view—better to have the air force there than to have housing there, given my own experience of urban housing as a South Australian Riverland resident. It does not matter how much you try, the more people you have near a water source, the more likely it is to be polluted either by children or adults than by a group like the air force which is obliged to meet certain standards from a run-off point of view?

Mr Clark—Mr Chairman, I couldn't really comment on that. It depends really on the actions—on how the housing is instigated on the designs that are taken, the way the housing is implemented and put in place as to how great those impacts on the creek system will be, and also the actions of those people living within that catchment which will influence the water quality.

CHAIR—I was suggesting that one tenant is sometimes easier to police than 3,000.

Mr Clark—I have no comment on that.

Mr FORREST—Where do your concerns about nutrients come from? Nutrients are usually phosphates and nitrates that, to be frank about it, come from sewerage. But the sewerage system is being disposed of into the conventional system, so where does your concern about nutrients come from?

Mr Clark—From a vegetation point of view—extra nutrients in the system. Most vegetation, especially that here in the top end, is adapted to very low nutrient soils. When

you start adding nutrients to the system you actually disfavour the natural vegetation and allow exotic vegetation to invade, so you are giving an opportunity for weed invasions by allowing those nutrients into the system. There is an example of this behind the North Lakes, which currently uses treated effluent on their golf course.

Mr FORREST—I understand what nutrients can do; I live on the Murray River. What I am asking is, where is the source of the phosphate and nitrate coming from in the works that are being proposed?

Mr Clark—At the moment there is a high phosphate level coming down there, higher than would be expected. And, if you have an increase in activity, then I would presume you would have an increase in phosphate levels coming down.

Mr FORREST—So it is a presumption?

Mr Clark—Yes, it is definitely a presumption.

CHAIR—I have no other questions, Mr Clark. Maybe there are other observations you would want to make. Is there anything else you want to add to the case you put to the committee? I think if I were to sum it up you are saying that you are relieved at the air force's concern for the environment and the action they are taking, but you want to see that action in place before you give them a stamp of approval.

Mr Clark—And would just like to continue the initiative that has been started with them in consulting local stakeholders and interest groups such as Greening Australia in dealing with these issues. In that case we would like to have an opportunity to comment on the proposed works, the design of them, and perhaps be able to bring some resources to that to improve the design.

CHAIR—Thank you. If there is nothing further you wish to add, I thank you very much for appearing before the committee.

[1.44 p.m.]

GRAY, Group Captain Norman Arthur, Director, Aerospace Systems Development, Director-General Force Development—Aerospace, Department of Defence, Russell Offices, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

HAMMOND, Wing Commander Owen James, Project Director D, Director-General Facilities—Air Force, Department of Defence, Campbell Park Offices, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

KAVANAGH, Group Captain Brian Lawrence, Officer Commanding, 321 Air Base Wing, Headquarters 321 ABW, RAAF Base Darwin, Darwin, Northern Territory

KENNEDY, Air Commodore James Frederick George, Director-General Facilities—Air Force, Department of Defence, Campbell Park Offices, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

CHAIR—Gentlemen, you have heard the evidence presented to the Public Works Committee this morning. There will, no doubt, be statements you will want to make in a general sense from a Defence point of view and specific issues that have been raised that you want to respond to. I invite you to do that now.

Air Cdre Kennedy—Thank you, Mr Chairman. There are a number of points that we would like to make in conjunction with comments made by the witnesses this morning. Firstly, I would like to clarify my statement on the timing of the development of a new airfield. When asked what the likely time frame from my perspective was, I indicated probably 40 to 50 years.

However, if there were other initiatives that came along that drove us in terms of increased capability, that would certainly affect that timing. The current requirement of this proposal is not in that court, being not an increase in activity at the base. So I would just like to clarify that point.

The question of the cost to develop Tindal to date was raised. I would estimate the amount of money that has been spent on Tindal, both in terms of the capital facilities and equipment, excluding aeroplanes of course, would be well in excess of \$500 million. We need to take into account also that there was significant existing infrastructure there at the time.

CHAIR—To clarify that: you said, ‘excluding the aeroplanes,’ did you not?

Air Cdre Kennedy—Yes, excluding the aeroplanes. I mentioned also this morning that the cost to develop a new airfield in proximity to Darwin would be in excess of \$300 million. I would just like to clarify that: there will be many unknowns that could clearly increase the cost of that and I am talking primarily about the unknowns in terms of

engineering services. The current airfield is greatly dependent on local government infrastructure: roads, electricity, sewers and water supply, and all those sorts of things would have to be addressed.

