

The Need

3.1 The need for the redevelopment of the Army Aviation Centre has four elements. They are:

- the Government's decision to move the Australian Defence Force Helicopter School from Canberra to Oakey;
- strategic considerations;
- the acquisition of a new armed reconnaissance helicopter for the Australian Defence Force; and
- inadequacies with current facilities.

3.2 These elements are discussed in this chapter.

Australian Defence Force Helicopter School

3.3 As a result of the *Australian Defence Force Rotary Wing Flying Training Rationalisation Study* conducted in 1998, the Government agreed to a recommendation that the Canberra based ADF Helicopter School should be disestablished. The Army elements of the School, recently renamed the Army Helicopter School, are to relocate to and come under command of the Army Aviation Training Centre. This is planned to occur in December 2001. The Navy elements have moved to HMAS Albatross at Nowra, where initial and conversion training of Navy aviators is now conducted.¹

¹ Submissions, p. 9.

Strategic Considerations

- 3.4 The December 2000 Defence White Paper initiatives include the acquisition of two squadrons of armed reconnaissance helicopters as a major new capability for Army. The training helicopters and associated training equipment, to train personnel to fly and maintain this new capability, are planned to arrive in Oakey from July 2003.
- 3.5 The Strategic Plan for the Defence Estate examined the longer term retention of Oakey Base post 2012 when the Memorandum of Understanding with the Republic of Singapore expires, and also considered the impact of such options as the relocation of the ADF Helicopter School. The Strategic Plan recognised Oakey Base as being economic in terms of its present size and population and well suited to helicopter training by virtue of its reasonably unrestricted airspace, benign environment, and helicopter landing sites in close proximity. Its southeast Queensland location meant relatively low global operating costs. The Strategic Plan sees Oakey Base being retained in the long term.²

Project Air 87

- 3.6 The aim of Project *Air 87* is to provide the Australian Defence Force with armed reconnaissance helicopters. It is intended that these aircraft will transform the Army's ability to conduct tactical reconnaissance by day or night and provide a vital capability to escort and protect the Army's Black Hawk helicopters as they transport troops and supplies.
- 3.7 At the time of the public hearing on 1 August the new aircraft had not been announced, however on 10 August the Hon Peter Reith MP, Minister for Defence, announced that the Eurocopter 'Tiger' had been selected. Up to 22 helicopters will be introduced into service between mid 2003 and the end of 2006.³
- 3.8 To exploit the full capabilities of these aircraft Army intends that the 1st Aviation Regiment's two existing rotary wing reconnaissance squadrons will be re-equipped with the *Air 87* armed reconnaissance helicopters. Other *Air 87* aircraft, to be employed in the training of pilots, ground crew and maintenance technicians, and attrition aircraft, will be located at Oakey airfield. The facilities required for the armed

2 Submissions, p. 11.

3 Hon Peter Reith, MP, 10 August 2001.

reconnaissance helicopters to be located at Oakey are addressed within this proposal.⁴

Inadequacies of current facilities

- 3.9 Numerous facilities at the Oakey Base do not meet current standards for instruction or training or are inappropriate for their current use. A number of occupational health and safety problems also exist. A redevelopment proposal has been deferred several times pending resolution of a number of strategic planning issues, both operational and estate related. These issues have now been addressed and are accommodated within this proposal.⁵
- 3.10 The *Air 87* aircraft are significantly larger and more sophisticated than the current Kiowa light observation helicopters, and have commensurately higher manpower, facilities and security liabilities.⁶
- 3.11 As the occupancy of Oakey Base increased and as training requirements and rates of effort increased, a series of planned and ad hoc solutions were implemented to meet these changing requirements. Buildings and infrastructure include many dating from the 1970s, many of which are now outdated, require mid-life upgrades or are reaching the end of their economic life. Changes in aircraft type, technology, personnel numbers, accommodation standards, and occupational health and safety standards mean that many of the present facilities fail to meet minimum requirements.
- 3.12 Living-in accommodation and messing, essential for training capability, requires rationalisation. HQ Aviation Support Group have been given expanded responsibilities and resultant staff increases from 43 in 1997 to 65 in 2000 which require increased office space. Recent changes to Defence structures and business management have also generated a requirement for appropriate accommodation for Defence Corporate Services for personnel management functions and base support.⁷

4 Submissions, pp. 8-9.

5 Submissions, p. 8.

6 Submissions, p. 9.

7 Submissions, p. 11.

3.13 Defence advised the Committee that the main deficiencies of current facilities exist in the following areas:

- Army Aviation Training Centre;
- Emergency Response Station;
- Army Aircraft Workshops;
- Hot Refuel Facility;
- Base Operations Centre;
- Base Security;
- living-in accommodation; and
- an existing civil terminal;

3.14 Details of deficiencies are set out below.

Army Aviation Training Centre

3.15 The Aviation Training Centre is now accommodated in a range of temporary and run-down 1970s accommodation. Many functions, which should be collocated, are not, causing inefficiencies and operational problems. Establishment of facilities for the Army Helicopter School and integration of all training functions of the Aviation Training Centre is a high priority in readiness for arrival of the new armed reconnaissance helicopter.

Emergency Response Station

3.16 The existing fire station is located on the flight line between the control tower and the Aviation Training Centre and has insufficient space for its vehicles and equipment. Its location is inappropriate as activities on the apron can hamper fire vehicle call-outs and compromise required response times.

Army Aircraft Workshops

3.17 Current operational maintenance activities are conducted in facilities of varying condition and arranged in a generally scattered and dysfunctional manner.

Hot Refuel Facility

- 3.18 Hot refuelling is a procedure that involves refuelling of aircraft without engines being shut down. It is currently conducted from fuel tankers approximately 10 times per day. This rate is expected to increase to 15 refuels per day. At present the arrangement for hot refuelling helicopters involves the use of hand nozzles from truck mounted units. The use of these units is recognised as a high fire risk procedure but an essential training activity. The Hot Refuelling Facility is a key to achieving increased training rates and has the potential to facilitate increases or surges in flying activities.

Base Operations Centre

- 3.19 The Base Operations Centre is responsible for the support of flying activity and the establishment and manning of the Emergency Operations Centre when required. Current facilities are poorly located, dysfunctional and many of them are temporary.

Base Security

- 3.20 Assessments by the Defence Security Branch confirm that the measures required for the protection of the new armed reconnaissance helicopters are significantly higher than is required for the current Kiowa reconnaissance helicopters.

Living-In Accommodation

- 3.21 The existing accommodation buildings at Oakey comprise separate facilities for Officers, Sergeants and Other Ranks incorporating messing and recreation amenities. The accommodation blocks were built in the early seventies and require considerable refurbishment, including providing a quiet, comfortable environment for shift personnel (night flying/training) and differentiation between live-in accommodation and temporary trainee accommodation.

Civil Terminal

- 3.22 This project element comprises the construction of a new civil terminal building on a like-for-like basis to replace the existing structure that is in an untenable location in the middle of the airfield. The proposal would honour a commitment made by Defence to local councils in 1995 to

maintain civilian access to a terminal facility, subject to council operation of the facility and Defence use as required.⁸