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JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Reference: Relocation of 171st Aviation Squadron to Holsworthy Barracks, New South Wales

MONDAY, 12 DECEMBER 2005

HOLSWORTHY

BY AUTHORITY OF THE PARLIAMENT

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**JOINT STATUTORY COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC WORKS**

Monday, 12 December 2005

Members: Mrs Moylan (*Chair*), Mr Brendan O'Connor (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Forshaw, Parry and Troeth and Mr Forrest, Mr Jenkins, Mr Ripoll and Mr Wakelin

Members in attendance: Senators Forshaw, Parry and Troeth and Mr Jenkins, Mrs Moylan and Mr Brendan O'Connor

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Special operations working accommodation and base redevelopment stage 1, Holsworthy, New South Wales.

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Committee met at 11.04 am

CHAIR (Judi Moylan)—I declare open this public hearing into the relocation of the 171st Aviation Squadron to Holsworthy Barracks, Holsworthy, New South Wales. This project was referred to the Public Works Committee on Wednesday, 12 October 2005 for consideration and report to the parliament. In accordance with section 17(3) of the Public Works Committee Act 1969:

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

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

The committee has this morning inspected the site of the proposed works and received a confidential briefing from Defence on the project costs. The committee will now take further evidence on the public record from the Department of Defence, the Cubbitch Barta Native Title Claimants Aboriginal Corporation, the Sutherland Shire Council and the Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council.

[11.05 am]

DUDGEON, Colonel Andrew Brian, Deputy Commander, Headquarters 16th Brigade (Aviation), Department of Defence

HEALY, Mr Michael Gregory, Director, Project Development and Delivery Australian Capital Territory/New South Wales, Department of Defence

HUTCHINSON, Brigadier Peter John, Director General, Infrastructure Asset Development Branch, Department of Defence

TRINDER, Mr Colin, Director, Environmental Stewardship, Department of Defence

WATSON, Mr Peter John, Regional Manager, CSI Sydney West/South Region, Corporate Services and Infrastructure Group, Department of Defence

WEIR, Mr Rod, Consultant to Infrastructure Asset Development, Department of Defence

Witnesses were then sworn or affirmed—

CHAIR—Welcome. First, on behalf of the committee can I thank you for the excellent briefing we received this morning and also for the opportunity to examine the site on which the proposed works are to be built. We have received a statement of evidence and three supplementary submissions from the Department of Defence. These submissions will be made available in a volume of submissions for the inquiry. They are also available on the committee's web site. Does Defence wish to propose any amendments to the submissions it has made to the committee to date?

Brig. Hutchinson—No.

CHAIR—Would you like to give us a brief overview and opening statement, and then we will go to questions.

Brig. Hutchinson—This proposal seeks approval for the construction and refurbishment of facilities to enable the relocation of 171st Aviation Squadron to Holsworthy Barracks. The program consists of three components: the construction of interim facilities at Luscombe Airfield and Gallipoli Lines; the construction of permanent facilities at Luscombe Airfield; and the refurbishment of working accommodation at Jordan Lines for logistics functions, vehicle compound and shelters. This will provide facilities for the establishment of a squadron of helicopters in the Sydney region to enable more focused air mobile support to the east coast special forces capability at Holsworthy, New South Wales.

The relocation of a squadron to the Sydney region was first announced by the Prime Minister in December 2002. As 171st Aviation Squadron will be operating in support of special forces also located at Holsworthy, this project is complementary to, though independent of, work at Holsworthy Barracks approved by the committee earlier this year. All these projects at

Holsworthy are part of the permanent counter-terrorist capability requirements and special forces requirements identified by the government. These capabilities remain a high priority for government and are critical for the defence of Australia and its interests. Co-location of the 171st Aviation Squadron together with the special forces improves the synergies of high-tempo training operations, thus enabling capability and improving safety. This also meets a key recommendation from the investigation into the 1996 Black Hawk crash.

The budget for this project is \$92 million. This includes: professional design and management fees and charges; construction; furniture, fittings and equipment; and appropriate allowances for contingency. The project was foreshadowed as part of the 2005-06 budget.

Subject to parliamentary approval, it is intended to commence works in the second half of 2006. The project will be progressively completed, with the interim facilities established by the end of 2006 and the works completed by mid-2008. The squadron is expected to commence operations from Luscombe Airfield in January 2007.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I will start with a question based on a statement at paragraph 29 of your submission. It says that basing the 171st Aviation Squadron at Holsworthy was selected due to ‘a higher standard of operational capability and efficiency’ and ‘improved coordination with Special Operations units’, two of which we had a good demonstration of earlier this morning. The third point as to the selection of the site was the lower capital and operating costs. Could you explain, for the public record, why the operating costs would be lower at Holsworthy than they would be at any other locations considered?

Brig. Hutchinson—Perhaps I can go through the whole selection process and what we have considered. Holsworthy Barracks is the preferred site, primarily for operational reasons. That is because the Special Operations group is here. That is the primary operational reason. But that also leads to financial reasons, because it means that we do not have to move the helicopters from other areas to marry up with the Special Operations group here at Holsworthy. For example—and I believe the costing of the hours is not classified information—the cost of a helicopter’s operation is \$20,000 per hour. As you can imagine, the transit from Townsville to Sydney takes a number of hours, so you are talking about big dollars with those sorts of transit times. We have done all those cost analyses and they have proved that basing the helicopters here has some significant operational cost savings.

We also considered a number of other sites within the Sydney region when the announcement was made by the Prime Minister to relocate the helicopters to the Sydney region. Sites considered included RAAF Bases Williamtown and Richmond, and Nowra. Williamtown and Richmond were discarded, as both would have required traverse of Sydney by the helicopters to actually link up with the Special Operations groups—again, a cost, and an operational reason for not being located in either of those places.

We looked at the Nowra costing option in quite some detail, and actually did plans and comparative plans with both Nowra and Holsworthy. We came up with a \$10 million premium to base the helicopters at Nowra. Therefore, for those operational and costing reasons, we have decided that this is the best place to base the helicopters.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Following on that question from the chair, I refer to paragraph 3 of the submission. There is a reference to the Board of Inquiry into the Black Hawk accident at High Range in Townsville in 1996. The submission goes on to say:

The recommendation was that dedicated Army aviation assets be allocated in support of the counter terrorist and special operations capability and that the units be collocated during training, planning and the conduct of operations.

That is clearly the basis upon which, at least partly, the Defence Force has proposed that the co-location occur at Holsworthy Barracks. I have not seen a copy of the report by the inquiry, but does the recommendation itself refer to Holsworthy or refer to a number of bases when it was considering co-location?

Brig. Hutchinson—Perhaps if I lead with the answer to that question generally, then I will hand across to Colonel Dudgeon for the detail. My understanding is that we could certainly provide you with a copy of that report if you wished. The actual report itself I am not specifically familiar with, so I will hand that to Colonel Dudgeon. But I have experience of operating with the helicopters. In fact, on the day that the Black Hawk accident occurred, my unit—at that time I was commanding the 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment—flew with the Black Hawks. They have two squadrons based out of Townsville: one squadron covers the special forces capability; the other squadron was for more general use. I was flying with the Black Hawks that day, so I can talk from personal experience about the planning requirements.

Even in Townsville, operating with the helicopters at RAAF Base Townsville and with my unit located at Lavarack Barracks—both in the same town but dislocated by a number of kilometres—you still had to work very hard at the relationships to get the synergies for making that operation work. So you had to have lots of planning groups together. You would have the face-to-face and the planning staffs getting together to go through the details of how you would conduct the operation. That is for a much simpler move of just moving a unit, which I was doing—combat engineers. The difficulty we have is that we have lots of material that gets slung underneath helicopters and that sort of thing as well. To put that together, the degree of difficulty for a special forces operation is much higher. I just make that point. It is a very complex thing, and therefore my own personal experience would say: work together as closely as possible. I will pass to Colonel Dudgeon for more detail on the inquiry.

Col. Dudgeon—To answer your direct question, firstly, yes, it is on public record—the results from the board of inquiry—and I can provide that for you. We run an annual review of those recommendations to ensure that everything has been followed on. I chaired one of those early this year and I will do another early next year. The answer to your direct question: 'Did it specifically mention Holsworthy?' is no, it did not. There is a quote in the information provided to you which states that the recommendation was that the dedicated Army aviation assets—and that is now 171 Aviation Squadron—be allocated in support of counter-terrorism and that they be collocated. When the government made the decision to locate Special Operations Command here at Holsworthy because of its central location on the eastern seaboard, this was the natural location for that.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—So there were no bases mentioned?

Col. Dudgeon—No, there were not.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Particularly given that you have mentioned that you review annually the recommendations of the inquiry in 1996, why has it taken almost 10 years for Defence to look at co-locating, from your point of view? There may be a variety of reasons, but why has it taken almost a decade?

Brig. Hutchinson—I guess the answer to that is that these things do take time. The first issue is that we need to have the facilities to locate the aircraft. There are a number of command and control issues associated with this as well. In the initial response, there was a real reticence to split the aviation capability because of the command and control and technical control requirements. Before we were able to do what is being done now, we had to have the critical mass of that technical capability being handled. So from my point of view as a layperson observing this, we had the 5th Aviation Regiment, based in Townsville, which was the centre of expertise for that aviation troop lift command and control capability, and it had limited assets to support both the special forces and the broader Defence capability requirement. A number of things have occurred over that last period of not quite a decade—I think next year is the anniversary. They have been the government's announcement of the location of Special Operations capabilities on the east coast here in Sydney, based at Holsworthy, and the announcement of the additional troop lift helicopters to provide an additional 12 helicopters. Going back to what I was saying before, you had the additional reinforcement of the capability. It is only then that you are able to split a capability off from that.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—I do not mean to interrupt, but I would have thought that when there were nine Black Hawk helicopters located here during the Sydney Olympics that would have been an ideal opportunity to commence the relocation. We only get a certain brief. We get information from your submissions and we can seek other information, but I would have thought it would have been an ideal occasion on which Defence could have expedited this process rather than waiting until 2008 for the completion. Can you comment on that?

