

Introduction

Referral of Work

- 1.1 The *Public Works Committee Act 1969* (the Act) provides that the Governor-General may, by Order, refer a public work to the Committee for consideration and report at any time when the Committee is in existence and:
 - the Parliament is not in session, or
 - the House of Representatives is adjourned for a period exceeding one month.¹
- 1.2 On 30 July 2003, the House of Representatives being adjourned for a period exceeding one month, the Administrator in Council executed such an Order, and referred to the Committee the RAAF Base Richmond Reinvestment Project. The proponent agency for this work is the Department of Defence (Defence).
- 1.3 In an Explanatory Memorandum to the Executive Council, the Hon Peter Slipper MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration, explained that the Order was required so that, pending parliamentary approval, the works might be committed by late 2003 and completed by late 2006.
- 1.4 Mr Slipper advised the Council that the estimated cost of the proposed works was \$35 million.

1 *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Part III, Section 18 (4)

Background

Site of the Proposed Work

- 1.5 RAAF Base Richmond occupies an area of some 270 hectares between the townships of Richmond and Windsor, approximately 60 kilometres west-northwest of Sydney, NSW. The base is bounded to the south by Windsor Road, and is located within the Hawkesbury water catchment area.²

History and Role of RAAF Base Richmond

- 1.6 RAAF Base Richmond commenced operation as a military establishment in 1925. In recognition of its role in the development of Australia's air defences, the base has been placed on the Interim List of the Register of the National Estate.³
- 1.7 Since 1987, the base has been the headquarters of the ADF's Air Lift Group and also accommodates a number of army and other support units.
- 1.8 RAAF Base Richmond is one of the largest employers in the Hawkesbury region, supporting approximately 1,800 Defence personnel and 800 to 850 civilians and contractors.⁴
- 1.9 A decade of uncertainty as to the long term future of the base has meant limited investment in facilities and infrastructure. On 27 August 1998 the Prime Minister announced that the base would not close before 2010, providing the impetus for reinvestment to maintain operational capabilities at least until that time.⁵

Inquiry Process

- 1.10 The Committee is required by the Act to consider public works over \$6 million⁶ and report to Parliament on:

2 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 5

3 *ib id*, paragraph 7

4 *ib id*, paragraph 9 and Submissions No. 2, 3, 4 and 5

5 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 1

6 *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Part III, Section 18 (8).

- the purpose of the work and its suitability for that purpose;
- the need for, or the advisability of, carrying out the work;
- whether the money to be expended on the work is being spent in the most cost effective manner;
- the amount of revenue the work will generate for the Commonwealth, if that is its purpose; and
- the present and prospective public value of the work.⁷

1.11 The Committee called for submissions by advertising the inquiry in *The Australian* on Wednesday, 6 August 2003 and in the *Hawkesbury Gazette* on Wednesday, 13 August 2003. The Committee also sought submissions from relevant government agencies, local government, private organisations and individuals, who may be materially affected by or have an interest in the proposed work. The Committee subsequently placed submissions and other information relating to the inquiry on its web site in order to encourage further public participation.

Inspections and Public Hearing

1.12 The Committee travelled to RAAF Base Richmond and inspected the site of the proposed works. A public hearing was held in Richmond on Friday, 12 September 2003.⁸

⁷ *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Part III, Section 17

⁸ See Appendix D for the official Hansard transcript of the evidence taken by the Committee at the public hearing on Friday, 12 September 2003 at Richmond, NSW.

