



The Secretary
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
Suite R1 - 119
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Attention: Vivienne Courto

**DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURAL AND INDIGENOUS
AFFAIRS (DIMIA) RESPONSE TO PWC SUBMISSION FROM THE ASYLUM
SEEKER RESOURCE CENTRE**

1. Thank you for referring a copy of the letter received on 9 February 2005 from the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre concerning the Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre (MIDC) Expansion Project.
2. The letter raises a number of issues regarding:
 - (i) Immigration detention policy,
 - (ii) Accommodation,
 - (iii) Social and recreation space,
 - (iv) Health and medical care,
 - (v) Meal facilities and standard of food,
 - (vi) Public phones,
 - (vii) Effects of transportables on amenity and privacy,
 - (viii) Needs of longer term residents,
 - (ix) Civil liberties of residents, access to outdoor areas and prayer space,
 - (x) Effects of zoning on interaction/socialisation between residents,
 - (xi) Standard of care within the centre and its effects on the dignity and wellbeing of residents, and
 - (xii) Consultation with relevant stakeholders.
3. The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre expressed its opposition to mandatory detention and encouraged DIMIA to explore alternatives to detention. Immigration detention policy issues are outside the scope of the PWC hearing, therefore DIMIA has responded to these issues.
4. The accommodation building has been designed to address the diverse range of needs within the centre. The existing male accommodation dormitories would be used for the shorter term residents, the newer facilities would cater for longer term residents and those special needs such as families with children.
5. The external areas will be re-balanced. The single men will now have the choice of 2 outside recreation areas. One for active and boisterous activities, the other for passive

and quiet recreation. Access will be enhanced to the southern grassed area. The southern grassed area will be reduced in area slightly. Some of the new construction will be built on the south west corner. The fence lines will be modified to increase usable area on the south east corner. The design of the landscape plan provides a greater range of social areas for use. The landscape plan also provides for a sports area. The passive recreation courtyard adjoins a room that can be used for prayer and spiritual contemplation.

6. The proposed plans double the medical facilities and introduce a larger split dining arrangement. This provides options for separation or mixed social gathering depending on the circumstances. Access to Public telephones will be increased for the larger Centre. The enhancements to security refer to improved personal security of residents and staff afforded by the design layout.
7. The prefabricated and partial transportable nature of some building elements does not have a detrimental effect on the amenity or utility of the Centre. The transportable units provide high quality accommodation and ablutions and have been successfully used in expanding accommodation at the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre. Off site manufacture allows for faster installation on site and minimises the disruption to the MIDC operations.

The architects have designed the accommodation to meet all Building Code of Australia and local statutory requirements and are of suitable standard. The design of the expanded facility provides for a greater variety of accommodation options. These include motel style accommodation for families and females, single bedroom suites, 2 bed and 4 bed ensuite rooms.

In the extended facility most single males will be accommodated in discrete bedrooms with up to 4 persons and access to recreation areas and some self-catering.

8. Most residents are short term. The expansion will provide enhanced facilities for both short and long term. The works are about providing improved accommodation capacity, welfare and safety to the residents and staff at the Centre that meet the Building Code of Australia, local authority and disabled access standards. The additions will create benefits for all residents through improved reception, visitor, medical, education and recreation facilities.
9. The Detention Services provider recognises the importance of separation for some people and the opportunity to socialise for others. The privacy and social needs of individuals do vary and the design seeks to accommodate as many options as possible. The use and management practice will vary from time to time to respond to the needs of the resident population at any given time.
10. The standard of care within the centre and the dignity and wellbeing of residents are significant matters. The timely commencement of this project provides additional versatility and flexibility in an expanded Centre that will promote and assist the attainment of these objectives.
11. DIMIA recognises the importance of consulting the Maribyrnong City Council on the project. DIMIA representatives met with the Mr Panagakos and Mr Matteo of the

Maribyrnong City Council on 15 September 2004 to discuss the project. DIMIA wrote to the then Mayor of the Maribyrnong City Council, Cr Joseph Cutri on 31 August 2004. We also wrote to the Maribyrnong City Council on 14 October 2004.

DIMIA had discussions with the owner of the adjoining factory and advised the other neighbour, Victoria University of the expansion. PWC material was sent to other neighbours and other state and community authorities.

The consultation process is ongoing. DIMIA will continue to consult with relevant stakeholders including residents at the Centre. Formal consultation sessions are undertaken regularly between the detention service provider, DIMIA and resident representatives. Many suggestions have been made by the residents and have been incorporated in the current design. These include improved self catering facilities, additional external areas. As the plans develop there will be additional consultation with residents.

David Doherty
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