Brig. Hutchinson—There are a number of factors to that. What I am trying to say is that we needed to have sufficient capability to be able to split it in the first instance. That only happened when we had the announcement of the additional helicopters. Yes, we are able to base a squadron of helicopters for certain specific times, and that was basically what happened with the Sydney Olympics. That will happen from time to time depending on the capability requirement. For example, we have deployed helicopters to East Timor. We have helicopters in Pakistan now—a smaller number of helicopters. It is one thing to deploy them for a set period and a set task but if you want to move a capability, which is what we are talking about here, you also have to think about things like families and the sustainment of trade capabilities. It has taken us time to build up the ability to split some of those trade capabilities. For example, we have been stressed at various points over the last decade with some certain critical trades, and we may not have been able at a specific time to move the helicopters because it is not just the pilots, it is also—

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—You are saying that there is also the maintenance of them.

Brig. Hutchinson—That is right. All of those capabilities have to be planned well in advance and that is part of the process. This is a very deliberate process of, firstly, making sure you have sufficient capacity, both with the equipment that is coming in and in the trades that we have got support it, and then, secondly, making a deliberate decision about when you can split it. This is

not just 12 helicopters we are talking about; this is 200 people, the maintenance, the houses that need to be built and everything else for that capability. For the Sydney Olympics, they were here for a deployment. There was never the intention that the families move here or anything else. This is a deliberate move that we are now planning to have that capability based here from the start of 2007.

Mr JENKINS—I will start with avifauna and get that off my chest, because birds and aircraft do not mix. The Sutherland Shire submission raised some concerns about that matter, on the basis that Holsworthy is a crucial part of the corridor out in this part of the world. What is Defence's comments on the concerns raised by the Sutherland Shire?

Brig. Hutchinson—Perhaps I will start with that. It is a fairly broad question, so perhaps we can weave a few issues into the answer on that question. Defence is committed to the important environmental sustainability of Holsworthy range, which the committee saw today. I would point to a couple of the submissions that we have had from Indigenous groups that point out that there is a general acceptance that we have been good stewards on a lot of those environmental issues. Certainly, the land activity that has occurred on Holsworthy range over the last couple of decades has reduced from what it was at its peak when we had an infantry brigade based here at Holsworthy.

The committee has already seen today the growth in the vegetation out there. Clearly that has had an effect on the wildlife—the fauna—and flora. A lot of what we are talking about with this proposal is not about trampling on the ground; it is about helicopters that fly over the ground. We are in the process of an extensive environmental consultation process at the moment. We are going through the initial environmental assessment at the moment. We started public consultation with that. There is an important process that we are going through to actually determine exactly what all those effects will be. I cannot comment exactly on what the outcome of that will be because clearly that is a process that needs to be gone through. But our assessment is that flying helicopters over the environment does not have any significant impact on those species and so on that you are talking about.

One particular thing that has been flagged in the media is bats. I think we should probably comment on bats. Perhaps I could pass to Colonel Dudgeon to talk about the effect that helicopters generally have on bats. But I preface that by saying that our assessment is that we will not have any significant impact on bats, and we do not see that they will have an impact on us.

Col. Dudgeon—Here is a quick summary. In five years of flying operations out of Luscombe field here, which has involved some 3,000 flight hours in Black Hawks, there has never been any bat or bird strike in this area at all. In fact, since 1988, when the Black Hawk was introduced, we have flown over 110,000 hours around Australia and the world and there have been only 38 incidents of birds or bats impacting a Black Hawk at all. Of those, none have caused damage to the engines or rotors that have caused the helicopter to be in any dangerous situation.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—So 38-0 for the Black Hawk bird!

Col. Dudgeon—However, out of here, to answer your direct question, in 3,000 hours of flying, there has not been one in the last five years.

Mr JENKINS—What about the effect of the wetlands? It will create a new environment.

Brig. Hutchinson—I guess that follows on from what Colonel Dudgeon was talking about with the bird and bat strikes. It would appear that the helicopters generate enough vibration and noise that birds and bats generally stay away from them. Those statistics are for bird and bat strikes. I would say that most airfields that you go past these days actually have wetlands somewhere near them. I was driving past Sydney airport on the way out here today, and they operate successfully with those sorts of things.

Mr JENKINS—In relation to the temporary works being done here at Mackie, next door there is a building that has a big sign about asbestos. Is there likely to be any asbestos matters arising because of the vintage of the buildings that are going to be used temporarily?

Brig. Hutchinson—Perhaps I will start and then I can hand to either Mr Weir or Mr Healy. Certainly we have done surveys on all the buildings here. We have a survey that has been completed here for the whole base. Yes, there is asbestos in these buildings. There is also asbestos in the buildings at Jordan Lines that we are dealing with. But perhaps Mr Weir could talk about the specific surveys that we have done. Before he does that, I would also point out that, when we go through the building letting contracts, we are aware of all those issues and we will be building those requirements into all of our contracts to have that handled in the appropriate way.

Mr Weir—Yes, there have been asbestos surveys carried out on these buildings. There is asbestos in buildings affected by these works. It is intended either to remove the asbestos or, in the case of these buildings, to just ensure that it is in a stable form so that no occupation is endangered. If any work is carried out by tradesmen in that area, they will be fully aware of its existence and they will carry out that work in accordance with the code.

Brig. Hutchinson—I would also point out that most of the asbestos on Holsworthy is of the bonded form and not the more dangerous particle form.

Mr JENKINS—At the airfield there is going to be a special bay—I do not know whether it is a washing-down bay or an anticorrosive bay. We saw a similar thing in Darwin. Is that self-contained in an environmental sense? Is anything that is used collected and then dealt with separately to everything else that is happening?

Brig. Hutchinson—Yes. I will lead and then hand over to Mr Weir. The corrosion control facility here is an important part of operating the Black Hawk capability. We have had significant problems with the Black Hawk in terms of corrosion and being located in that marine-type environment. That was one of the things that we had to introduce into Townsville. In Townsville it was basically retrofitted, because we had not anticipated the level of problems that occurred there. It is something that we have developed with the experience of operating this aircraft over a number of years now. It is an important part of maintaining this capability long term.

In terms of your question on capture of runoff and that sort of thing, yes, there will be all the appropriate environmental treatments there—capture drains and that sort of thing. I will hand over to Mr Weir to handle the detail of that.

Mr Weir—Yes, it is a closed system, so the runoff from the washing operation goes through a separate filter. We are investigating, as one of the ESD initiatives, whether we can reuse that water in the first flush of the next wash. Before any of that water is discharged into the sewer system it goes through a filtering system. It is not just discharged directly to the sewer system.

Mr JENKINS—Chair, I will probably leave it at that now that I know that the HCCF is the helicopter corrosion control facility.

CHAIR—Thank you. I might say that this committee—I think before your time, Mr Jenkins—did the inquiry into the new washdown bays at Williamtown, on the same issues.

Mr JENKINS—I might have been MIA on that inquiry.

CHAIR—Yes, you have been on the committee for a long time. Senator Parry.

Senator PARRY—Thank you. I will avoid the acronyms. Brigadier, in the private briefing we touched on the issue of noise, and I wanted to raise it in the public arena. There has been a bit of correspondence between you and us in relation to the Sutherland Shire and the local environment plan. The main question that arises out of that correspondence—I have a series of questions on the noise issue—is: on 7 October, correspondence was entered into about the amendment or a request for the amendment to the plan. Can you explain the reason why you wanted that amendment to the plan?

Senator FORSHAW—Before you do, Brigadier Hutchinson, I hesitate to interrupt but I want to put on the public record that my wife is a councillor on Sutherland Shire Council. That should not in any way inhibit your answers, but I say that just in case somebody raises it later.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Brig. Hutchinson—As a precursor to the answer, we could show a couple of overheads that we have on the ANEF contours. We would be happy to release these ANEF contours to the committee as well. The first one is of Sydney airport. Mike, do you want to talk to this?

Mr Healy—Yes. With the ANEF—Australian Noise Exposure Forecast—or ANEC, which is Australian Noise Exposure Concept, documents are produced by a computer modelling system that attempt to forecast, say, for a year, some certain time in the future. It could be 10 or 20 years in the future or a concept, which is what we have developed for Holsworthy, with respect to how we will operate the aircraft. These documents describe the impact of aircraft noise on people. It is the cumulative impact of noise on people, and it is expressed as a contour diagram, generally ranging in contours between 20 and 40, in steps of five.

As you go up through the contours the impact of noise on people becomes greater. It is the primary document for planning and relates to Australian Standard 2021, which is for acoustics, aircraft noise intrusion, building siting and construction. So it links to that document. The ANEF 20 is often considered to be the critical contour. If you are outside of the ANEF 20 contour there are no restrictions on domestic housing. If you build a domestic house no special measures are required. Between ANEF 20 and 25, normally some special measures are required and above 25 a new housing development should not be permitted when the development application goes to

local government. Sydney is bit of a special case, though, as you will see in this contour diagram on the board. The outer contour there is the 20 contour. You see it covers a great deal of Sydney. Much of Sydney is affected by aircraft noise.

This one is for Bankstown airport. The outer blue line is the ANEF 20 for Bankstown. We at Holsworthy today are just below that diagram. If we go on and look at the ANEC for Holsworthy, which is the next one, you will see there is a green line. In fact it is two lines when you look at it in more detail. They are the outside of the two 20 contours. Between those green lines you get ANEF contours of 20, 25, 30. So it is all contained within that green diagram.

Brig. Hutchinson—The yellow is the Holsworthy range.

Mr Healy—The heavy red line is the military-controlled airspace around Holsworthy. So you can see that the ANEF 20 that is generated by these helicopter operations that we are proposing is all contained within the base boundary except for one small section there on the lower right-hand side, where it goes outside of the range boundary but is still within the military-controlled airspace. That is also national park—there is no housing in that vicinity. No citizen should experience planning controls when trying to submit a building application or the like resulting from the aircraft noise generated by 171 Aviation Squadron.

Brig. Hutchinson—You have Lucas Heights here. I think the area that council was talking about is around that area there.

Mr Healy—There and further south. There is pressure all over Sydney to develop and there is undeveloped land there. Defence did write to Sutherland Shire Council on the general development issue, because we are concerned about encroachment on our boundary. We are concerned about encroachment on our boundary at many bases, whether aircraft are involved or not. We have had comments from the community for many years about activities that go on on the range, whether that has been artillery, which has been fired at the range extensively in the past and not so often now or whether it is from demolition ranges and charges that are detonated on the range. The noise does penetrate beyond the range boundary. The other activities that go on on the range sometimes penetrate beyond the boundary.

