



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

**Reference: Provision of facilities for collocation and re-equipping of the 1st
Aviation Regiment at Robertson Barracks, Darwin**

TUESDAY, 8 JULY 2003

DARWIN

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JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Tuesday, 8 July 2003

Members: Mrs Moylan (*Chair*), Mr O'Connor (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Colbeck, Ferguson and Forshaw and Mr Jenkins, Mr Lindsay, Mr Lloyd and Mr Ripoll

Senators and members in attendance: Senator Colbeck, Senator Forshaw, Mr Jenkins, Mr Lloyd and Mr O'Connor

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Provision of facilities for collocation and re-equipping of the 1st Aviation Regiment at Robertson Barracks, Darwin.

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Committee met at 1.14 p.m.

FRASER, Brigadier Anthony Peter, Commander, 16th Brigade (Aviation), Department of Defence

GREEN, Mr Michael Wayne, Project Director, Infrastructure Asset Development, Department of Defence

HUTCHINSON, Brigadier Peter John, Director General, Infrastructure Asset Development, Department of Defence

PATCH, Brigadier Mark James, Director General, Armed Reconnaissance Helicopter Branch, Defence Materiel Organisation, Department of Defence

SMITH, Mr Richard, Project Manager, Connell Wagner Pty Ltd

ACTING CHAIR (Mr Brendan O'Connor)—I declare open this public hearing into the provision of facilities for the collocation and re-equipping of the 1st Aviation Regiment at Robertson Barracks, Darwin, Northern Territory. This project was referred to the Public Works Committee on 25 March 2003 for consideration and report to parliament. In accordance with subsection 17(3) of the Public Works Committee Act 1969:

- (3) In considering and reporting on a public work, the Committee shall have regard to –
 - (a) the stated purpose of the work and its suitability for that purpose;
 - (b) the necessity for, or the advisability of, carrying out the work;
 - (c) the most effective use that can be made, in the carrying out of the work, of the moneys to be expended on the work;
 - (d) where the work purports to be of a revenue-producing character, the amount of revenue that it may reasonably be expected to produce; and
 - (e) the present and prospective public value of the work.

Earlier today, the committee received a briefing from the Department of Defence and inspected the site of the proposed works. The committee will now hear evidence from the Department of Defence, the Northern Territory Department of Infrastructure Planning and Environment and the Northern Territory Regional Airspace Advisory Committee. I welcome representatives of the Department of Defence. The committee has received a submission and two supplementary submissions from Defence. These submissions will be made available in a volume of submissions for the inquiry and are also available on the committee's web site. Does Defence wish to propose amendments to any of the submissions it has made to the committee?

Brig. Hutchinson—I do not have an amendment; however, I have an addendum to our submission. This is a letter regarding the airspace redesign to accommodate Robertson Barracks's helicopter operations. It clarifies verbal advice from CASA that the Robertson

Barracks safety case has been approved. Along with that, I have the actual design safety case, which I will table.

ACTING CHAIR—I have been provided with a copy of the exhibit to which you refer, which will be exhibit 1. I now invite a representative of the Department of Defence to make a brief opening statement, after which we will proceed to questions.

Brig. Hutchinson—This proposal seeks approval to develop new facilities for the collocation and re-equipping of the 1st Aviation Regiment at Robertson Barracks Darwin. The 1st Aviation Regiment currently comprises the following elements: Headquarters 1st Aviation Regiment, 161st Reconnaissance Squadron, 162nd Reconnaissance Squadron, 171st Operational Support Squadron, 173rd Surveillance Squadron, Headquarters Squadron and Technical Support Squadron. The regimental elements are currently dispersed across the Army Aviation Centre at Oakey, the Royal Australian Air Force base at Darwin and Lavarack Barracks, Townsville. This dispersion is not ideal from a command perspective.

As a result of the acquisition of the armed reconnaissance helicopter, the 1st Aviation Regiment will be restructured. This project will, as a consequence of the functional reorganisation and re-equipping project, see the collocation of all operational armed reconnaissance helicopters and related command support elements on to one site. The reorganised regiment will be a major unit of some 400 personnel, 17 aircraft and approximately 160 vehicles organised into Headquarters 1st Aviation Regiment, 161st Reconnaissance Squadron, 162nd Reconnaissance Squadron, Logistics Support Squadron and Technical Support Squadron. Working accommodation will be required for each of these elements, as well as domestic accommodation and airside facilities.