More importantly, an environmental impact statement would be required to develop the concept of such an airfield, and most of these issues could be fleshed out. Whilst it has been indicated that the Northern Territory government, in terms of their planning, have identified a likely site, that still has to be proven through the environmental impact statement process to ensure that it is compatible.

The other important aspect is that there was some confusion in terms of what the intent of this current proposal is. I would like Group Captain Gray to clarify that.

Group Capt. Gray—As the project sponsor for this proposal, I was the one who took this up through all the senior Defence committees. The intention of this proposal is not to make things safer for exercises out of Darwin; it is not to do with anything to do with exercises out of Darwin. The development of Darwin is the minimum development needed to allow Darwin to operate in its assigned forward operating base role in the air defence of Darwin and the region. The fact that those facilities can then be used to increase the safety of our peacetime operations is a bonus; it is not the intent of the proposal. We have limited the development of Darwin to just those minimum capabilities needed to allow it to operate in a wartime situation to provide air defence of Darwin and its surroundings.

Air Cdre Kennedy—There are a few points that I would like Group Captain Kavanagh to address.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—There was some confusion about military aircraft movements in the previous evidence. I would like to clarify some points here. The average military percentage of overall movements is in the order of 13 per cent over five years, and I include this year's projected figures in that, so I am covering 1992 through to 1996. The average foreign military usage or movements of the overall movements is some three to four per cent. It has varied down to 2.7 and up to about 3.8, but it is in the order of three to four per cent over that period.

I do not believe that Defence did mislead the committee with the statistics given earlier about total military movements and the vast increase in those movements. The evidence submitted by a previous gentleman referring to the Fisher report relate to a particular period in the calendar year from April to March 1992-93 and from April to March 1993-94. The aggregate figures for those two years were 22,000 movements. The figures that we presented were exactly the same except that they were taken from January to December. The aggregate figures from both totals of those two years tallied to about 22,000 movements all up.

The ADI projection of exercises, which were tabled earlier as evidence as well, is the 1994 document. The current figures that we have projected for aircraft major activities for next year and the year after are up-to-date and current. I am not sure of the number that was projected, I think it was some 18 exercises projected for the next year or so. That is indeed incorrect and we are projecting only nine exercises in 1997 and at this stage plan for four in 1998.

I wish to make a point. There was some discussion as to what sort of Defence community support exists for the Darwin region. The results of three Defence Commission random surveys that were done in 1995 show that between 74 and 79 per cent of respondents indicated that aircraft noise was of no concern to them. Between six to eight per cent of total respondents said aircraft noise was of major concern, and 81 to 88 per cent surveyed believed the ADF presence in Darwin was of benefit, while between three and seven per cent thought it was a disadvantage. We intend to do a follow-up poll at the end of this year. But those survey results are available.

There was a statement by, I believe, Ms Midgley about what I was supposed to have said in a telephone conversation with a gentleman. I was said to have told him to 'Sell up now. It's going to get worse.' I did not use those words. To clarify that incident, I spoke to the gentleman concerned. He had a problem—in fact, I believe he was the gentleman who had the louvres that fell out. I indicated to him that we had taken noise management to a level such that, if we took it any further, we would jeopardise the safety of aircraft and crews and that I did not intend to do that and that I was sure he would agree with that. He did agree with that.

I then said that, from my perspective, it had been indicated to me from my bosses that the air base was going to stay where it was and that there would be no increase in operations; but that, however, there was going to be no decrease. His response to me then was, 'What am I supposed to do about it?' And I said, 'If you cannot live with the noise, then I suggest the only solution is to move.' And that was the extent of my conversation with that gentleman.

It was also pointed out that we did not get back to the public on noise complaints. I would just like to clarify that point. We classify a complainant as a bona fide complainant, if that person produces some form of identity—all I need is a telephone number and a name—if the person has got some constructive complaint to offer and some specific information on what occurred, so that we can investigate the complaint; and if the person is not excessively abusive. If all of those criteria are met, then we will investigate. Those are my instructions to my people: we will investigate the complaint and we will report back and provide feedback.

It has also been stated that, on one occasion—I am not sure when, but it was in 1993 or 1994, during Exercise Spring Training—that we 'gave control of the control tower to the Yanks.' I cannot comment directly about that, because it is not specific enough for

me; but I know that, in the time that I have been commander of this base, that has never occurred. I would also say that I find that statement quite preposterous. There is no way, I believe, that my personnel would ever give control of an air traffic control tower to Americans. We may, on occasions, have air traffic controllers in the tower to assist, but we have never in my time and watch given control of the air traffic control tower to Americans—or to anyone else, for that matter, of other nationalities.