Brig. Hutchinson—In the public consultation that we have got going as part of the environmental impact assessment, we are showing these sorts of slides to the community. What we are basically saying is that the critical noise element is contained largely within the range or the national park and therefore we do not see that this is a problem for council. Council suggested in their letter that, because of our letter, we were saying that we might have an effect. We are saying, no, we do not actually have an effect but we are concerned in general about encroachment, knowing that if council approves developments on the boundaries of military ranges there will be noise. The ANEF 20 is not where noise stops; it is where noise is at a critical level. There will be noise beyond that but that is at the level at which you do not have to do anything with your building. So if council approves development up to the range boundary, those people will have their houses affected by noise. It has always been that way and it will always be that way.

Senator PARRY—After all, they know what they are buying into and what they are buying next door to.

Brig. Hutchinson—That is right.

Senator PARRY—Does the ANEF 20 cover helicopters as well as regular aircraft?

Brig. Hutchinson—Yes.

Senator PARRY—So it is all types of aircraft?

Brig. Hutchinson—Yes. The ANEF 20 which we have had developed for Holsworthy considers the way that we expect to operate the helicopters along with all of our other aircraft that we would use there as well.

Mr Healy—There are standard noise profiles of various aircraft in this international modelling technique, but Defence went a further step with our Black Hawk helicopters. We flew some set patterns at Oakey about two years ago so that we could measure those noise impacts on the ground and enhance the model by inputting that detailed information for our own specific Black Hawks into the model.

Senator PARRY—If you cannot answer this question because of any confidential operational issues you do not have to. What frequency increase would the public expect? Are we expecting 20 flights a day or one flight a week? Can you give any indication?

Brig. Hutchinson—In general terms the aircraft will operate in groups of up to six as a maximum. The hours for which we are able to train are limited by aircraft and pilot availability. You will see movements of these aircraft that are far less frequent than movements of domestic aircraft. That is why, when you compare those ANEFs that we showed you for Bankstown and Sydney, you see they cover a broad area, because of the volume of aircraft that are coming in. It may well be that on a given day there may be a number of aircraft movements on the range but we have undertaken that the general entrance into and egress from the range will be to the south so that we can actually come over the least populated areas.

In the next slide, those three southern exit routes that you can see are the more common exits that we will be using. For example, if you wanted to head down to Nowra or some place like that, that would be the way that you would go. If you are going into Sydney, you will generally use one of those southern egress routes. Movements along the northern egress routes, which go over the more densely populated areas, would occur very irregularly. I think the figure is far less than one movement per day. I think we are talking about one movement in a number of days.

Col. Dudgeon—One every 18 days is what they planned for with these sorts of things.

Senator PARRY—What about when the helicopters travel in a group? What do you call a group of helicopters—a squad?

Col. Dudgeon—A formation.

Senator PARRY—Thank you for that. Does ANEF 20 take into account six travelling together or is that a single movement?

Brig. Hutchinson—Yes.

Senator PARRY—It does; that is great. I think you have satisfied my questions.

Senator FORSHAW—I wish to follow on from that discussion. I sat on a committee some years ago that looked at all these ANEF things in relation to Sydney airport and the third runway, so I know they are pretty complex. At Sydney and Bankstown airports, the planes have to take off in relation to the prevailing winds, switching between the two runways. Do helicopters largely take off and land in the one direction? How much variance would you get, depending upon prevailing wind patterns?

Brig. Hutchinson—I will not even pretend to know anything about that, Senator. I will pass the question on to Colonel Dudgeon.

Senator FORSHAW—The question is in relation to how consistently you can use the same corridor.

Col Dudgeon—Helicopters take off and land into the wind, so it changes depending on where the wind is coming from. That makes it a lot easier, really, because when you are going to and from a runway you are bound to go along that direction to land. Helicopters can approach from the side of the runway, depending on the wind, so it does change. There are prevailing winds into Holsworthy, but I am not sure where they are from.

Senator FORSHAW—Are they north-easterly or southerly?

Col Dudgeon—Probably southerlies predominantly from the coast, or south-easterly. Once a helicopter takes off and goes into the wind, it can change fairly quickly. It is just that initial period of going through transitional lift and getting wind through the rotor blades, and then you can move.

Senator FORSHAW—And that is why the ANEF contour is pretty much the boundary.

Brig. Hutchinson—Yes, rather than following those there.

Col Dudgeon—Yes, because it does not have to approach for a long way to get down there or take off.

Brig. Hutchinson—We have planned the routes within the boundaries so that we stay away from the sides, because we are trying to minimise that noise. The planning we are undertaking is in order to minimise the effect on the community. Therefore, we have planned the routes within that area. So, even though we have this restricted airspace, we do not intend to go outside to the boundaries of that restricted airspace. We will be planning the routes within the range to meet that ANEF.

Senator FORSHAW—Have you had any exchange of correspondence with the other councils that surround Holsworthy? I think this is part of the Liverpool Council area.

Brig. Hutchinson—Yes. We have had extensive contact with a number of interested groups and councils. I can provide the committee with a list rather than going through it, because there has been extensive consultation.

Senator FORSHAW—We have had a submission from Sutherland Shire Council, which borders the base to the south and to the east. But we do not have any submissions that I am aware of from any of the other councils, which are in very close proximity to the base too.

Brig. Hutchinson—I think the Sutherland Shire Council one probably links to that letter we sent them earlier, in which we say it is not directly connected; we have responded to that. We have sent notification about our environmental process to 83 organisations, which involves all of the interested councils and government instrumentalities and different layers of government, and I will provide the list of whom we have already consulted to the committee. We had three public consultation meetings last week, based on the three main council catchments for this area here. We had public consultation meetings at Moorebank, Illawong and Ingleburn last week.

Senator FORSHAW—You can ring me up and let me know when you are flying over Engadine, because that is where I live. I would like to see one because I have not seen one as yet. Another point I want to follow up is in relation to issues raised by Mr O'Connor. The squadron is to relocate to here from January 2007 and you say that the works will be completed in mid-2008, and that is the necessity for the interim works. Tell me if we are getting into areas that should be dealt with confidentially, but I am wondering about the reason for this 18-month period. I understand that you cannot complete the construction before that time, but what is the basis of the decision to relocate from January 2007? The second part of the question is: have you looked to structure the works so that the period of time for the interim facilities is as short as possible? Could you avoid some of those interim works by having a different schedule of works?

Brig. Hutchinson—I guess this follows on in part from the question of Mr O'Connor about the reason for the delay. I think government would like us to have the capability located in Sydney as soon as possible, but it is building that departmental capacity, which is what I was answering to Mr O'Connor's question.

Senator FORSHAW—Mr O'Connor also asked about what happened with the Olympics. I wonder why subsequently there was not an attempt—or maybe there was—to synchronise the completion of the works with the relocation.

Brig. Hutchinson—I think at the time of the Olympics we did not have September 11 and so there had not been the emphasis on the counter-terrorism capability; it came subsequent to that. For example, we had the interim capability during the Olympics but it was not foreseen then that all of these other things that have subsequently happened were going to occur. Perhaps if I leave that aside and just make the point that, in hindsight, that would have been a smart thing to do, but we were not as smart then.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—That is a valid point.

Brig. Hutchinson—In terms of your comment on 2007 and mid-2008, as I said, government would like to have the helicopters here as quickly as possible, and interim arrangements are being made to ensure that we have appropriate capabilities available. Perhaps that is enough said

on that. In regard to getting the permanent capability here, we have looked at the process that we have to go through for the approval of works. One of the options that I would have had would be to ask the committee for approval of advanced works. We made the assessment that, in terms of our development of the ability to deliver the works, we could go through the full process and still deliver those works in line with a move of the capability in January 2007.

The alternative would have been to try to move in January 2006, but we would not have been able to go through a process that would make that happen, particularly when you consider all the elements of capability, which I have spoken about, such as moving families and maintaining the helicopters—all the different components. That would be too soon to be able to permanently establish that capability here in Sydney.

We like to move units in a December-January period because that works around the school year and all of those sorts of things. We do not like to move units mid-year. So either you move it in January 2006 or you move it in January 2007. We want to move it as soon as possible. And clearly we are still going through processes that involve environmental clearances and everything else and making sure that we minimise the impact and that we allow public consultation and all those sorts of things. It would have been too hard to push it any earlier. So we are moving it as quickly as we think we can to meet that government—

Senator FORSHAW—I think that covers that. When everything is completed with the interim facilities, what plan, if any, is there for their reuse?

Brig. Hutchinson—To me, this has been a win-win situation. We have an amount of money, which has been discussed with the committee, that is committed to the interim facilities. A large component of that money is for the apron works for the interim facilities, and they are the same apron works that we will use for the permanent facilities. So all or a large portion of the money that we spoke about for the apron works is what we have for the permanent facilities.

But within the interim facilities themselves are the buildings that we are using. Part of what we are doing is buying some deployable shelters. We will put them on the ground for January 2007 but they will also then be available for the unit to take if we have, for example, an overseas deployment or a deployment elsewhere in Australia. So they will be reusable; that is a saving. A very large portion of those one-off interim facilities costs will be reused.

Senator Troeth—What increase in numbers are you looking at as a result of the co-location?

Brig. Hutchinson—I think the number is about 200.

Senator Troeth—I also want to ask you about the greenhouse rating. At paragraph 61, you have submitted that the energy efficiency target is a '4.5 star Whole Building Australian Building Greenhouse Rating'. Do you think you will have any difficulty achieving that target rating?

Brig. Hutchinson—We are very much on track for meeting the ABGR 4½-star target, as I understand it. The green building council four-star rating is the other one that we are heading for.

Mr Weir—It will not be easy, but we think we have a good handle on what we need to do. I have in front of me a report that gets us part of the way there. It identifies 45 different initiatives that we need to select from to achieve that rating. We will choose some of those based on a value for money approach.

Senator TROETH—That is a comparatively high rating, is it not?

Mr Weir—It is certainly not easy to achieve.

Brig. Hutchinson—But it is what we aim for in all of our new construction.

Senator TROETH—Will that apply to both the new and the refurbished facilities?

Brig. Hutchinson—It only applies to new facilities. I think the actual rating tool is only aimed at office type accommodation. So we have to make allowances for our other facilities where the rating tools have not been developed yet. We try and incorporate ecologically sustainable development in all of those facilities as well, but the tools have not been developed for workshops and that sort of thing at this stage. It is only for office accommodation and new accommodation.