The following facilities are to be provided by this project: headquarter facilities for the regiment, the two flying squadrons, the Technical Support Squadron and the Logistics Support Squadron; a logistics precinct, comprising a regimental quartermaster store for regimental and squadron equipment, stores and maintenance requirements; a specialised workshop for aircraft repair and maintenance, and a discrete workshop for the repair and maintenance of vehicles and stores; hangars for 12 aircraft and workshop shelters for a further five aircraft and approximately 160 unit vehicles, as well as an aircraft wash bay, compounds, aircraft parking aprons and taxiways, and take-off and landing pads; training facilities, including instructional facilities and a simulation facility specific to the needs of pilots and battle captains, flying instructors and operational planners; engineering services, roads and landscaping, inclusive of relevant security measures for the new asset; and living-in accommodation for up to 110 personnel within the Robertson Barracks complex.

The budget for the project is \$75 million. This includes construction costs, professional design and management fees and charges, furniture, fittings and equipment, together with appropriate allowances for contingency. The project was foreshadowed as part of the 2002-03 budget. The facilities project at Robertson Barracks has been discussed with both territory and federal environmental authorities. Defence is also presently undertaking an environmental assessment of the introduction of the armed reconnaissance helicopter capability in conjunction with Environment Australia. Subject to parliamentary approval, it is intended to commence construction in early 2004. Project delivery is expected to be sufficiently developed by

December 2004 to facilitate early occupation by key elements of the regiment, with completion of outstanding works by mid-2005.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. We will now commence with questions.

Senator COLBECK—In your submission you make note of some additional beds that are being provided on site. There are currently 120 beds and you are providing an additional 110. Are these supplementary to the existing ones on site, or are they replacement units?

Brig. Hutchinson—These are supplementary to the beds on site. The paragraph you refer to, paragraph 58 of the submission, talks about the fact that Defence has recently constructed a further 120 transit rooms. These are a demountable type and they are the rooms that are used for the training throughput at Robertson Barracks. That is separate to this requirement. This requirement will provide 110 rooms in junior officer, senior non commissioned officers and other ranks, precincts.

Senator COLBECK—Going on to the design philosophy, what sorts of life cycle considerations have you built into the budget for the proposed works, given the pretty harsh environmental conditions that exist in the region?

Brig. Hutchinson—We have a philosophy for considering whole of life considerations in all of our projects now and, in particular, looking at ecologically sustainable developments. So we see them as being general principles. The way that we ensure we cover that is to involve the regional managers of facilities along with our contractors and other people who will work on the facilities early in the planning cycle. There has been some consultation with them already at this preliminary stage, and that consultation will be ongoing once we get into the detailed design stage. The detailed design stage is where those considerations will be particularly embedded into the project. So at this stage, we have a number of stated principles that we wish to achieve. That has been put out in our philosophy and it will be also in our contract documentation. I will ask Mr Michael Green, the project director, to expand on some of the specific things. Richard Smith might also have some areas to specifically address.

Mr Green—In relation to life cycle considerations, one of the key strategies we will be adopting is capturing a lot of the local knowledge from our previous experience on the building site and from the local building industry generally. Our design consortium that will eventually do the detailed design will be tasked with deliberately seeking materials based on durability and life cycle effectiveness and actual design detailing in terms of the construction of those materials. We also have in the plant and equipment, which is another important area of the life cycle costing, a similar approach, where the local consultants are required to provide us with equipment that will do the task that we are asking of them and which is suitably selected and with evidence of satisfactory performance. We are fortunate on this project that we have quite a lot of significant construction on the same site already which provides us with some good opportunities for ongoing lessons learnt.

Senator COLBECK—Are there any significant logistical issues with respect to procurement of materials based on what you are looking to do, given that previous experience?

Mr Green—No. We believe that, although this project is quite large in itself, it is certainly not overly large by the capacity of the local industry here. Much larger projects have been built on the same site already, and the existing industry infrastructure will certainly cope with the size of the project.

Senator COLBECK—Would any of the design features have any time implications for the project?