On the matter of the incidence of near misses, I have been back through our air traffic control records. You have to define what a near miss is. The definition of a 'near miss' is, as I understand it, where one or more aircraft take deliberate action to avoid a collision, irrespective of whether it is under the control of a ground controller or not. That is the definition we use. Under that definition, there have been no near-miss reports in the past two years. In fact, the last near-miss report put in through our air traffic control services was in October 1994, and that was an occurrence of two civilian aircraft. The one before that was November 1994, again with two civilian aircraft. We do have situations where aircraft will impinge on another aircraft's airspace and there is a breakdown in separation, but that is not classified as a near miss. There have been a number of those incidents, and I think we need to clarify that before this committee.

The last point that I would make is that it was stated also that the community centre is under the flight path. I would suggest that there are no community centres located under the flight path directly. They are displaced from the flight path. I am not sure of the distance—I am sure the NT Planning Authority could tell us the exact distance of displacement—but, as I understand it, there are no community developments directly under the flight path of aircraft.

CHAIR—I have a couple of questions I had noted through you, Air Commodore Kennedy, and you may direct them as you wish. The aircraft noise abatement group indicated that it was getting a lot of phone calls from unhappy people. That is not surprising because I know enough about the political process that they would look for someone and phone. Does this mean that, in fairness to them, you are not apparent enough in the telephone book and that people do not know where to go so they go to the aircraft noise abatement group?

In other words, if I were looking for you, apart from dialling the general office number, should we have a dedicated line that was more clearly identified in order to improve RAAF public relations and relieve what must be a burden for a volunteer group?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—The difficulty with that is that we no longer have a centrally controlled switchboard. It is now controlled remotely from Tindal or Richmond, depending on which one is operating at the time. So we cannot rely on a single point of contact except for a set number for one of my officers to be my contact person. That is okay during hours, but after hours that person then goes home so I have to have a duty officer. I would have to give out two numbers for starters, which I am happy to do, but at

this stage we have not actively campaigned with the PR program to indicate where people can ring to make noise abatement complaints. At the moment, they ring the switch; they may get through to Richmond or Tindal switch, and then they are referred to another number which is usually the duty officer.

There are some mechanical difficulties in getting some contact which we could probably overcome in the near future but, at the moment, we have no active campaign to publicise where people can call. I believe that the number of calls we have had have not really justified that in the last year or so. As I said, last year we had a total of 32 complaints.

CHAIR—We could take a look at this at the close of the hearing. I wonder whether there might be merit in having a dedicated number which had an after hours answering machine that indicated that an officer would get back to that person in the morning. I know that people react unkindly to answering machines, but I must say that personally, as a taxpayer, I think that that would be a reasonable effort on behalf of Defence and, in this case, on behalf of the air force.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—We could put a 1800 number on it.

CHAIR—Yes. I certainly do not think that it is reasonable to have you find an officer who is then expected to sit up all night responding to these calls when, in fact, it could be done in a much more civil arrangement during working hours. That is just a possibility that struck me when you were giving the answer.

You also talked about the survey that indicated a relatively high level of support for the presence of RAAF Darwin. Can you elaborate on the sample size?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—I have not gone into the sample size at this stage. I would have to check. This was not conducted by myself; it was conducted by the RAAF public relations personnel at Northern Command so I am not aware of the details, only the findings at this stage.

Air Cdre Kennedy—We could table a copy of the report for you, if you wish.

CHAIR—Yes. That would be very helpful. We could then follow up the sample survey and get a view as to how objective it has been. If there is no objection to the report being tabled, it is so ordered.

There was also a question asked about the proportion of RAAF and friendly visitor flights that made up activities at RAAF Darwin. Could you comment on that?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—Did you say RAAF and friendly visitors?

CHAIR—In World War II terms it would be allies, but I do not think that that is quite right now.

Air Cdre Kennedy—Foreign aircraft movements.

CHAIR—But the proportion that were Australian and the proportion that were American or Malaysian or Singaporean as the case may be, and you recall I think it was Mr Martin—if I have misrepresented him I will allow him to raise a hand and indicate—but I think it was Mr Martin who said that he had witnessed a high proportion of other than RAAF flights that were military based.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—I believe the 90 per cent that was bandied around during that discussion is correct. Overall we have about 100,000 movements per year. An aircraft movement is an aircraft takeoff or landing, about 100,000 per year, all up. Of that, approximately 13 per cent are military, so about 13,000 military movements. Of that 13 per cent, about 30 per cent are foreign, so in the overall figure only three per cent of all aircraft movements in and out of Darwin. When I say military movements, I am talking about all military aircraft. Every time a Caribou gets airborne, every time a military helicopter flies off, that is another statistic.