Senator TROETH—I note the list in paragraph 72 of authorities and organisations that will be consulted during the development of the project. You said in your earlier remarks that you have made contact with them. There is a difference between contact and consultation, obviously. What will be the level of consultation that you undertake with them?

Brig. Hutchinson—What I could say is that there are a number of levels of consultation that we are undertaking at the moment. The first thing that we have is the extensive environmental consultation process that we are going through. The second level of consultation is around the helicopters themselves, because clearly in moving a significant capability like the helicopters permanently to Sydney we have to make sure that we have done the consultation with the range of aviation related organisations in the Sydney region. There are a number of those. There are also a number of operational type consultations that need to occur as well. That is linking in with the various state instrumentalities and organisations—police and all those sorts of people—because clearly they are people that we could be working with as well. So there is a lot of operational consultation around the helicopters as well. Finally, the third level of consultation would be the building type consultation. A number of the things mentioned in paragraph 72 are perhaps more focused at those building development type consultations as well.

This project probably has more consultation than any other project that I have been involved with. We also have Army running a very extensive consultation process in terms of the helicopters' move here. I guess I am more responsible for the consultation on the building side of things. We have engaged consultants separately for driving the environmental consultation along with our people as well. So we have all of those areas going on. As I said, I can table a list of people that we have contacted on the environmental side of things.

Senator TROETH—Yes, thanks.

Brig. Hutchinson—Do you want to talk more on the building consultation, Rod, about where are you at with covering those things?

Mr Weir—We are obviously consulting with infrastructure suppliers, rural bushfire authorities and the fire brigade to look at the capacity requirements and make sure we can plug into those. Those sorts of things are ongoing.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

[12.00 pm]

CHALKER, Mrs Glenda Josephine, Chairperson, Cubbitch Barta Native Title Claimants Aboriginal Corporation

CHAIR—Welcome. Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear today?

Mrs Chalker—I am appearing as the chairperson of the corporation and I am also a registered native title claimant.

CHAIR—The committee has received a submission from you, which will be published in a volume of submissions for the inquiry. It will also be available on the committee's web site. Do you wish to propose any amendments to the submission you have made?

Mrs Chalker—No. I am not quite sure what is required of me today, apart from answering questions.

CHAIR—We thought that you might like to make a brief comment about the submission you sent to the committee.

Mrs Chalker—I replied to the original letter that came out to me because originally, as a member of the Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council, I participated in the EIS that took place for the proposed Sydney airport. It gave the Aboriginal community a chance to have a look at the Aboriginal sites that are within the Holsworthy area. Over a seven-week period, it took about 20 of us to record approximately one-third of the sites within the Holsworthy area. During that time there were over 800 sites recorded. The reason I put in the submission is because of our concern for the possible impact that may occur on the sites. A proposal was put in 1997 by the Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council to list the Holsworthy area on the national heritage estate. I believe that happened in 1998. The estate is named after the clan of my people, the Dharawal people.

CHAIR—You outlined in your submission some general concerns. Are there some more specific concerns with regard to the impact that this project may have on the heritage value of the Cubbitch Barta national estate area?

Mrs Chalker—When the second Sydney airport proposal was squashed, for want of a better word, and with the listing on the heritage estate, the Aboriginal community believed that this was now going to be an area where there would be very little or no impact, with the Holsworthy Army Barracks winding down. Now it seems to be escalating with the helicopter squadron coming here. We have seen some damage out there with the impact of the Army over many years, but generally a lot of it has been preserved purely by the public having no access to make an impact. There are some very special places out there that there are nowhere else within the Sydney area. In fact, at one stage it was referred to as Sydney's Kakadu because of some of the artwork that exists in the Holsworthy range. It is a very special place. It provides a connection

for my family's history from a little bit further south through to the Sydney area. There is some stuff in there that is absolutely incredible that if you have not seen it you would not believe it.

CHAIR—I noticed in our information there is reference to rock carvings, rock paintings and other significant sites. I am not sure at what time you arrived here but, in an answer to a question from Senator Troeth, the point was made that an additional 200 people will be on the base as a result of this. Do you think that will have any significant impact on the preservation of the significant sites?

Mrs Chalker—I guess we are worried again about the impact from the shooting and the bombing out there and all that type of thing. That really would impact on the sites out there. There would be the people impact. Sites are impacted by people who, for whatever reason, go out and do things to them. I do not imagine that the Army would be of the frame of mind to do that sort of thing, but I am speaking of the physical impacts that might occur from training and other things.

CHAIR—Have you been included in consultations relating to this project?

Mrs Chalker—Cliff Foley from the Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council, Charles Mundine, a member of the land council, and I attended a meeting—I do not know whether it was last Thursday or last Friday—with members of the Department of Defence.

CHAIR—Are you satisfied that, through a consultation process, most of your concerns could be addressed?

Mrs Chalker—Possibly, but I think we need a little more reassurance about what may and may not occur, because sometimes we get a bit pessimistic about what we are told and what actually happens.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—I have no questions.

Senator TROETH—Having had a briefing last week, do you now know what areas you would like more information on?

Mrs Chalker—Last week we were briefed on the compound areas. We were taken out to the airport—we have been there many times before with the airport proposal study—and told what would happen there. But, once again, I go back to what may or may not happen out on the range. That is where the real impact will be; it will not be from what will physically happen around a compound.

Senator FORSHAW—You have indicated that you had the opportunity, with the Holsworthy second Sydney airport EIS, to identify a number of sites and you have mentioned the National Heritage List. Is there any sort of agreement or understanding in writing, for instance, between the land council or your native title group and either the Department of Defence or the Holsworthy defence establishment, which identifies the sites out there, describes your access to them and sets out any undertakings, if you like, or guarantees that they will not be disturbed?

Mrs Chalker—There are a lot of questions there.

Senator FORSHAW—I am sorry; I have put them all together. I am trying to understand what, other than—

Mrs Chalker—There is no agreement. Access is an issue and it is something that we would like to have. Apart from back in 1997, when the EIS was done, I have only had access to this area once, which would have been in about 1999. That was to take—I cannot remember who he was—a representative from the Army or somebody like that into a couple of the sites. So I have not accessed this area probably since 1999. Both the land council and we would like to have access to the area, but we know there are many restrictions on having access to it.

Senator FORSHAW—That would relate to the fact that a lot of live ordnance could be lying around.

Mrs Chalker—Before we did the EIS we had to sign a piece of paper saying that, if we were blown up, we would not sue them. So we have been there and done that—and a lot of live ammunition was out there, which we had to be very careful and mindful of at all times. It is something that we really are aware of.

Senator FORSHAW—That provides some degree of protection, if you like, of the sites.

Mrs Chalker—Back then, we had to do an orientation or training session before being allowed physically in there anyway.

Senator FORSHAW—Is there anything happening with regard to identifying other sites? You said that you had no doubt that there were sites that were not properly recorded or identified.

Mrs Chalker—There was someone who was in the Army here at that time in 1997 who did some recordings privately. He was a soldier here. I do not know whether that is still happening today. But we only covered about a third of the area during the airport proposal.

Senator FORSHAW—Your group is the Cubbitch Barta Native Title Claimants and you mentioned that you are a claimant yourself. Could you expand on that with regard to what is happening, if anything, in progressing a native title claim? Do you have an objective, given that this is Commonwealth Department of Defence land? That provides some barriers.

Mrs Chalker—We do not have a native title claim over Holsworthy. We have had a small number of small native title claims within the Wollondilly and Wollongong areas. Don't get me started on native title! I have been in the battle for some seven years now and, quite frankly, the government finds it very hard to say the words.

Senator FORSHAW—But in respect of the Holsworthy site there is no specific claim.

Mrs Chalker—No. I do not know what the legality is. For native title, if there has been any kind of lease at all on Crown land it is not eligible for a native title claim. And I do not know what the legality is of Holsworthy.

Senator FORSHAW—It was important to ask you that. I live locally and I am aware that there are claims in and around the Georges River area and that end. Sometimes, as you know, there is publicity which is misleading as to just what is—

Mrs Chalker—Which is not true.

Senator FORSHAW—That is right.

Mrs Chalker—We have one at Helensburgh. That is probably about the closest to this area.

CHAIR—As there are no further questions, thank you very much for appearing today.

[12.12 pm]

CARLON, Mr Mark, Manager, Environmental Planning, Sutherland Shire Council

CHAIR—Welcome and thank you for appearing before the committee today. The committee has received a submission from the council which will be published in a volume of submissions and will also be available on the committee's web site. Do you wish to propose any amendments to the submission you have made to the committee?

Mr Carlon—Since that submission was made the council has made a subsequent resolution which I would like to bring to the attention of the committee.

CHAIR—Perhaps you could speak to that now in a brief opening statement.

Mr Carlon—Certainly. Because of the timing of submissions we had to proceed with the submission before it went through the full council process. In the final stages, the council requested that a further letter be sent to the parliamentary committee and the Minister of Defence asking for: (a) consultation with the public; (b) information on flight paths; (c) flying height above all shire residential areas; (d) details of the expected ANEF levels above shire residential areas; and (e) details of future noise amelioration and a funding program for areas where the ANEF is about 20.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—I missed the opening paragraph of that resolution.

Mr Carlon—The council simply requested that a further letter be sent.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—To the Defence department.

Mr Carlon—Yes, and the parliamentary committee.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Are there any further comments you would like to make before we ask questions of you?

Mr Carlon—It is quite clear from council's view; it is only here with one issue, really. It is very early in the process, and council is aware of that, and it is not in a situation yet to fully know the impact on shire residents. Council has been previously advised by the Department of Defence, during another planning exercise, that there were to be noise and vibration impacts from the relocation of the Black Hawk squadron. In relation to that, the Department of Defence at that point made recommendations to council about land use and zoning matters. Council's main concern is to ensure that shire residents are not unduly affected and that, if they are, there are appropriate federally funded amelioration programs.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—We have received a letter firstly, chronologically speaking, from the council indicating concerns about a lack of consultation about the impact of noise and vibration. We have received a letter, in light of that submission you made, from Defence indicating that there are two separate matters: the issue about the environmental plan of the

council and suggesting where development should go is different from some of the concerns you have raised. What is the view of the council now on Defence's view about your concerns about the lack of consultation?

