

Inquiry process

- 1.1 On 7 December 2000, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration referred a proposal for site filling, stabilisation and construction of infrastructure at the Department of Defence (DoD) land at Ermington, Sydney, New South Wales.¹
- 1.2 The Committee sought submissions for the Inquiry by advertising the proposed work in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 23 December 2000.
- 1.3 Letters seeking submissions were also sent to those likely to have an interest in the Inquiry. This included Commonwealth, State and local government agencies, Federal and State government representatives and a range of peak organisations, professional bodies and individuals representing various interest groups.
- 1.4 On 19 February 2001, the Committee inspected the site for the proposed site filling, stabilisation and construction of infrastructure at Ermington, Sydney, New South Wales and was briefed by DoD representatives. Following the inspection, the Committee held a public hearing. A list of witnesses who appeared at the public hearing is at **Appendix A** and a list of submissions at **Appendix B**.²

Scope of the proposal

- 1.5 The proposed works are to take place on the site of a former Royal Australian Navy naval stores depot. The proposed works involve an

1 The Hon Peter Slipper MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration, House of Representatives, *Votes and Proceedings*, p. 2021, 7 December 2000.

2 The Committee's proceedings will be printed as Minutes of Evidence.

extensive site filling, stabilisation and construction of infrastructure program, the main elements of which comprise:

- stripping topsoils and regrading the exposed surface to prevent ponding and enhance the flow of surface water;
- installing vertical prefabricated band drains from the prepared ground level to varying levels below ground;
- forming a fill platform above the 1 in 100 year flood level;
- constructing an access lane off Silverwater Road for construction traffic;
- installation of sewer pipe reticulation; stormwater drainage works, water supply pipe;
- construction of roads;
- construction of landscaping and water quality control works;
- installation of power, gas and communications reticulation; and
- reconstruction of a seawall near the southern boundary of the site.³

Site location and description

- 1.6 The site for the proposed works is situated on the northern shore of the Parramatta River between Silverwater Road and Spurway Street at Ermington, and is part of the city of Parramatta. **Appendix C** shows the location of the former naval stores depot in a regional context.
- 1.7 West of the site on the western side of Silverwater Road is the Eric Primrose Reserve, to the east of the site is the George Kendall Riverside Park. Across the Parramatta River from the site is Wilson Park and Millennium Park which is part of the Homebush Bay Olympic development. The north eastern boundary to the site is Tristram Reserve. To the north of the site is land owned by the New South Wales Department of Housing.
- 1.8 The site, which covers an area of 19.64 hectares, is approximately 15 kilometres from the Sydney CBD and 4 kilometres from the Parramatta CBD. The site is currently owned by the Commonwealth.⁴
- 1.9 The site is rectangular in shape and has a frontage of 700 metres onto the Parramatta River and is approximately 320 metres deep.⁵ The site is

3 Evidence, pp. 10-12.

4 Evidence, pp. 3-4.

relatively flat, sloping down from the north towards the Parramatta River. The lower part of the site, fronting onto the Parramatta River is reclaimed land.⁶

- 1.10 Former naval buildings on the site have been removed, however the concrete foundations and bitumen access roads to those former buildings have been left in place.
- 1.11 Several open drainage channels cross the site. These channels flow in both an east-westerly and north-south direction. The drainage channels are of brick and earthen construction.⁷
- 1.12 The site is, for the most part, without flora. Some trees and shrubs are located in the northern part of the site, mostly along the northern boundary and in the north eastern portion of the site.⁸

The cost

- 1.13 The estimated cost of the proposed works is \$31.6 million.⁹ This includes design, site establishment and environmental controls, excavation, treatment, backfilling and compaction of fill, seawall protection works and management of ground water. The estimated cost includes a contingency for both the filling and stabilisation costs and infrastructure costs.

History of the site

- 1.14 The site of the proposed works has had a history of use since European settlement of the area in the 1800s. The site was originally used for grazing until approximately 1920.¹⁰ During the 1920s the site was part of a proposed residential subdivision called the 'Broadoaks Estate'.¹¹ During the early 1930s the low parts of the site were filled in anticipation of the

5 Exhibit 2, p. 3.

6 Exhibit 2, p. 3.

7 Exhibit 2, p. 3.

8 Exhibit 2, p. 3.

9 Evidence, p. 12.

10 Exhibit 2, p. 21.

11 Exhibit 2, p. 21.

subdivision.¹² Due to the depression of the 1930s the planned subdivision of the site did not proceed.¹³

- 1.15 The Commonwealth acquired the site in 1943 for use by the United States Army and it served as the Australian Headquarters of the United States Army supply service during the Second World War.¹⁴ Between 1943 and 1945 seven Nissen hut warehouses were built¹⁵ and roads and support services, including roads and a wharf, were constructed.¹⁶
- 1.16 Following the Second World War, the site was occupied by the Australian Defence Force. Between 1945 and 1947 the site was occupied by the Australian Army.¹⁷ From 1947 to 1990 the site was occupied by the Royal Australian Navy.¹⁸ The Navy used the site as a depot for heavy equipment and machinery used to repair ships at Garden Island.¹⁹
- 1.17 The Royal Australian Navy ceased using the site in 1990. From 1990 to 1996, the site was leased to Prix Cars for motor vehicle storage. From 1996 to 1998 the site was vacant. Following decommissioning in 1998, the site was remediated of contaminated soils and has remained vacant.²⁰
- 1.18 The Commonwealth undertook environmental characterisation studies throughout 1996 and 1997 resulting in a Remediation Action Plan which identified the scope and cost of remediation works. These works were completed in July 1999 at a cost of \$1.795 million and the site certified by an accredited auditor for future residential use.²¹

12 Exhibit 2, p. 21.

13 Exhibit 2, p. 21.

14 Exhibit 2, p. 21.

15 Following a heritage assessment, 6 of the 7 warehouses were demolished in August 1997. It was intended that the remaining shed would be retained as a community facility, however, this was destroyed by fire in 1998. Evidence, p. 7

16 Exhibit 2, p. 21.

17 Exhibit 2, p. 21.

18 Exhibit 2, p. 21.

19 Exhibit 2, p. 21.

20 Exhibit 2, p. 21.

21 Evidence, p. 8.