I believe that Mr Martin is talking about fast jet aircraft, so there is some confusion there in our statistics. I do not have the statistics available to me about fast jet aircraft as a separate entity. We do not count fast jet aircraft. All we do in our statistics is count the number of military aircraft and the number of civilian aircraft, the same as I do not have any figures of how many Cessna 150s take off compared to how many Boeing 737s take off. All I have is a breakdown of military and civilian, and foreign military is about 30 per cent. So it has to be borne in mind that when we are talking about foreign military aircraft and the majority of them are Australian, they are not necessarily all fast jet. But then again, not all of the American and Singaporean and other foreign military aircraft movements are fast jet either. We also have transport aircraft that come and support those particular deployments.

CHAIR—I have one other question which was raised with me over lunch, which was the question of the hazard posed to Darwin by the presence of a RAAF base close to the city, relative to, say, putting it on West Arm or one of those alternatives. Would you as a military strategist care to comment on the additional hazard posed to Darwin? It really does not relate to the inquiry because the inquiry is about making the existing base less hazardous, but the question was posed about the hazard to Darwin by reason of the proximity of the base to the city.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—What hazards are we referring to?

CHAIR—If in fact Australia were under threat of attack.

Group Capt. Gray—That is very difficult to answer without looking at particular adversaries and their capabilities. Certainly if Darwin airport was to become a target then there is always the possibility that the area around it will also be targeted. However, with the advent of modern precision guided munitions that is less likely to happen. Capabilities do exist that we consider to be within the realms of possible adversaries that would allow precision strike on an airport like Darwin with very little collateral damage to the surrounding area. If someone is not going to use those sorts of weapons, it does not really matter where you put the airfield. If they are using those types of weapons, particularly large bombs with large blast effect and large collateral damage, then it means they are not concerned about civilian casualties and civilian damage, in which case they are more likely to go for the effect of bombing the city rather than the airport anyway. It is very difficult with that sort of weapon to actually put an airfield out of action, so if you are using that sort of weapon it is normally because you are trying to get the maximum amount of collateral damage, in which case you bomb the city. There is no point in bombing the airfield. So moving the airfield will not take that type of threat away.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—I think it is also a bit academic. If the airfield was targeted for a strike, then I would suggest there would be other targets within this Darwin metropolitan which would be listed as targets. It would not only be the airfield. It could be the port and it could be other military units in this area. I do not think you can work on the presumption that because it is a target you have to move it out of the metropolitan area. You would have to move all your fuel storage and you would have to move your other military units out as well based on that premise.

CHAIR—I also respond to the questioner with the view that if I were an enemy force wanting to invade Darwin, then I would find Tindal even more attractive in the longer term. Is that a fair layman's view?

Group Capt. Gray—Tindal is a much better power projection base than Darwin, that is correct. If you could take out something that really hurt our defence of the north, then Tindal would be the target. Tindal is more difficult to get to and that is one of the reasons we built it there.

Mr HATTON—I wanted to ask Group Captain Gray a question. In relation to what the inquiry is about, you said that you thought the core of this was to bring RAAF Darwin up to the minimum standard as a forward operating base. A lot of what we have been speaking about in terms of the increased safety of RAAF Darwin as a result of the OLAs and so on is tangential to the essential core of what this work is about. It is a question of bringing its pre-existing existence as a forward operating base up to scratch after a decade or more of monies not being spent on that and being spent on Tindal. Is that correct?

Group Capt. Gray—That is correct, but the urgency to upgrade the base was not there ten years ago because of the capabilities that were available within the region. As

military capability in the region has improved, it has become a higher priority to be able to provide an air defence capability in Darwin. We could not conduct an effective air defence campaign from Darwin with the current capabilities whilst still keeping the airfield running as a civil airfield because of the safety implications. By having operational facilities there that provide us with a capability to operate safely in conjunction with the civil operations, and also keep our assets safer from ground attack, that gives us a capability to project an air defence power base from here.

Mr HATTON—Those things are related, but the core is about the effectiveness of the airport operationally and in terms of being able to defend Darwin and the local assets there.

Group Capt. Gray—That is correct.