Mr Carlon—Council is still concerned about that. As I understand, the terms of the inquiry were very much to do with the funding of the program. It is a case of making sure that there were allowances made for amelioration works if they proved to be needed. That is a system that is in place for Kingsford Smith airport and council has been separately lobbying for a noise amelioration program to extend to the affected residents in Kurnell. It was really motivated by that—to ensure that if there was an impact there would be appropriate funding set aside for it.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—You said in your submission:

... a Federally funded noise amelioration program to reduce the burden on residents.

Mr Carlon—Yes.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—I want to ask about the relationship between Holsworthy and the shire in the broad sense. Is it your view that the community believes that the existence of Holsworthy here is a net benefit to the area? What are the views? I am asking you something that is perhaps hard to articulate, but what is your impression of people's views on the existence of what has been a longstanding location for Defence?

Mr Carlon—To the best of my knowledge it is well accepted and well regarded as an institution and a neighbour. The only adverse consequence really comes in bushfire season. Because of the unexploded ordnance there can be no firefighting on the barracks, which means that a fire builds up an incredible head of steam, at which time it then crosses Heathcote Road and hits shire residents. That is the biggest downside for our residents of having Holsworthy as a neighbour.

Senator TROETH—Carrying on from that, are you satisfied with what you know of the level of firefighting expertise provided on the base to contain such a fire?

Mr Carlon—I am not an expert in that area. I think it is a general problem that because of the unexploded ordnance there is very little ability to fight a fire, and because of the topography you get strong westerly winds coming across the plain and there is a large area where there can be no preventative action.

Senator TROETH—You would have seen the letters provided to the committee from the Department of Defence regarding an answer to your questions.

Mr Carlon—Yes, I have.

Senator TROETH—Are you satisfied with the level of information provided in that response?

Mr Carlon—The council is satisfied except that it is a little contradictory to the letter we received from the Australian government Department of Defence earlier, dated 7 October. That is our only position.

Senator TROETH—Where do you see the contradiction?

Mr Carlon—The 7 October letter was from Liz Clark, the Acting Assistant Secretary, Strategic Planning and Estate Development. There is a site that we know as site A—it is basically the other side of Heathcote Road—and it has a very flexible future zoning. At one stage it was thought it would be a future urban area. That is less likely now, but it will have some economic value in the future. In relation to that land this letter says:

Due to its close proximity, located adjacent to Holsworthy, the site may be impacted on by aircraft noise in addition to impulse noise and vibration from training exercises. As such, Defence is reticent to support any future development of Area A unless—

changes are made to our planning scheme, which was on exhibition. So we took that on board and changed our instrument. Then when we were advised of this committee and of the background information it was said there would be no impact. So within our own files we have inconsistencies in the information that Defence have given us.

Senator TROETH—But they talk about ‘within the confines of the Holsworthy range’, don’t they?

Mr Carlon—They do in the latest but not in the earlier advice. It is quite specific that it would extend beyond Heathcote Road.

Senator TROETH—Perhaps that is something that we will take up with them.

Mr JENKINS—What suburbs do you think are most affected by these operations?

Mr Carlon—It really depends on where the flight path is. I understand from my discussions since with Defence and from the consultants preparing the environmental impact statements that the main effort is to keep over water board land and national park land. Engadine is the closest suburb as well as parts of Menai and Illawong in the west of the shire. Certainly Engadine is the closest to it in the revised information.

Mr JENKINS—You have now had a discussion with the people involved in this project. I think both sides would see that as the commencement of consultation. Are you happy with that process so far?

Mr Carlon—We are happy to be consulted. My personal view, not the council’s view, of that consultation program is that it is very tight and that the public meetings and the public information things in the shire were quite restricted. Although you might think of it as one local government area, it is basically a whole series in the west of peninsulas that are separated by the Woronora River. I think the consultation was held in Illawong, yet the most affected residents are in Engadine. The distance by car from Engadine to Illawong is at least 30 minutes. They are quite different communities.

Mr JENKINS—So the council is looking not only for consultation with it, as a representative body, but also for consultation with the community/suburbs that will be affected?

Mr Carlon—Absolutely. Sutherland Shire Council has a really high rate of community consultation with everything it does and it would like to see that standard adopted.

Mr JENKINS—On the existing and previous—over the last five to 10 years—operations of Holsworthy, has the council had many complaints?

Mr Carlon—I have been there for three years. No, I do not know of any complaints. Not all would come through my office; there are other sections. But it would be a pretty benign neighbour in its current phase.

CHAIR—As there are no other questions, thank you, Mr Carlon, for your attendance.

[12.24 pm]

FOLEY, Mr Clifford William, Chairperson, Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council

MUNDINE, Mr Charles, Member, Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council

CHAIR—Welcome. Thank you for taking the time to appear before us today. The committee has received a submission from the land council, which will be published in a volume of submissions. It will also be available on the committee's web site. Do you wish to propose any amendments to your submission?

Mr Foley—Yes. We have revised our submission. We have raised some additional matters.

CHAIR—Could you outline what those additional matters are? If you will address the amendments briefly, we will then ask you to speak to your submission.

Mr Foley—I have copies here and an electronic copy as well.

CHAIR—The committee has agreed to receive that as additional evidence. Now that we have got that in writing you can speak generally to your submission.

Mr Foley—Generally we talk of the area in terms of the whole Army range. It is within our local Aboriginal land council boundary. We have a particular interest because of some work we did in there during the proposal of a new airport in Sydney. We did an environmental assessment survey of one-third of the area in looking at proposed development. We are aware of a large number of Aboriginal sites in there, we are aware of a large number of historical sites in there and of areas of military interest as well.

The area is certainly of a high significance to us. The area was locked up for a long time because of its military background, which we saw as preserving and protecting the area and its significance. The changes in the development and the use of the land are alarming to us. The Department of Defence has sold off large tracts of its defence land for housing, which we feel places this particular area under some pressure with some additional use or changes in its use. We do not see the relocation of this squadron of helicopters as just a matter of changing the barracks up in the village. In terms of the evidence that has been presented by the Department of Defence for this proposal, we see it as a process of looking at operational matters out on the range.

There have been two new weapons ranges developed on the range that were subject to cultural significance assessments, but that work was not done. That work was not completed, although the construction of the ranges was completed. We are aware that some of our sites were under threat in terms of that process and we have become alarmed at what we see as other operational matters out on the range that may impact on the environment and Aboriginal sites.

We certainly have a great interest in the area because the area is now on the register of the national estate. We were the original proposers of that nomination. The original proposal

nominated five areas of significance. It is in the federal legislation to be able to do that. We have lands adjoining it down to the south-west, down in the Wedderburn area, so we are aware of it. It is named after a native title group that is associated with the area. It is a group that is held in high regard by us and it is well respected by the communities.

One of our particular interests is that if there are going to be changes to the range then we are looking at getting some access in there and, in partnership, looking at care and management protection of some of our areas. We understand the significance of the nature of the work Defence would like to do on there, but we see some of that needs to be controlled so it does not impact on some of the other areas. We would like access to look after and maintain our areas of interest. Would you like to add anything to that, Charlie?

Mr Mundine—The nomination to go onto the National Estate List would not only list the Aboriginal significance but also the settlement history that is out there—some of the stuff there is quite unique to any part of Australia—and also the military history, which includes things that have happened through the area. Once you go through this paperwork you will see that we have listed some of the things that we know have happened through this area. We have not only the Aboriginal sites but also the environmental stuff too. Some of the plants, animals and so forth are unique and you would probably never find them anywhere else in the Sydney basin for a start, let alone outside the Sydney basin.

CHAIR—Can you tell the committee what discussions you have had with Defence, if any, over these issues?

Mr Foley—We spoke with the manager there last week in relation to our submission. They had asked us to come and have a talk with them. We spoke with them about those issues and our concerns. They indicated that some of the work that has been proposed would not affect the areas that we are talking about. Our point to them was that we understand that in terms of the barrack refurbishments but that, in the evidence that the Department of Defence had placed before the committee, they were talking about other new operational matters out on the range. Two new ranges are being built, and they are not going to be as controlled as the Army were in areas where they did particular works. We feel that, with the scope of these exercises and the machines being used, they will be accessing far more parts of the range without the controlled flow that the Army would have.

CHAIR—Are you reasonably confident that these matters can be discussed through and agreements reached to your satisfaction?

Mr Foley—When we did the original surveys in there, when we were looking at the land in terms of the proposal for the second airport, what surprised us was the number of significant Aboriginal sites. I do not think people understand the cultural and environmental significance of that area for Sydney. From our perspective, this land is pristine. Aboriginal sites out there are untouched. The land was locked up very early in settlement. Our old people's stuff is still there. I have never seen anything like it. In the Sydney basin there are some 10,000 Aboriginal sites. We recorded 3,000 sites out there when we surveyed just one-third of that range. I think people need to be aware of that. We may get passionate about it, but please understand our passion and the significance of those places—not only for us. It is a window for the whole of broader Australia,

in something that is so close to Sydney, and it is a unique opportunity to have a look at something like that.

Some of our art sites and some of our engravings have been shot up in some of their strafing exercises or trampled over by tanks, but such is the nature of it we will understand it. But 90 per cent of the stuff out there is untouched. Some of our people's tools are still there in their shelters and caves. Charlie and I come from up the north coast around Goombangaree country, but this place so close to Sydney is incredible. It is within our boundary and it is part of our responsibility as an Aboriginal land council to ensure that that area of significance and importance to our people is looked after and to provide the opportunity to explain that to the broader public. Under the concept of native title, there is only one native title claimant body that has passed the registration of the Native Title Act on the east coast of Australia, and it is in our boundary. You heard evidence before from the claimant body here. It is a body so close to Sydney but it still claims an association with country that is recognised by the Federal Court.

Our people from up the North Coast still have not achieved that. But we have done that and achieved that in our responsibility as Aboriginal people to maintain, protect and look after these places and to present evidence in appropriate forums to get that message across. We thought the area was locked up—we went silent on it after they pulled away the proposal for the second airport and we thought, because it was Defence Force land, they would lock it up for a long time. Given the opportunity to provide evidence here, we have raised the spectre of the defence lands in Sydney that are being sold off—not only the ADI site but also land in Ingleburn and surrounding Holsworthy area. Not just us as Aboriginal people but all Australians have a unique opportunity with something so close to Sydney that is pristine. Part of our brief and our responsibility as Aboriginal people and in our role with our land council is to raise this issue. You have given us the opportunity to do that, which we appreciate. We are asking that this be taken seriously and we are looking for some access. We are looking to be allowed in a partnership to play that role and have the responsibility of monitoring it a bit more now.

