

Issues and Conclusions

Costs

- 3.1 In a confidential briefing prior to the public hearing DFAT gave the Committee a comprehensive breakdown of associated costs for the Vientiane project. At the public hearing, the Committee asked about the likelihood that costs will be driven up or delays will occur as a result of building activity in Vientiane. DFAT stated that Vientiane is not experiencing a boom period and therefore costs are not likely to increase.¹

Building Codes and Standards

- 3.2 As Laos does not currently have building regulations or standards, Australian standards and guidelines will be applied to this project. When asked whether the Australian building standards were applicable to the climatic conditions of Vientiane, DFAT advised that the Laotian climate is very much like Darwin and the northern part of Queensland. DFAT assured the Committee that its designers would take account of all characteristics of a hot and steamy climate.²

1 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 10

2 ib id, page 3

Environmental Considerations

Climate

- 3.3 The Committee asked for more information about the particular climatic issues of Vientiane. DFAT advised that Vientiane has very heavy rainfall and a long monsoon season as well as a dry season. Mould, high humidity and rodents must be considered in planning.
- 3.4 Given the monsoonal conditions, DFAT proposes that the ground floor level of the building will be raised to be above the known flood level, and there will be oversized drainage to mitigate possible blockages due to tropical conditions. DFAT advised that Australia has very good designers who understand the monsoon conditions and associated building requirements.³

Basket Catchment Facility

- 3.5 DFAT's submission records that:
- "The medical clinic is provided with a basket catchment facility in the drainage line to facilitate removal of incompatible material".⁴
- 3.6 At the public hearing, DFAT informed the Committee that a basket catchment facility is an interceptor in the drainage system to pick up any chemicals discharged from the medical facility that could not go into the normal drainage system. When asked if it is reliable, DFAT advised that it will comply with the Australian standard which specifies the requirement for medical facilities and the disposal of waste from medical facilities.⁵

Impact on Neighbours

- 3.7 The Committee noted that the proposed new chancery is in an area where there are other buildings and people in occupancy and asked how DFAT plans to manage the noise, dust and other problems during the construction period, to minimise disruption to neighbours.
- 3.8 DFAT believes that as the building has a large setback on all sides, this may mitigate some of the inconvenience, however, it acknowledged that

3 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 3

4 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 17.22

5 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 10

“inevitably, with a building like this there will be quite noisy and disruptive concrete pours and things like that”.⁶

- 3.9 As the new building will be set back from the road, DFAT does not anticipate any disturbance to pedestrian or vehicle traffic.

Floor Space

- 3.10 DFAT advised that when the existing Chancery became too small for all of DFAT’s operations, space was taken in the old British chancery which is directly across the road. AusAID operates out of part of the old British chancery and the medical clinic is at the rear of the site. DFAT also leases a nearby house which is used as a workshop for the facilities management operation, and there is a library there as well. At the back of the British Chancery DFAT also leases the old British Head of Mission’s residence. Total current aggregation of floor space is approximately 1,010 square metres.
- 3.11 The Committee noted that the proposed new Chancery would be increasing available floor space by approximately 60 per cent and enquired if this was necessary. DFAT advised that the net lettable area the agencies will occupy is about 1,300 square metres. The new total area was determined through a negotiation process with the agencies based on their existing requirements and on future growth projections.⁷

Leases

- 3.12 DFAT advised that the Australian Head of Mission residence and the Chancery site is on a ground lease to a Lao national which expires at the end of 2006. DFAT is currently exploring the possibility of a six-month extension of that lease to mid-2007, which is when DFAT expects completion of the new building. If it is not possible to extend the lease, DFAT will make temporary arrangements. DFAT reported that there are a number of houses around Vientiane where DFAT could make some short-term arrangements.⁸

6 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 12

7 ib id, page 6

8 ib id, page 8

Use of Non-local Material

- 3.13 The Committee requested information about sourcing of materials and was advised by DFAT that base materials such as the concrete, the terracotta tiles for the roof and the render will be available locally. Other materials will need to be imported. Most of that material is likely to be imported through Thailand.⁹
- 3.14 In order to meet Australian standards it is anticipated that some equipment and material will be imported from Australia. The tender documentation will not specify Australian material, but will set Australian standards that may lead to that outcome.
- 3.15 DFAT advised that some of the finishes inside the building will feature Australian material, but these areas have not yet been specified.

Staffing

- 3.16 A discussion about the possibility of flooding in the new building during a severe monsoon led the Committee to ask about projected staff numbers. DFAT advised that the occupation of the building is likely to be about 40 to 45 people. This will include staff from the AFP, Defence, AusAID, DIMIA, the medical clinic and local staff. Additionally, there are another eight to 10 support staff who provide services such as facilities management and driving.¹⁰

Provision for People with a Disability

- 3.17 DFAT advised that the building will be fully compliant with the provisions of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. Specifically, DFAT explained:

“There will be a lift, which will be a stretcher lift. There will be two staircases. There will be the usual disabled toilets, and there will be ramps where required up to the front entry. There will be no steps where people need access. From a global viewpoint, it will be

9 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, page 7

10 ib id, page 8

a fully compliant building for disabled purposes, including furniture and fittings, which will be imported from Australia.”¹¹

Occupational Health and Safety Requirements

- 3.18 DFAT advised the Committee that the design of the building will be fully compliant with Australian standards for both OH&S and fire safety. The new building will have full thermal smoke alarm systems, hydrants, fire extinguishers and the usual range of alarms, bells, voice alarms and evacuation procedures.¹²
- 3.19 The need for rapid movement of people out of the building in an emergency will be balanced with the need to keep entrances secure from people wanting to come in from the outside. Doors which can be secured so that they can be opened only from the inside and are intruder resistant will be used. A number of these doors are incorporated into the design as emergency exit points. Whilst the Chancery will probably have substantial visitor numbers at any time, visitors will only be on the ground level and they would have easy exit from there.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the proposed construction of a new Chancery building for the Australian Embassy in Vientiane, Laos, proceed at the estimated cost of \$11 million.

Hon Judi Moylan MP
Chair
22 June 2005

¹¹ Appendix D Official Transcript of Evidence, page 11

¹² ib id, page 11