Mr HATTON—I should have probably asked the Northern Territory Government representative this question. In terms of the foreign forces that are taking their part in exercises here, from your view as RAAF people what do you know about the economic impact in Darwin of those foreign forces taking part in activities, firstly in terms of their input into full cost recovery and secondly in terms of their direct input into the local economy through the time that they spend here, what they spend in the streets and so on?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—That is a difficult question to answer. We certainly pump a lot of fuel into foreign aeroplanes. Something in the order of \$18 million a year alone goes into those aircraft. As to how much they put into the community directly, apart from fuel there are also other consumables such as food, other petrol, oil and lubricants and other stores. What they put into the community directly in terms of recreation or whatever is hard to say. We did do some calculations and I believe with the present usage of RAAF Darwin by foreign military it is in the order of \$1 million a year directly into the community. I would not like to be held to that. That is just my feeling on it and that is about the best I can give you, I am afraid.

Mr HATTON—Thanks. Group Commander Gray, when the exercises are under way, given the national security situation with Tindal, if those foreign forces which are exercising here were to be relocated to Tindal and operate out of there, would it be the case that you would have to move a squadron of Australian aircraft to Darwin to operate their part of the exercise from there?

Group Capt. Gray—Yes, that is correct. The number of aircraft involved in the exercise is set by the exercise scenario. It has to be realistic. For the exercise to be a realistic exercise of our capabilities in the north, we basically need to operate the range of capabilities you have been briefed on out of Tindal. If we do, that fills up the base. So if you want to put more foreign military aircraft in there to take one of those bits of the capability, then you would need to free up one whole section of the base by moving a squadron up here. So you would still have the same number of aircraft operating the

exercise out of Darwin. It is just that they would be ours instead of someone else's.

Mr HATTON—In the evidence given to the committee previously, it was suggested that Curtin and Scherger could be used instead of Darwin, so that Darwin would not be part of that process. As I understand it, Curtin is already used as a bare base. Could you explain what the situation is?

Group Capt. Gray—Scherger, of course, is not finished yet so we cannot use it. Curtin is used to exercise the particular scenarios that would normally use Curtin in a wartime environment. However, there are extensive costs and problems which Group Captain Kavanagh is better placed to talk about, as he is responsible for the maintenance of that base.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—We activate Curtin on an average of once to twice a year for major exercises, and the costs involved are quite substantial. First of all, you have got the personnel costs to activate a base of that size. It takes in the order of 200 people to set the base up and running and they all have to be transported in advance. There are also resource transfer costs. Everything that is used in Curtin has to be shipped in, and over long distances.

As you are aware, up in Derby in north-west Western Australia, there are some long lines of communication to get everything in there for an exercise of that nature. On the distance to training areas, once you are in that area and locating out of there - for example, in the last Pitch Black exercise, aircraft had to transit and use in-flight refuelling to get across to the Delamere air weapons range - there are some extensive costs in terms of transiting to the training areas.

A lot of our training areas are now in the Northern Territory - the new NATA opening up here at Bradshaw station, the Mt Bundy training areas, and the Delamere air weapons range area - so there are substantial costs in transiting.

Mr HATTON—Given that the core of the work here is about upgrading RAAF Darwin to minimum operating standard, a direct part of undertaking the exercises has to involve RAAF Darwin, not only because of its significance as a military base and a forward operating base, but also the assets that are directly associated with that. I think it was suggested that RAAF Darwin could be completely taken out of the picture, but I would not think that would be logical in terms of what you have to protect.

Group Capt. Gray—No, that is right. You have got to exercise protecting Darwin and its approaches, and you cannot do it any other way than the way you would do it for real. You need to use Darwin.

Mr HATTON—And that involves using those foreign services as well. They are part of those exercises related to the defence of Darwin.

Group Capt. Gray—Yes.

Mr HATTON—With your indulgence, Mr Chair, if I could direct our attention to the future map. As it exists at the present, RAAF Darwin has a corridor out to the sea. From what I could see from that map, the residential and commercial areas are to either side of that corridor. There is some industrial activity in the front, but essentially there is a long funnel where it has been protected in terms of the ANEF contours.

If you look at the West Arm situation as they have drawn it up potentially, if the activity were moved down from there, and if the residential activity within 50 years time went to one million, would there be more impact on the future population of Darwin with operating from West Arm than there is at the moment with operating from Darwin? I know that is exceedingly hypothetical but, just looking at the location constraints there, where the runway is drawn with West Arm, right up to the left of that there will be some industrial but essentially most of it will be residential. If you have a long corridor coming down between the old Darwin and the new Darwin will there not be noise impacts that might be more direct, felt on a wider basis and more intensely than what currently exists where you go straight out to sea?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—It is difficult to hypothesise but with a million people projected for Darwin, and with the extension of the proposed runway to the south-east, it would be over noise effected areas and we would have the same problem as we have now. If you are going to be moving an airfield in the next however many years you would have to move it further away than that particular case. That is just an opinion.