CHAIR—We appreciate you putting forward your perspective so eloquently. But I guess that, for our committee, the question we need to resolve is: can the needs of Defence be met and at the same time ensure that important Aboriginal sites are preserved for the future?

Mr Mundine—If you look at the sites as they are today and the history of the military on this land, as Cliff said before there are a lot of sites, probably 90 per cent of them, that have not really been impacted upon. So the military in their own way have been quite good caretakers, not only of the Aboriginal sites but also of the environment itself. I always look at from the perspective of where I come from. My backyard is the Washpool National Park and I can see similarities between it and this land. Also, I have been through other lands such as in Arnhem Land, and everyone raves about that. You have got it here, believe you me. Plus, there are some animals, such as the frogs, which are never found anywhere else. How do you look after them? We as Aboriginal people do not just look at it and say, 'These are our sites.' No, we have to look at it as the total care of the land: how do we look after the whole lot of it? In defence of the military, they did a fairly good job without realising they were doing it. How do we keep maintaining that? All we are asking is that we can work with them in partnership to maintain that and even to enhance it.

CHAIR—That is the question that our committee has to satisfactorily have answered—whether that can be achieved. It sounds to me, from what you are saying, that it is achievable.

Mr Mundine—It has been for over 100 years now. Why can't it be maintained?

CHAIR—Sure. Thank you.

Senator TROETH—I have a couple of questions. When you did the survey that you undertook at Holsworthy in respect of the second Sydney airport, did that take in the area that is now going to be affected by this new project?

Mr Mundine—We looked at the whole range as part of it, but the main thing was that, because of the time restraint, we only had seven weeks to cover 19,000 hectares. So we only covered about a third. A lot of it was going quickly through creek and ridge lines, trying to pick the major significant sites. We did find others that are not so significant but that are there. We found 3,000 sites on just a third of the land. I am ex-military myself and I have run around this place out here. I know that there are more sites than we picked up on the survey.

Senator TROETH—When you were meeting with the authorities here last week, did you discuss the specific area that is being impacted on by the proposed works?

Mr Mundine—Not with the actual works going on on the airstrip, or down here in Gallipoli Lines or Jordan Lines, no.

Senator TROETH—Were they part of the area that you surveyed when you did the earlier survey?

Mr Mundine—No. It was all down range, out on that area, once you pass that top gate.

Senator TROETH—I think the Department of Defence have indicated in their submission to us that they are unaware of any major sites within the area that they are going to be working on. Would you need to go and look at the area in more detail to find your answer to that?

Mr Mundine—I would say we would need to have a look to satisfy not only our side of it but also Defence's side of it, to make sure that they are not disturbing anything. In the course of works they have carried out in the barracks area recently, artefacts have been found. What we did not do when we were doing the airport stuff has been picked up since then.

Senator TROETH—If your concerns were properly looked at, and anything to do with your concerns taken care of, would you be happy for the project to go ahead?

Mr Foley—A part of what we presented in our evidence was with regard to the Department of Defence submission when they talked about operational matters; our concern is, what does that mean? When the Army were here they had areas where they did specific things—for example, strafing, or other functions. But we have talked to our community members, to people like Charlie who have been in the Army and are certainly aware of the place. When you bring in helicopters, they are not restricted in the way that some of those other operational matters would be. We understand that it is not necessarily Army personnel only who are going to be here—

there are going to be other specialists in training who may not be restricted in terms of the Defence Force's specifications.

So our concerns go beyond just the works at the barracks. They go into the environment. As I said, there have been two new ranges built out here on the range that were not compliant in terms of the environmental assessment act. That is, those surveys had to be done, and they were started but they were not completed. So that raises a concern for us that there are works going on here that are not being subjected to the proper controls and assessments. And if that is happening just on those two ranges, where else does it happen?

These Army lands were locked up for a long time when operational matters were going on here. But that is not the case now. If the Commonwealth has sold off other Army lands in this vicinity and in other parts of Sydney, what other threats are there to some of these areas out here? These matters concern us, simply because of the nature of the area and our responsibility and custodial role in terms of looking after them and making sure all of those places are okay. We do not just do it in terms of the Commonwealth lands here—we do it with all the lands our boundary covers. We are out there surveying, monitoring and participating in partnership to make sure the care and protection of these lands is okay. We have never pushed the point in terms of these lands here simply because they were Commonwealth lands and people were locked out of access to them. But that access has been whittled away, and the range now is not under the Department of Defence, it is under a private company.

Mr JENKINS—Are the sites that you talk about mapped or recorded?

Mr Foley—The ones we recorded when we were out here doing the surveys are. We got access, and in the seven weeks that we were out here we surveyed about a third of the lands. That was all subject to the environment assessment act and that report was produced with the Department of Defence.

Mr JENKINS—So would you really prefer that there be a greater survey?

Mr Foley—Yes, in one sense. But, as I said earlier, what shocked and surprised us—and what really created the urgency for us to have a presentation here today—is the pristine nature of those sites out there. Those sites are still untouched. We talk about our old people. Their tools and their materials for doing business are still there; they are still in the shelters. Our old people put them away and they are still where they placed them. There is nothing else like that in Sydney.

We have done a lot of survey work in Sydney. As I say, there are 10,000 or more sites recorded in the Sydney basin. Three thousand of them are out there. This is just the work we have done, and they were pretty cursory examinations because of the nature of the access that we had at the time due to the nature of the terrain out there. From our experience in the known country there are certainly other places there that are just as important.

Senator PARRY—I do not know where to start. We are getting into an area where part of it is to do with the inquiry and part of it is a broader issue. Do the group that you represent and Mrs Chalker's group communicate? Do you have one central coordinated group that looks after—

Mr Mundine—We support the native title group through our land council. They are members of our land council, even though we are not members of theirs, because they are the people who are traditionally from this area. We work with them all the time. We support them with anything that they want to do within the reasonable boundaries of what they are allowed to do.

Senator PARRY—Do you consult with the base, in the consultations that there have been, as a representative body or as lots of independent groups?

Mr Foley—All Aboriginal people within our boundary are entitled to be members of our land council. We have some 700 members. Every adult Aboriginal person who resides within our boundaries is entitled to be a member of our land council. We consult widely. We have partnerships with our other organisations. The nature of the way we operate with our community business is that we are of the view that there is only one community on the ground. It is the responsibility of all our organisations to work together to identify and address needs and priorities as set by the community. That is the way we operate. It is the way we have to do business. Our responsibility is advocacy on behalf of our community. We have other organisations, like medical services, housing companies and that, but part of the responsibility is that we all have to work together to address the needs of the community and identify those needs and priorities.

Senator PARRY—Is your submission to our inquiry as the peak body or organisation?

Mr Foley—Under the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Rights Act, cultural heritage matters are a part of our core business and responsibility in terms of dealing with other statutory bodies—like the National Parks and Wildlife Service and other natural resource conservation bodies—working under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. It is our responsibility under the legislation to work with them to address these needs and protect these areas.

Senator PARRY—We will move on from the broader issue of all the sites, the 3,000-odd sites, on the Commonwealth land—although you did say something about a private company in answer to Senator Troeth or Mr Jenkins.

Mr Mundine—That is where Defence put out a tender a few years ago for people to run the maintenance of their bases.

Senator PARRY—But it is still owned by the Commonwealth.

Mr Mundine—It is still owned by the Commonwealth, but it is a private company that is doing the work on the range.

Senator PARRY—But the Commonwealth owns the land?

Mr Mundine—Yes, we are fully aware of that.

Senator PARRY—That is all I want to establish—thank you. Coming back to the purpose of this inquiry—forget the broader issues—you are satisfied that the actual site where the construction work is going to take place does not represent any historical significance. Is that correct?

Mr Mundine—We have not had an in-depth look at that area, even down here to Gallipoli Lines. We know that the ground has been turned over a few times around here, with different constructions going back some 100 years. It would need to be looked at to see whether there is anything there.

Senator PARRY—But it would be fair to say that, because, as you say, the land has been cultivated and used and there has been activity on it since 1906 or whenever the base commenced.

Mr Mundine—But apply that same analogy to the survey of Badgerys Creek for the airport. That land had been farmland. It had been ploughed for 50-odd years. When they went out there they did find significant sites. They found platypus in the creeks, which they thought had moved because of the farming and pesticides but they were still there. There were plants there that they thought had disappeared off the Cumberland Plains.

There was a whole range of things like those that came up. There were Aboriginal tools and sites used for grinding that they had not realised were there. So it does not matter how much it has been turned over, there is always the possibility of something being there. If you go through gate 9, there is a big engraving of a kangaroo. People have driven over and over that, in whatever types of vehicles they have had on this range, but it is still there. We have seen tracks where the APCs have been driven across it. It is lucky they did not turn on top of it, because that would have sheared the face of the rock off. They have just driven across it and it is still there as if it has not been touched for 200 or 300 years.

Mr Foley—There are Aboriginal engravings at Bondi Beach. They are there and people are not aware of them and so they do not interfere with them.

Senator PARRY—So the broader concern is additional ordnance activity in the broader area by having 200 additional personnel or thereabouts. Is that an issue?

Mr Foley—That is the unknown factor to us. That is why we have presented our submission. It is not just about some of the works on the barracks. They talk about operational matters in a brief of evidence. They have built two new weapons ranges out on the range, and the nature of their training with the helicopters can take them anywhere. When the Army were in here they were restricted in terms of using tracked vehicles, being out camping or doing grenade throwing or strafing—that was done in designated areas. The nature of the operations will now not be so constricted. They are likely to have a much broader range of activities that they will do.

Senator FORSHAW—To follow up from that, I understand the last point you made—and you have made it a number of times—is that in the past any damage has been caused, I assume, essentially by artillery firing out there on the range. Presumably a lot of the sites have not been disturbed. You are concerned that these operations involve people going in there, firing some sort of ammunition and damaging the sites. In simple terms, is that it?

Mr Mundine—It would be about people going there, because it is not just about damage caused by artillery. Most of the damage you see is where the odd person has strafed a shelter—has just gone in there indiscriminately shooting when they have moved through an area. As we

said earlier on, we are lucky that it has been minimal damage. Hopefully we can keep it to that—if not to no more damage then to minimal damage.

