

## Introduction

### Referral of Work

- 1.1 On 11 May 2006, the proposal for the facilities upgrade to the Shoalwater Bay Training Area, Rockhampton, Queensland was referred to the Public Works Committee for consideration and report in accordance with the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969* (the Act).<sup>1</sup> The proponent agency for this work is the Department of Defence (Defence).
- 1.2 The Hon Gary Nairn MP, Special Minister of State, advised the House that the estimated cost of the proposed works was \$11.16 million. Subject to parliamentary approval, construction would commence late this year and be completed by April 2007.

### Background

#### Shoalwater Bay Training Area

- 1.3 The Shoalwater Bay Training Area (SWBTA) is an area of approximately 454,500 hectares, located approximately 80 kilometres north of

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from the *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives*, No. 96, Thursday 11 May 2006

Rockhampton, Queensland. The first evidence of usage of the area is that of the Darumbal people, who have a long historical affiliation to the region. The Commonwealth acquired the area for Defence training purposes in 1965.<sup>2</sup>

- 1.4 The SWBTA is a strategic Defence site, used as a training area for the maintenance of combat skills, through continuous individual and collective capability training. The SWBTA provides a highly effective training location for the Australian Defence Force's (ADF) three services.<sup>3</sup> The SWBTA is also utilised as a focal point for major national and multilateral combined arms exercises. These exercises commonly involve defence forces of the United States, New Zealand and the Republic of Singapore.<sup>4</sup>

## **Inquiry Process**

- 1.5 The Committee is required by the Act to consider public works over \$6 million<sup>5</sup> and report to Parliament on:
- 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.<sup>6</sup>
- 1.6 The Committee called for submissions by advertising the inquiry in *The Townsville Bulletin* on Saturday, 10 June 2006. The Committee also sought submissions from relevant government agencies, 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.

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2 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraphs 2 and 3

3 *ibid*, paragraphs 4 and 5

4 *ibid*, paragraph 5

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

6 *ibid*, Section 17

## Inspection and Public Hearing

- 1.7 On 28 July 2006 the Committee visited the SWBTA and inspected the site and environs of the proposed works. A confidential briefing from the Department of Defence and a public hearing were held at the Defence Support Group Base in Rockhampton, Qld later that day.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix D for the official Hansard transcript of the evidence taken by the Committee at the public hearing on Friday, 28 July 2006 at the Defence Support Group Base, Rockhampton, Qld