Air Cdre Kennedy—Unless we can protect the area from development.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—Sanitise it.

CHAIR—I think Mr Hatton's comment was that because you were heading north with the development—on both sides of the Gulf, if you want—that there would be more impact. Am I right?

Mr HATTON—I raised the question because the West Arm development has been put up throughout the day as the great salve for lots of noise problems. But, looking at the map, I can see a lot more problems than we currently have over a long period by placing a second RAAF airport, or a combined airport, where it is proposed under the Northern Territory government plan. People may disagree with that but, to me, it seems fairly obvious that running down an extended corridor with development on both sides—residential development—you could have greater problems than exist now, given the current location factors. I thought it was important that we start to look at that instead of simply saying that moving it somewhere else will fix whatever noise problem there are at the moment.

Air Cdre Kennedy—That is the reason that an environmental impact statement

would need to be developed. That is one of the issues that has to be looked at.

Mr FORREST—I am a bit concerned about these near miss air incidents that we have heard about today in evidence. I would like additional perspective. One incident goes back to 1984 or it might have been 1988 with some photographs of an aircraft that has crashed somewhere near the site shown. Are you aware of the type of aircraft that that is?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—Yes, I am. It is a Mirage.

Mr FORREST—Does the RAAF still fly those aeroplanes?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—No, we do not. We got rid of those back in 1988.

Mr FORREST—Why did you get rid of them?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—Because they reached their life of type, their age. They were replaced by F18s, as a modern day fighter.

Mr FORREST—I would like a bit of background about that incident.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—I do not know the details of that incident but I believe two mirages crashed over a period of time in that area. I think one of them was because of a malfunction. I think it had what we call a flame-out where the engine stopped. This was a single-engine aeroplane and once the engine stops then you hit the ‘silk’ so to speak. I believe that happened in one of those occurrences but I am not sure which one this was.

Mr FORREST—I am just a bit concerned because someone reading the evidence later will read that there is a general concern around Darwin about air safety and so forth. I am not sure that there is but one incident was described as a commercial aircraft striking a barrier around a park, and a military aircraft had a wheel off and so forth. Are these real incidents?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—That is a real incident. I was present at the time when that incident occurred; it certainly was a real incident. The background behind that was that an FA18 pilot from the United States Marine Corps did a normal landing, but he had a hairline fracture in his undercarriage, in his nose wheel, which collapsed on landing. It was a problem that was made evident from that other accident that some other aircraft throughout the world had a similar sort of problem. The aircraft slewed sideways off the strip.

Now the aircraft was well and truly clear of the strip at the time, and it was about two-thirds of the way down the runway. So a displaced runway procedure was implemented whereby we put crosses on the section of runway that is displaced and we

put cones to indicate where the runway should start. So the remaining two-thirds of the runway was available for the aircraft to then operate out of. A Qantas 737 came in, and it was made clear to the pilot of that aircraft on four occasions, as the evidence of this inquiry will show, that there was a displaced runway and only two-thirds of the runway was available, which was the latter two-thirds, and that the former one-third was out of action and had banners placed on it. The aircraft landed short. It did a normal landing and landed in the one-third and actually pulled up in the one-third of the runway. So it did not go anywhere near—when I say anywhere near, it stayed on the centre line of the runway, and the crashed aircraft was well off the actual runway surface on the grass. So there was no way that that can be construed as a near miss.

Mr FORREST—So the barriers it collided with were some sort of witches' hats or something.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—No, the barrier was in fact a couple of crosses on the runway made of chicken wire and banners, material painted red, and the aircraft touched down right on one of the banners. It was a gross error on the part of the pilot.

Mr FORREST—Was that recorded or reported as an incident?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—It certainly was, yes.

Mr FORREST—Are there any other incidents like that which were not near misses but reportable incidents?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—Yes, we do report, as I said, breaches of air separation where one aircraft will penetrate the safety boundary that is put around an aeroplane by the controllers on the ground. A controller will keep aircraft separated in a lateral and a vertical displacement sense and, if one aircraft is told to do something and he disobeys that or fails to obey that particular instruction and enters into that safety zone of that other aircraft, that is reported as an air safety occurrence report. There are quite a few of those, but they are not classified as near misses. A near miss, as I stated earlier, is when one or more of the pilots take immediate action to avoid a collision.

Mr FORREST—I did not take notes of some of the other instances that were described, but are you aware of those two other incidents and can explain what happened there?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—The one that was related that I have already mentioned was down in the Tindal area. It was two FA15s that penetrated into the safety zone of a Boeing 747 Qantas aircraft which set off their anti-collision system. I do not know what the actual separation was, but it was some four or five miles and a couple of thousand feet.