Senator FORSHAW—It will be related ultimately to what type the operations are, how frequent they are and where they go. I am not an expert and I am not a military person, but I understand they can run these operations in all sorts of territory. But there is some pretty rugged country out there, too, isn't there?

Mr Mundine—You're not wrong there!

Senator FORSHAW—That is why I always wondered why the heck they ever thought they could put an airport there. When you talked about the area you surveyed, is that all within the base?

Mr Mundine—It is within the range itself. We did not go off the range.

Senator PARRY—The range and the base are the same thing?

Mr Mundine—No. South of the gate from the airport where it is now, out the back here?

Senator PARRY—No, I am sorry; I am not sure. So the 3,000 sites are contained on Commonwealth land?

Mr Mundine—Yes, in the land, but not actually in this area here, this base area.

Senator PARRY—The only Commonwealth land here is the military base? There is no other Commonwealth land here?

Senator FORSHAW—I suppose the Defence people can clarify this, but it is all of the base facilities and it is the artillery range, as I understand it.

Mr Mundine—It is all of the military land, yes.

CHAIR—As there are no further questions, thank you for appearing before us today.

Mr Foley—Thank you very much for the opportunity to come and talk to you.

CHAIR—We will now

[12.55 pm]

DUDGEON, Colonel Andrew Brian, Deputy Commander, Headquarters 16th Brigade (Aviation), Department of Defence

HEALY, Mr Michael Gregory, Director, Project Development and Delivery Australian Capital Territory/New South Wales, Department of Defence

HUTCHINSON, Brigadier Peter John, Director General, Infrastructure Asset Development Branch, Department of Defence

TRINDER, Mr Colin, Director, Environmental Stewardship, Department of Defence

WATSON, Mr Peter John, Regional Manager, CSI Sydney West/South Region, Corporate Services and Infrastructure Group, Department of Defence

WEIR, Mr Rod, Consultant to Infrastructure Asset Development, Department of Defence

CHAIR—I recall the Department of Defence personnel and remind them that they are still under oath. There are probably two key areas that the committee needs you to address and you may like to just speak to those matters. One is to do with the Sutherland Shire; the other is to do with both of the submissions by the Aboriginal groups. Would you like to give a quick response to each of those before we go to some more questions?

Brig. Hutchinson—Perhaps I will address my comments not only to the committee but also to the members of the Tharawal Aboriginal Land Council. I would like to allay some of the fears that they have expressed today. They have indicated that the range is in pristine condition and that the Aboriginal sites remain largely untouched simply because of the Army presence here over the years. They implied that a lot of that is probably unwittingly. I would put the point that we are little more sophisticated than that these days and that some of it is wittingly. The more recent stuff is probably more wittingly than the earlier stuff. I can certainly see that in my 31 years of military service we have become far more environmentally sensitive and sensitive to such things as the Aboriginal heritage on a lot of our ranges as well. So I would say there is some wittingly stuff there.

I would also make the point that Defence is passionate about the ranges that we have the caretaking responsibilities for. They are parts of Australia that we have that caretaking responsibility for. I thank both Cliff and Charlie for their comments today. I think they have acknowledged the work that has happened here at Holsworthy, but I could point to a number of other ranges around Australia where we have done similar things.

There were concerns over range use. Defence has occupied Holsworthy range for a lot of years. The use of the range is for Defence purposes, and that use of the range remains for Defence purposes. That use might change marginally over time, but it is still broadly for Defence purposes use. We have spoken previous about the fact that we have had helicopters using this

base for a long time—permanently based here from 1974 and then subsequently from 1994 on an intermittent basis—and a lot of that use has continued.

There were concerns about helicopters giving access to the whole range. I put it to you that the infantryman in his size 9 general purpose boots has actually had more access to the whole range over that period of time. There are lots of areas that an infantryman wearing his boots can get to that a helicopter cannot get to. You cannot land helicopters just anywhere and you cannot deposit people from a helicopter just anywhere. So the range has actually had Army people traipsing over probably every inch of it for a lot of the last 50 years plus.

We have changed the range use in recent years, and that has been positive for the environment. We do not use the area for tracked vehicles nearly as much as we used to. That change will probably be reinforced into the future. We have far more self-imposed restrictions on the use of tracked vehicles in order to promote that care of the environment.

In relation to both the Aboriginal submissions, on the one hand we thank them for their positive comments about land use and on the other hand we would reassure them that, in the permanent basing of these helicopters here, we are not looking to doing anything much more different out on the range and we are certainly not going to look at doing anything that would have a significant impact on the range.

A lot of the impact of the actual building proposals will be on what we would term brownfield sites. The committee has seen the area out at the airfield, which is a previously disturbed area. Most of our work is being done there or in the area of the barracks here. The airfield is classified as part of the barracks. Basically the treed areas on the far side of the airfield that you saw when we were out there today is where the range boundary starts. Those treed areas on the other side of the airfield are the range area. This proposal will have very little impact on that range area. Yes, helicopters will take troops and they will be deposited at various points of the range. But they have always had the ability to go to those points of the range anyway, and we will not be doing anything with the helicopter in terms of damage to the ground that would be anything more than what we would have done with vehicles in the past. The main focus of the range use will be the special forces training facilities and other things that we have here.

So on the first point I would say, yes, we take those responsibilities seriously and we will be looking to talk to the community and to both of the submissions we have received to continue that consultation process and to address their concerns. A lot of their concerns seem to be about general access to the range, which I do not think are part of this particular proposal. They are issues that Mr Watson as the regional manager would need to address separately with the groups, if they wanted to raise those concerns with us. I must admit that it seems that this proposal has been more of a prompt for people to raise those concerns. They could have raised them with us at any time and we would have looked to address those concerns as a separate matter. If they want to pursue those concerns then certainly we would be looking to take those on board as a separate matter to this particular proposal. My understanding is that there has been no application for access to the range since we had the Sydney airport investigations. If the communities want to have access to the range, there is a process that they can go through. I can ask Mr Watson to talk about that, if the members of the committee are interested. That is how I would summarise the Aboriginal issues.

On the council issues, again I think there is a disconnect within the one letter that was sent, which was a more general concern. As I said to you, there will be noise outside of those ANEF 20 contours. ANEF 20, which is the significant contour, as we have shown the committee, is contained largely within the range boundary or with the national park and does not therefore go into the council area. Therefore, the Commonwealth does not see any requirement for any compensation to be made or anything like that in terms of the building responsibilities. What we are doing is flagging to the council that there will be noise outside of those areas. They need to be aware of it in their zoning responsibilities, because that will have an effect on the people who live there. But it is not an effect beyond the building responsibilities and it is certainly a much lesser effect than in the great bulk of areas we showed you earlier that are affected by Mascot airport or Bankstown airport or these other areas.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Can I go to the native title issues that were raised. Do you know when the investigation into Sydney airport was conducted? Was it 1999?

Brig. Hutchinson—I am not sure. I will see if we can find someone who can give that answer.

Senator FORSHAW—I can tell you that the government made the announcement not to build the Holsworthy airport in, I think, September 1997. It was the same day they announced the decision to build the reactor. But I cannot remember when the EIS was completed.

CHAIR—As I understand it, the survey covered only one-third of the area.

Brig. Hutchinson—From an engineering point of view, I think the survey would have been looking at the higher areas. As you have already seen, this is not a particularly flat area. You would be talking about the higher ground from about the area where we were, somewhere down the middle of the range.

CHAIR—The reason for my question is that I am wondering whether the survey included any details of the area to be affected by this particular project. Are you aware of that?

Brig. Hutchinson—I am not aware of that. Again, I reinforce the point that the great bulk of the areas where we are talking about doing work are brownfield sites where the ground has already been disturbed. Therefore, I would not expect that many of those sites would have been in those particular areas. The sorts of sites that I expect would have been surveyed would be the higher ground—the range area going away from the airfield. It may well have included the airfield area but, without going into the detail of our register of where they sites are, I could not give you the answer on that.

CHAIR—It is just that Charlie Mundine just made the point that, even where sites have formerly been disturbed, there are still occasions when artefacts are found.

Brig. Hutchinson—It will be built into our contractual requirements that if people find those sorts of things as they are constructing, work will halt at that stage and we will look at a process whereby we can record what has been found and make decisions at that point as to what happens with that particular find. So we will build in contractual procedures to make sure that those things are properly handled when they are discovered.

CHAIR—As part of that, would Defence consider employing a cultural heritage specialist from the local Aboriginal community as a site monitor as this work continues? Otherwise, people carrying out earthworks may not be familiar with what may or may not be significant.

Brig. Hutchinson—I will pass that question to Mr Watson, the regional manager. I think we generally have some connections in those areas anyway, but if we found something like that and there was a one-off requirement we would be able to do that sort of thing as well. Peter, do you want to talk about what we do with that in general?

Mr Watson—I have on my staff a team of environmental specialists who, as an ongoing part of our program of heritage and environmental control, conduct surveys and carry out specific examinations of sites that are going to be used for development. I would have to take on notice the question of whether we could include in that group specific representatives from the Aboriginal team—our cultural advisers. It would be a matter of budget and those types of matters.

CHAIR—This is a fairly big project, so I imagine it would not be a hugely expensive exercise. It would be very difficult, unless you had specialised knowledge, to know whether you were or were not disturbing or turning up things that were significant. Is that your understanding?

Mr Watson—I think it is a reasonable assumption.

Brig. Hutchinson—Madam Chair, I will ask Mr Trinder to talk about what we are doing with the environmental studies because there is an element of those in this as well.

Mr Trinder—Part of this project is the development of an open, transparent and comprehensive public environmental report. A number of the issues that have been raised today will also be addressed in that public environmental report. As part of the development of that report, we have obviously asked our consultants to look at Aboriginal cultural heritage issues. The first cut of that in an initial environmental review looked broadly at the Indigenous cultural heritage of the Holsworthy area, but that is more of a broad-brush approach than what you are talking about, which is a very site-specific survey of the footprint of where works are going to be undertaken.

CHAIR—Yes. I was just going to ask if you have a specialist, an archaeologist, on your team, because the cultural heritage and environmental issues are separate issues.

Mr Trinder—We have employed a company by the name of ERM as our consultant to undertake this work. They have those people on their staff.

