

Construction of Defence housing at Yamanto Hills, Queensland

- 3.1 The proposal to construct housing for Defence at Yamanto Hills, Ipswich, Queensland, was referred to the Committee on 19 March 2009 by the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support, the Hon Dr Mike Kelly MP. The estimated cost of the works is \$19.63 million (including GST).
- 3.2 In its submission to this Committee, DHA stated that the housing development was needed to meet the growth of RAAF Base Amberley.
- 3.3 On 9 April 2009 the Committee received a letter from Mr Michael Del Gigante, Managing Director, Defence Housing Australia, requesting that the public hearing scheduled by the Committee for the inquiry for 29 April 2009, be postponed. The stated reason for this request was because:
- Since the referral, some planning issues have arisen that will need some time for DHA to examine and evaluate before the project can proceed.¹
- 3.4 Subsequently, the Committee received a letter from the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, the Hon Warren Snowden MP, withdrawing the referral from the Committee's consideration and stating:
- The Yamanto project was originally referred to the Parliament by our colleague, the Hon Dr Mike Kelly AM MP, on 19 March 2009. Subsequently, and in the normal course of its business, DHA sought the advice of a noise consultant regarding the potential

1 Correspondence dated 9 April 2009 from Mr Michael Del Gigante, Managing Director, Defence Housing Australia.

impact on the project of the introduction of the Super Hornets to RAAF Amberley. The consultant was advised by Defence that it was likely that there would be an adverse impact, the effect of which would be to render Yamanto unsuitable for housing.

In view of this risk, the DHA Board has decided to suspend further work on Yamanto pending the outcome of the public environment report process required under *the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, that will confirm or otherwise the noise impacts of the Super Hornets at RAAF Amberley.

Accordingly, DHA advises that it no longer requires the referral to the PWC. If the DHA Board decides to continue with the development at a later time, the project will be re-referred to the Committee.²

- 3.5 Therefore, the Committee will not proceed with its inquiry into this referral and, given the need for Defence housing in this region, hopes that the project will be re-referred in the very near future.

Committee comment

- 3.6 The Committee undertook an inquiry into facilities at RAAF Base Amberley for the introduction of the Super Hornet aircraft in August 2009. At this time the Committee was told:

The initial indications are that the Super Hornet engine compared to an F111 engine is at least as loud on take-off, but it is significantly quieter on landing. What is more, the operational profile of the aircraft – its proximity to the ground, how often it flies and how long it spends flying low to the ground – is significantly different from an F111; therefore, the overall study on that aircraft is still in its initial stages. Air Force is very confident that profiles of not just Super Hornet aircraft but all aircraft at RAAF Base Amberley and so forth are able to be modified to make sure that we accommodate the needs of the local community.³

- 3.7 The Committee was further told:
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2 Correspondence dated 2 June 2009 from the Hon Warren Snowdon MP, Minister for Defence Science and Personnel.

3 Group Captain S. Robertson, Head, Air Combat Transition Office, Department of Defence, Transcript of Evidence, Australian Super Hornet Facilities Project, 20 August 2009, p. 6-7

Therefore, we have concluded that it would be prudent to refer the noise impacts that are likely to arise from the operation of the aircraft to the Department of Environment and Heritage to consider those impacts through the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. That referral has been lodged in the last day or so, as I understand it, and a comprehensive environmental impact assessment process will look at that.⁴

- 3.8 The Committee is concerned that DHA was not aware that this environmental assessment was being undertaken despite the fact that the housing project is intended to meet the growing needs of RAAF Base Amberley. The Committee is concerned that this indicates a failure by DHA to undertake basic consultation with its primary client, the Department of Defence.
- 3.9 Furthermore, evidence to the Committee by DHA indicates that it was aware of the potential of unacceptably high noise level over the land. In its submission to this Committee regarding the referral, DHA stated:

Noise impacts. The site is located close to RAAF Base Amberley which currently operates the F111 and C17 jet aircraft. The current approved Australian Noise Exposure Forecast (ANEF) for RAAF Base Amberley, dated 2006, shows that the land development is situated within the 20 - 25 ANEF contours. Such land is categorised as conditionally acceptable for residential use. While the ICC [Ipswich City Council] has not placed any conditions on the Development Approval, DHA has accepted the consultant's recommendation to undertake an acoustic assessment to ensure that the proposed houses comply with AS2021 for aircraft noise levels.⁵

- 3.10 The Committee is also concerned that, although DHA purchased the Yamanto Hills site in 2007, it did not engage a noise consultant to address the potential impact of the Super Hornet until after the project had been referred for parliamentary scrutiny.⁶ Given that the project was subject to

4 Mr C. Trinder, Director, Environmental Impact Management, Department of Defence, Transcript of Evidence, Australian Super Hornet Facilities Project, 20 August 2009, p. 7

5 Submission 1, Defence Housing Australia, Construction of new Housing at Yamanto Hills, p. 5-6.

6 Submission 1, Defence Housing Australia, Construction of new Housing at Yamanto Hills, p. 1.

tight timeframes⁷, the Committee was surprised that these planning issues had not been finalised prior to referral.

- 3.11 This Committee has seen cases where poor consultation and planning has led to significant costs to the Commonwealth and is pleased that in this instance this has been avoided.
- 3.12 When this project is re-referred, the Committee will be seeking to satisfy itself that DHA has consulted fully with the Department of Defence and appropriate planning and noise consultants to ensure that all planning issues have been resolved prior to referral.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Defence Housing Authority establish an internal protocol to ensure that, in future, similar issues impacting upon projects are addressed fully prior to referral to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works.

7 Submission 1, Defence Housing Australia, Construction of new Housing at Yamanto Hills, p. 20.