Mr FORREST—Even that is not described as a near miss.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—No, it is still not a near miss.

Mr FORREST—In compliance with normal aviation safety procedure, really.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—Yes.

Mr FORREST—My only other question involves changing the tack completely back to environmental concerns. I want to congratulate the RAAF for the way in which they cooperated with Greening Australia. They seem fairly supportive but they do have some concerns about nutrients. I am wondering if somebody could just describe where such concern might come from because I have not seen anything so far which suggested to me that there was a problem with nutrients as a result of the works we are considering here.

Air Cdre Kennedy—I am not aware of any but we will certainly look into it and discuss it further with Mr Clark. But I am not aware of where the nutrients would come from. There are, on rare occasions, aircraft washed but very rarely.

Mr FORREST—That would be detergent; not phosphates or nitrates.

Air Cdre Kennedy—That is true. I am not aware where these nutrients would come from but we could look to see if any fertilising is done to the fly strips; we are not aware of that. But maybe it could be coming from other users like the golf course. I do not know if they do any phosphating over there or fertilising of the golf course—I am not certain—but we will certainly talk to Mr Clark subsequent to this meeting to ascertain clearly what his concern in that area is.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—We monitor foreign militaries and the washing of aircraft. They have on occasions washed aircraft with detergents and we have attempted to restrict the washing on the concrete areas which then goes down into the normal drainage system to Sadgroves Creek area but it is only detergents that we are aware of; so we do monitor that continually.

Mr FORREST—That would go via some interceptor system though, would it not, prior to entry into any conventional drainage?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—Could you answer that? I am not the engineer here.

Wing Cmdr Hammond—Yes, sure. The judgment is that we will use either coalescers or interceptor pits to capture any fuel spill that is not mopped up by absorbent material. When it spills, you put a barrier around it. You put dri-sorb in it to absorb it; any further wash down is trapped in interceptors or coalescers, depending on the design

solution. Later, the water that is not taken out of the interceptor will feed through our vegetated buffer strips.

CHAIR—Could I just add there that Mr Clark was clearly grateful for the level of consultation that RAAF has extended to him and sought an assurance that would continue. It might be appropriate if Wing Commander Hammond could give that assurance now.

Air Cdre Kennedy—There is already a very good working relationship not only with Greening Australia but as Group Captain Kavanagh has mentioned, there are 12 organisations who are involved in the environmental management plan.

CHAIR—There is no reason why that should do anything other than continue to improve, I presume?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—That is correct.

Mr HOLLIS—I have something I would like to clarify. I know the Chair has asked this but, for my own records, one of the witnesses was quite definite when they said that the percentage of foreign planes using Darwin airport defence was 90 per cent—the activity was 90 per cent. You refute that, don't you?

Air Cdre Kennedy—Yes.

CHAIR—Can we just clarify again what the witness meant. I thought there was a bit of confusion there.

Mr HOLLIS—I thought there was too. Mr Chairman, can I just ask Mr Martin, so that I am not just misinterpreting.

Mr Martin—I am talking about aircraft movements at Darwin airport, in relation to fast military jets—FMJ as it is known in the trade, I think. Group Captain Kavanagh and the RAAF here have included all aircraft whether it be visiting 727s or Caribous or Hercules. The point I made was that I would be very surprised if the ratio of fast military jets that operate in Darwin, namely, Skyhawk, A4s, F16s and the like, to Australian jets—meaning F111s and F18s—was less than 90 per cent out of RAAF base Darwin. But, as I say, I can only use visual observation.

Air Cdre Kennedy—Ninety per cent of all fast jets are foreign?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—As I said earlier, I cannot debate that because I do not have statistics to support or disprove that. I can only go on a gut feeling, in the same way I think Mr Martin is doing, and I would suggest it is nowhere near 90 per cent. We do operate two F111 bombing camps out of here per year and one 75 Squadron fighter camp out of here per year. We operate another major fighter exercise out of here, usually Aces

North, or Pitch Black which is multilateral. I would say that it is certainly not 90 per cent. It may be in the order of 50 to 60 per cent.

CHAIR—From a committee point of view, we would be happy to get those figures. Obviously you have a permanent air force presence in Darwin. Do you have permanent air force aircraft presence at the base?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—We have one aircraft at the base on a permanent basis. The army have a squadron of medium helicopters, Kiowa helicopters, plus one leased Twin Otter. So as far as the military is concerned there are two fixed wing and 10 rotary wing aircraft there permanently. We are a deployment base for eight to 10 months of the year.