CHAIR—I guess it is matter of whether, while they may have them on their staff, they are going to be specifically used in relation to managing these particular issues.

Mr Trinder—We have not actually scoped what the final process will be for them to manage those sorts of issues, but certainly some of the approaches that have been talked about today would be the ones that we could consider in that process.

CHAIR—Perhaps when you have finished scoping it you might let the committee know precisely what you are intending in that regard.

Mr Trinder—A corollary to that is that we are developing as well a heritage management plan for Holsworthy in which we will also address Indigenous issues. That is separate from this particular project but it will be much more comprehensive than the sorts of studies that will be undertaken simply to address the impacts of this particular project.

CHAIR—Brigadier Hutchinson, you did indicate that you were prepared to undertake further consultation with the Aboriginal custodians and interested parties. Can you state for the public record that you will formally make a commitment to continue to consult with local Aboriginal groups?

Brig. Hutchinson—Yes, Madam Chair. I would also make the point, if I may firstly pick up on your earlier question, that the Aboriginal cultural heritage study for the second Sydney airport was presented in 1997.

We do not have any project allowance in the budget for the employment of an Aboriginal heritage specialist. However, if we found something that we needed to do, that would be one of the things that we would spend our contingency funds on. Through the consultation process that we are going to do on both the environmental studies and the undertaking I have just given to consult with the Indigenous groups, I would see that we would be looking at at least understanding. We have only recently had the opportunity to show these groups and to start this process, because the minister had only finally made the decision about coming here in, I think, July and we have had to do some work since then to prepare for all of this. But we are obviously getting on with doing that. When we have the opportunity we will take a bit more time to take the groups through and show them those things. I reinforce the point about the brownfield site and that it is probably going to be difficult to find anything there, but we will see how we go. We will at least give it a go.

Mr JENKINS—Is what ERM are doing project specific?

Mr Trinder—That is correct.

Mr JENKINS—So we are hoping that at the edges of it you might embrace that. Then you are saying that there is an overall heritage plan as another exercise.

Mr Trinder—Yes. That is scheduled for the next 24 months.

Mr JENKINS—And hopefully the broader issues that the Tharawal council mentioned, including military heritage history and things like, would be part of that.

Mr Trinder—Yes, indeed. But remember that one of the outcomes of this whole process of conducting a public environmental report will be that we will develop a management plan for the management of this capability that will specifically address the sorts of issues that the Indigenous groups have been talking about today.

Mr JENKINS—I think that in the last answer we got an answer to the question I was going to ask about whether people were happy with the timing of the consultations. But you would see that, given the time from the announcement, the processes are really starting to commence when they should. What I am saying is that, for instance, we have had the council coming in and saying that there was no consultation and then, between the letters and us gathering here, the consultation has started, which begs the question about whether the consultation should have started earlier. I think you are suggesting that, given the time we are at in the project, it could not really have started earlier.

Brig. Hutchinson—When you look at when we referred this proposal to the committee, that was at about the time we had sufficient information to start a consultative process. I am not sure exactly when that was, but I think it was a couple of months ago. From there, we had to engage environmental consultants and all that sort of thing. The minister made his announcement on 30 July, and after that announcement we had to finalise our documentation and project preparation for bringing this to the committee. Until we had done that work we were not in a position to go out to any public consultation. That only occurred from about the time we referred the proposal to the committee for hearing. We just were not in a position to consult with people before that, because we did not know what all the answers were.

Mr Trinder—The formal process for public consultation has not actually commenced yet. We have contacted all the community groups in the lead-up to the development of a public environment report so we know what issues to deal with in the public environment report. That consultation will commence in late January and run to the end of February.

CHAIR—I think most of the committee members understand and accept that. We look to have assurance that that consultation process will take place in a serious way and take into consideration some of the concerns and make adjustments and compromises where it is reasonable to do so.

Mr Trinder—I can give you a copy of the report when it is released.

Mr Watson—Madam Chair, allow me to assure you that we already have meetings organised with those two groups in the new year to continue discussions about not just this project but access to the site and further considerations they may have.

CHAIR—You are saying that there is not a budget for this. Given the extent of, perhaps, Aboriginal relics on the site, one has to ask: why wasn't there a budget item to cover this possibility?

Brig. Hutchinson—I will go back to the point I have made a number of times: we need to try to separate the broader Aboriginal community concern for the range from the project-specific stuff, which is this brownfield site concern. I would postulate—and our consultation will confirm this—that a great bulk of all the sites we are talking about are beyond the areas that we are actually dealing with. We have a bit of work to do to sort that out, particularly on the boundaries and when we are talking about our retention basin and the wetlands there. That is one area we will need to focus on particularly, and we are aware of that. But the bulk of that area has had significant earthworks already done to it in order to put the airfield there, so we will be working over the top of that. As in the areas here, they have had significant engineering works

already done. My expectation is that there are two separate issues here. One is the broader range, which it is up to the regional manager to consult on, and the other is this specific project, which we do not think is going to be a big problem.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. I understand that situation, and I am sure my committee members do as well.

Mr JENKINS—Whilst you were described as a ‘benign neighbour’ by one of the previous witnesses, that same witness raised some questions about firefighting. Do you have a response to those types of matters?

Brig. Hutchinson—I will pass that question across to Mr Watson as the regional manager from the firefighting point of view.

Mr Watson—We maintain what I would call a first response firefighting capability. That is an engine and a team of firefighters that can react to the initial fire being discovered. We then rely on the local bushfire brigades and fire engines from the New South Wales Fire Brigade through which we allow access to the ranges under a controlled plan. Obviously, we cannot allow them into areas where we suspect they could go unnecessarily into harm’s way, if I could put it that way. They certainly assist us and we rely on that assistance. We control how they access the ranges, but they do access them.

Mr JENKINS—That question was a Brett Lee run-up to the real question. That was for bushfires; what about a firefighting facility for 171 Aviation Squadron?

Brig. Hutchinson—I will pass this question across to Colonel Dudgeon, but I will just say first that we have the Emergency Response Squadron, which is part of the Incident Response Regiment, which was under the proposal the committee looked at before. You were not here, Mr Jenkins, but the rest of the committee may recall the old facilities that we saw down the back of this area where that element of the Emergency Response Squadron is located. They have a role around Australia to assist in some of these sort of areas. Colonel Dudgeon can cover that.

Col. Dudgeon—Every one of our aviation squadrons is manned with specific maintainers on the airfield who have an emergency response foam bottle when aircraft are started and stopped at different times of day, in case of a fire in that instance. If there is a fire within one of the hangars—and that is one of the reasons for the separate hangars—an emergency response capability is immediately at hand with the squadron personnel. As part of the move to Holsworthy, the Holsworthy barracks accident response plan is being redeveloped or expanded because of the helicopters coming back Holsworthy. They were here initially and they had an incident response on the base to assist with that. There is now an Incident Response Regiment based here as well which also has a firefighting capacity. They will be involved in providing additional firefighting on the base.

Senator FORSHAW—Can I just make one observation. To be fair to the people who are gathered here today, some of the issues from both the Indigenous community and the council were ones which also related to the initial decision to locate the Black Hawk squadron here. That in itself, I presume, presented difficulties about consultation, because it was when the decision was announced that you got a reaction from people. That was somewhat different to, say, the

Holsworthy airport issue, where there was a range of sites being considered before any final decision was made.

CHAIR—Good point. Before closing, I take the opportunity to thank all of the witnesses who have appeared before the committee today and to thank Defence for facilitating the hearings and the inspection of the site this morning. I also thank the Hansard people for their assistance and our secretariat.

Brig. Hutchinson—If I can briefly beg your indulgence, this is the last of 13 hearings that I have had before the committee. I will be moving on to greener pastures, leaving the Army and moving into private industry next year. May I just say that—along with my time in Iraq, which was a career highlight—it has been a career highlight for me to be involved in the parliamentary process. I would like to thank all of you and all of the committee members. Sometimes we have agreed and sometimes we have disagreed, but the process is the important thing, and it has been an honour and a privilege to be involved in that process.

I would also like to thank the committee secretariat, who have given us a lot of support in bringing hearings forward and in the administrative arrangements and that sort of thing. I would like to thank Hansard also, who do a fantastic job. I would like to thank all of my team for the support they have given me over the last three years, as I said, in 12 hearings as the defence lead witness and in one hearing with DIMIA up in Darwin, which was interesting.

I will make one final comment. I do have one concern with the process: the value of the projects. I make the point that I have had these 12 hearings in the last three years; next year I have 15 projects on my books for my successor, of which seven are under \$20 million. You look at the workload for the committee and you look at the current rules, and it seems to me that we are going to have some real difficulties in bringing forward the number of proposals that need to be considered. I fully support the process—it is a good process—but maybe there are some rules that need to be looked at at some stage.

CHAIR—Maybe on indulgence I can respond. I did not like to wish you well publicly before you yourself had announced that you will be leaving, but I know that members of the Public Works Committee have appreciated the very good working relationship we have had with you and your colleagues. I think it has been very professional. As you say, sometimes we have disagreed; but our job is to look after the public interest, and we have an act of parliament that gives us some specific guidelines in terms of our role in that. I think we can say at all times that communications have been very good and the process has at all times been very professional. We have enjoyed our work with you. I am aware of the tremendous work you did in Iraq. I know you will be a great loss to the Australian military and we wish you well in your future—and also compliments of the season.

If I may touch on the issue of the threshold which the Public Works Committee is to examine, the current act specifies that we must examine all works over \$6 million. We agree with you that this needs to be considered in light of the fact that it has not been considered for 20-odd years and obviously things have changed. We have for some time now been urging our government to make the necessary amendment to the act to lift that threshold, because otherwise we will have trouble as a committee trying to schedule. Normally we would have 12 projects a year and that would be a busy year for this committee; this year we have delivered 23 reports to parliament

and concluded three public hearings on top of those 23 reports. So, if our workload grows much more, we will have serious trouble being able to accommodate them in the speedy manner that the parliament has done. In that regard I would also like to publicly acknowledge the work of committee members and the committee secretariat, obviously, in facilitating such a huge workload in such a timely manner.

Once again, we wish you great success and we look forward to hearing from you from time to time. To everyone here today, our compliments of the season: happy holiday.

Resolved (on motion by **Senator Forshaw**):

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 and submissions presented at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 1.29 pm