

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 28 MAY 2009

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(52) Program 4.2: Onshore Detention Network

Senator Pratt (L&CA 66) asked:

I note that the redevelopment of Villawood has in fact been on the cards for quite some time. I want to know when it was first considered and why action, I suppose, was not taken earlier.

Answer:

As Mr Metcalfe indicated at the Senate Estimates hearing, the Department was looking for alternative detention facilities in the late 1990's, the potential use of the accommodation for the Olympics and consideration of a potential development by the then detention service provider Australasian Correctional Services (ACS). An announcement was made in the context of the 1998-99 budget that envisaged a build own operate agreement with ACS. The agreement would finance the construction and maintenance of a redeveloped facility with the Department paying an annual fee. The commercial nature of this agreement was not released.

The redevelopment using a build own operate agreement had been abandoned by 2001 and interim modifications to the infrastructure were made between 2000 and 2003 to assist in the operational requirements with improvements to the medical, kitchen and arrivals facilities, fire safety, fencing and lighting.

Subsequently the redevelopment was reconsidered and formed part of the strategic infrastructure planning by DIAC in 2004. The inflexibility of the existing infrastructure to meet current operational requirements and the age of that infrastructure resulting in high maintenance and other costs was acknowledged. The need for the replacement of "Stage One" and the construction of central facilities was re-confirmed along with the importance of the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre (VIDC) in the national immigration detention network.

A program of works was approved for the VIDC in the 2004-05 Budget for the replacement of Stage 1, with supplementary funding in the 2006-07 Budget.

Subsequently the project was tested against the option to redevelop Villawood on a range of alternative sites around Sydney, the outcome of which was to stay within the existing site. DIAC then prepared a business case for the redevelopment that better reflected the changing social conditions and the greater use of community accommodation.

After the 2008 Budget the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, said a "\$1.1 million feasibility study for the redevelopment of the Villawood centre will be conducted in 2008-09." He went on to state that "the Rudd Government will deliver on its commitment to redevelop Villawood Immigration Detention Centre, as part of an overall promise to improve immigration detention accommodation".

The Department of Finance and Deregulation, in collaboration with DIAC, progressed the project to the next approval stage which was the submission to Government of a Feasibility Study/Detailed Business Case considered in the context of the 2009-10 Budget.