Mr HOLLIS—Following on a point Mr Hatton was making about disused bases around here, one of the witnesses said there was one airfield quite close by, called Fenton, and seemed to indicate that that could be brought into operation without a lot of expenditure. Are you familiar with this airfield?

Air Cdre Kennedy—The wartime fields such as Fenton are nowhere near the strength capability required of a military or an RPT international type of facility. In fact, we would have to completely rebuild the airfield operating surfaces.

Mr HOLLIS—I think he was saying that. He was not saying that you could take something out there and land on it now. If I am not misinterpreted him he seemed to think that would be a site that should be looked at to maybe have some expenditure on it.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—There was a private development proposal put forward to develop land around the Fenton airstrip.

Mr HOLLIS—Where is Fenton?

Group Capt. Kavanagh—I am not quite sure—it may be off this map.

Mr HOLLIS—Is it near Batchelor?

Mr Martin—It is about 15 kilometres from Adelaide River.

Group Capt. Kavanagh—So it is a fair way. I was referring to a proposal put forward for a private development company to develop rural blocks around the strip and allow people to use the strip for their private aircraft. But I am now advised that that was not at Fenton.

CHAIR—Do you wish to pursue this any further, Mr Hollis?

Mr HOLLIS—No, I do not think the RAAF are going to go to Fenton anyway—wherever it may be. I have no further questions.

Mr FORREST—I am not sure whether it will ever go to West Arm either. It really surprises me that, off the bottom of the cuff, people can say, ‘Let’s move to West Arm.’ I have asked several times today if anybody has done a cost estimate. I know it is probably not the RAAF’s position either but you do have some expertise. I notice that you said that the military development of Tindal cost about \$500 million and I did hear you mention a figure of \$300 million as well.

Air Cdre Kennedy—I said at least \$300 million.

Mr FORREST—What was that figure for? Was it for just an airport facility?

Air Cdre Kennedy—That would be to replicate the current capability that we have at Darwin, militarywise, excluding civil.

Mr FORREST—Would you have to add the civil stuff on as well?

Air Cdre Kennedy—Yes, as an extra.

Mr FORREST—Including the infrastructure and the sewerage treatment and the roads and bridges to get out there?

Air Cdre Kennedy—I did highlight that there are a lot of unknowns there because of the engineering infrastructure that would have to go in. I am not certain what the cost of that would be. But once the airfield was set up with the infrastructure there then you would need to add on the RPT international, GA and those sorts of activities.

Mr FORREST—Is anybody prepared to give a better guesstimate than what we have got, which is just a collection of figures?

CHAIR—I will have to interrupt here. I have tried since lunch not to jump up and down and say that this is ranging wider than is necessary. With great respect, Mr Forrest, it does not matter a hoot what the guesstimate is between \$300 million and \$500 million because our charter is to determine whether \$60 million is going to be wisely spent on Darwin Airport.

I have no doubt that the Northern Territory government will have a look at a number of proposals. I would have thought that West Arm has only emerged because it is an obvious piece of land that is unoccupied and may, therefore, be appropriate. I do not think that the location of the airport is particularly our business. The issue is whether or not it is about to happen, and if it is not about to happen, do we wisely spend \$60 million?

Mr FORREST—Mr Chairman, I am trying to get the situation into context. It seems to me that somebody had better get busy and work out what it might cost to relocate the airport.

CHAIR—I think you have made your point. You get universal applause for that view. Are there any other comments that Defence wishes to make?

Air Cdre Kennedy—No, thank you, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR—As there are no other questions it is proposed that all submissions be received, taken as read and incorporated in the transcript. Do members have any objections? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The documents read as follows—

CHAIR—Before closing can I indicate to all present that the four of us who are here with parliamentary experience can tell you that if you offer a parliamentarian in the House a debate on tax, he or she is bound to range into GST and a whole range of things unrelated to the bill. That sort of capacity to range into areas marginally, or largely unrelated to the subject, has been evident in the hearing today. I do not regret that. It has, however, meant that there have been opportunities for witnesses to be provocative and emotional and yet all witnesses have avoided that. I am grateful for the very constructive way in which the evidence has been given by all and been responded to by the Department of Defence.

Can I thank all witnesses who have appeared before us today and thank those who have assisted our inspections over the last couple of days, particularly yesterday afternoon here in Darwin. A special vote of thanks is due from all of us to the Speaker of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly for allowing us the use of these hearing facilities. I would also like to thank my committee members, Hansard and the secretariat staff for making this hearing possible.

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 2.35 p.m.