Mr Green—Other than the normal, probably no. I suppose a more precise answer would be that there are certain materials that will be imported—that is, not manufactured here locally in Darwin. The industry itself is well equipped. Most materials are readily available. Certainly, within the design period, we would provide sufficient advanced notice for contractors to undertake any forward ordering.

Senator COLBECK—Going on to the project cost, you have mentioned in your submission and again this afternoon the \$75 million budget cost based on July 2002 figures. Given 12 months has essentially passed since then, are there any budgetary implications on the calculations made at that time, and how does that sit within the expectations you have for completion towards the end of next year?

Brig. Hutchinson—The costs have been recently updated since they were submitted with our consultancy. We are confident that the \$75 million prices are still current and that there is sufficient contingency built into the project. We are confident with those prices and with the contingency that we have allowed.

If I could go back to your previous question on the ecologically sustainable development, I have an attachment to our special conditions for the request for tender which I would be happy to tender as an exhibit. It actually goes through the principles; it expands on two pages worth of principles in that sort of area that we are looking to build into the project. It has principles ranging from 'efficient and effective use of natural resources in a way that maintains ecological processes on which life develops' through to a number of objectives, including 'conservation of species, conservation of resources' through to half a dozen performance measures and targets which we are looking to achieve. All Defence projects are required to achieve those. I would be happy to tender that for the committee if you require.

Senator COLBECK—Thanks. That would be good. Given some new projects are starting at the moment—I think the gas project is one, in particular—how do they impact on your project and your projected completions?

Brig. Hutchinson—The gas project and the railway project are two projects which we think will have a significant impact on the local industry. We monitor the local industry to ensure that it has the capacity. One of the issues that we are looking at with both of those issues is to achieve the start of our project before the full impact of those other projects start to affect the industry. It actually mitigates to the fact that we would like to start our project sooner rather than later, as we see that the effects will come to be more significant the longer we delay any start. However, our assessment at this stage is that the local industry has the capacity. Certainly, the contracting methodology that we are looking to adopt is aimed to provide maximum opportunity for the local industry for small and medium enterprises to get involved in our project.

Senator COLBECK—Given that you are looking to start as quickly as possible, what would you see as the potential threats to that time line being achieved?

Brig. Hutchinson—Subject to committee approval, what we are looking at is a time line where we would be going through and allowing contracts to be let prior to the next dry season. So we would finalise our designs, go through a two-stage tender process and look to have those tenders complete and contracts awarded prior to the next dry season. The factors that are going to impact on that will be the time to complete our designs and any delays through the actual approvals process itself. They would be our key risks at this stage to the program. Obviously, with the wet and the dry season impacts, we would be looking very closely at the effects of weather on the project. Provided we do not get a significantly late wet season next year, we believe that we have got the flexibility in our program to meet all of those requirements.

Senator COLBECK—Apart from this particular committee, what are the other potential speed humps, if you like, in the approvals process?

Brig. Hutchinson—The only other approvals would be bureaucratic ones internally—not so much bureaucratic as gaining the full signoff from a user point of view. Generally speaking, we have processes in place where we believe that they would not delay significantly the project.

Senator COLBECK—Do you see those fitting in with your delivery expectations for your helicopters?

Brig. Hutchinson—Yes.

Senator COLBECK—Are you aware of any specific heritage issues that impact on the project?

Brig. Hutchinson—My understanding is that the heritage ties in with the environmental side of the project. We have a number of environmental issues that are tied up with the project, and I will just outline those. Firstly, from a broader perspective, an Australia wide environmental management plan is being developed by Army in consultation with Environment Australia which covers the whole introduction of the armed reconnaissance helicopter capability. So that is Australia wide, and that looks at the implications not just in the Northern Territory but anywhere else where the helicopter would be operated. Within Robertson Barracks itself, there is an existing site specific environmental management plan which also considers in part the heritage aspects of the site. This environmental management plan will be replaced in the next couple of years by a Defence wide certified environmental management system which will continue to look at those requirements.

For this project itself, we are required to have an environmental certificate of compliance, which has been completed. That environmental certificate of compliance covers both the environmental and the heritage aspects within Robertson Barracks. For any construction elements, there is a requirement for individual construction environmental control plans, and they should also address those sorts of issues. So we believe that we have the environmental and heritage aspects pretty well covered. We also have within Infrastructure Division an environment, heritage and risk branch. Members of that branch have been consulted and involved in the development of the proposal and those elements which I have mentioned.

