



30 August 2005

Mrs Judi Moylan
Chair
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mrs Moylan,

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works' consideration of the Relocation of Selected RAAF College Units to RAAF Base East Sale, Victoria and RAAF Base Wagga, New South Wales.

As you are aware, I have been a staunch supporter of RAAF Base Wagga and the many benefits it brings to the city of Wagga Wagga and the entire Riverina. Not only does RAAF Base Wagga bring enormous benefit to the region, but I sincerely believe this support for the base is reciprocated with many former and serving defence members having great affection for the city.

The expansion of the RAAF Base Wagga Wagga presents a substantial business case for the continued investment in rural and regional Australia and in particular the Riverina.

Wagga Wagga is home to not only RAAF Base Wagga, but also the Australian Army's Recruit Training Centre at Kapooka. Navy personnel are stationed at Forest Hill, while the Reserve Unit – A Company 1/19 Royal New South Wales Regiment and Defence Housing Authority have a significant presence in the city.

An article published on 18 March 2003 in the city's newspaper *The Daily Advertiser*, reports that Wagga Wagga is the sixth largest defence city in Australia according to 2001 Defence Census with a defence population of 1613.

As a result, Wagga Wagga has a significant defence population and is proud of its long association with the Australian Defence Forces.

I have been fighting for expansion of the RAAF Base Wagga Wagga since my election in 1998. I recognised during my time as Deputy Mayor with Wagga Wagga City Council the critical importance of the RAAF Base for Wagga Wagga and district and of the excellent partnership between the community and base personnel.

It was recognised during the 1998 election that Coalition and Labor were in favour of retaining and expanding RAAF Base Wagga. I have continually made representations on behalf of RAAF Wagga upgrade and was thrilled when the Prime Minister himself made the "Nyngan announcement" about the future of RAAF Base Wagga.

This positive announcement was the catalyst for the expansion of the Base. The community have worked extremely hard to be involved in ensuring the relocation would take place with a smooth transition and that Wagga Wagga was supportive of this process.

The decision to bring Point Cook to Wagga and send Edinburgh to East Sale was a strategic decision, made with strategic vision on the best outcomes for recruit training. It was obviously and correctly viewed by those decision makers that these cities would be the best location to deliver the best outcomes for Australia's defence and training.

It makes incredibly good sense to build on the existing business case for the growth and development of RAAF Base Wagga with logistical capacity. Being only two hours drive from Canberra, with an already accredited training facility and an airforce strip which is used in conjunction with Wagga Wagga City Council.

There is already a strong and well-developed relationship between RAAF Base Wagga and Wagga Wagga City Council, including discussions and negotiations in relation to the airfield shared by Wagga Wagga City Council and RAAF Base Wagga. As reported in *The Daily Advertiser* on 5 August 2003 former mayor Councillor Kevin Wales described the announcement as "something really special for the city."

There is a close proximity between all training places ensuring the movement of recruits and defence personnel much easier and cost effective.

There are approximately 136 flights into and out of the city each week linking Wagga Wagga with the major airlines and capital cities and large centres. There is no additional cost in moving recruits to flights as the airport is situated on base. Wagga Wagga already has an extensive rail and bus network structures in place, also linking the city with major cities and centres throughout Australia.

The recent contractor information sessions that have been held in the city have received widespread attention and support from both the business community and the general public. There is a great deal of interest in the community about RAAF Base Wagga and plans for its expansion.

The Defence Housing Authority has a large office of approximately 10 staff, which is responsible for assisting and managing all married quarters for all defence personnel in the city. They have an enormously important supportive role in ensuring defence personnel are relocated to their postings. This role will increase dependent on the number of recruits and personnel that pass through RAAF Base Wagga.

The increase in the number of single recruits who pass through RAAF Base Wagga for training may result in an increase in the workload for Defence Housing Authority's Wagga Wagga office, as they take on the responsibility for moving recruits onto their new postings once training is completed.

Riverina TAFE also succeeded in securing a \$110 million training package because we offered the best value in training technique. The success of TAFE's winning tender then multiplied right across the electorate of Riverina, bringing many benefits to the community and ensuring recruits at RAAF Base Wagga received the best training available.

This training package has underpinned the entire education component of TAFE and its work in the trades and services area.

The Riverina is one of many regions experiencing a shortage in skilled labour, one that is impacting on future growth and development. With adequate numbers of skilled workers, there is enormous potential for continued growth in this region. Many of those throughout industry and the community are aware of the many young people who are forced to move to metropolitan areas to pursue a career.

As a result, the Riverina is suffering a severe skills shortage. There is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that sustained economic growth is occurring because of the demand generated in local industries. But increased economic growth cannot occur without the skilled people to do the work. We are focused on sustainable development of the region by 'growing our own'.

Employers throughout the region cannot attract skilled staff. Those that do train apprentices often lose their staff to other firms. Young people are moving away to get an education or up skill in other industries. This skills shortage has been formally recognised by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations as of 7 December 2004 in their survey "Regional Skills Shortages Survey (RSSS) – pilot surveys: Monitoring Group Meeting Griffith" through the Labour Market Strategies Group, DEWR, Canberra, Australia

This extension is vital for training and work opportunities to enable the continuing development of the region and will provide a significant boost to the economy, through greater confidence in our future viability.

As stated throughout this submission, there is an enthusiasm and excitement throughout the community about the future of RAAF Base Wagga in the community. The local newspaper, *The Daily Advertiser*, is very supportive of RAAF Base Wagga. Some recent articles have included extremely positive comments about the Base and its important place in the fabric of this community.

In an article published on 18 January 2005, an editorial stated, "The importance of the two defence establishments and CSU to Wagga's progress, development and prosperity as a beacon in regional and rural Australia, should not and cannot be taken for granted." RAAF Base Wagga was described by RAAF Deputy Chief Air Vice Marshall on 9 April 2003 as "the heart of the air force."

Again on 3 September 2004, *The Daily Advertiser* reported comments from Air-Commodore Ekin-Smyth during a visit to the Base. "Wagga is the home of logistics training for the air force and we are increasing and changing the training for logisticians," Air-Cdre Ekin-Smyth said.

The Daily Advertiser published comments by Wing Commander Graeme Wren on 5 August 2003, stating the Base would deliver long-term benefits to the RAAF and the local community."

"The most important thing out of this is that it establishes RAAF Wagga for the long term. I think it's a really good step forward for the base.

It would be very difficult to find a more embracing community than that of Wagga Wagga and the incredible level of support that exists in this community for RAAF Base Wagga and its defence personnel.

The strategic decision to relocate Point Cook to Wagga Wagga was obviously canvassed by defence and determined to be best option for defence. We congratulate Defence for having made these decisions.

Yours sincerely

Kay Hull, MP
Federal Member for Riverina

Keh.kb.wga