Senator FORSHAW—Does Environment Australia actually issue you with an approval? I think you said a moment ago that it was an environmental licence. Who is responsible for overseeing that?

Brig. Hutchinson—Environment Australia are required to sign off on the environmental management plan, which has been raised for the entire introduction of the armed reconnaissance helicopter capability. So Environment Australia have actually been engaged in the preparation—when I say ‘engaged’, they have been consulted—and they have been intimately involved in the preparation of that environmental management plan. Ultimately, they have the signoff of the procedures that we put in place with the environmental management plan.

Senator FORSHAW—I apologise for interrupting Senator Colbeck, but I will just follow this through. That is what you are referring to in paragraph 84 on page 23, which says, ‘Defence is also undertaking a separate study into equipment acquisition aspects.’

Brig. Hutchinson—Yes. That is the Australia wide part of it; it is the nationwide environmental management plan.

Senator FORSHAW—When is that likely to be completed?

Brig. Hutchinson—The first draft of the plan has been completed, and currently that is back with Defence from our nationwide consultants and that is being reviewed. Those comments will be provided by the end of the month and returned to Environment Australia. We are expecting that that will then be given the approval by Environment Australia for moving forward.

Senator FORSHAW—I take it that that will be completed and that any issues, proposals or whatever that come out of that will then be incorporated into the actual detailed design and planning.

Brig. Hutchinson—Yes, that is correct. Basically, what we will be doing is incorporating into design of facilities if there are measures required there, or there might be other actions that we are required to take as part of that Australia wide that might affect our training areas, use of training areas, how we actually approach sites and that sort of thing. All of those issues would be considered and we would take measures to meet the environmental management plan. That is basically our contract—that we would be signing up to meet those requirements with Environment Australia.

Senator FORSHAW—At some point, and I think this works in respect of other Commonwealth projects of course, they would then sign off on it after it is completed, if you like, or at the appropriate stage in the project. In other words, when the requirements that they lay down have been satisfied.

Brig. Hutchinson—That is correct. They would come up with a number of requirements that we would need to meet. The way we are actually doing it is that we have engaged a private firm to prepare the environmental management plan. We have actually engaged, off the Defence environmental panel, HLA Enviro Sciences to complete the plan. As I said, that first draft has now been completed. That is with Defence to look at the recommendations and what the implications are at the moment. We would then be looking to meet those recommendations. It

then goes back to Environment Australia for Environment Australia to actually say that they are happy with it and to publish the environmental management plan.

Senator COLBECK—The only other environmental issue related to long-term issues, such as your proposed flight corridors and potential urban growth around the site. Are there any measures or issues that you might be able to put into place to mitigate potential threats to, say, your flight corridor from the site out to where your operational areas are going to be?

Brig. Hutchinson—I will talk generally and then I will ask Brigadier Fraser to provide a bit more detail on the specifics. I would have to acknowledge that the flight paths and the environmental impact of flight paths were one of the key considerations that we had with the project, so we have actually been looking at those issues for some time. We believe that we have now come up with a number of measures that will address those issues very adequately.

The first thing we have looked at is to look at flight paths that actually go away from any population areas so that we minimise the effect of noise et cetera on potential people in the area. That also had an influence for us on the actual selection of the Robertson Barracks site as opposed to the use of Darwin airport from the point of view that there are some of those issues around Darwin airport.

The second aspect that I would highlight is that the Robertson Barracks site will not be used as an operating air base from the point of view of doing circuits of the base, using it for touch and go landings and those sorts of things. Basically, it is a home for the aircraft. They will fly out and do their training and operations in other areas, and then they will fly back and be housed and maintained at the site. The site will not be used for comings and goings a number of times during the day; it will be just for that home basing issue. I will now hand to Brigadier Fraser to talk about the actual detail of what we have looked at in terms of the corridor and addressing those environmental and flight path issues.

Brig. Fraser—It covers two areas. The first, which has been addressed, is that the operations around Robertson Barracks are quite different to how we would normally operate from other airfields. We will not be conducting circuits. It is a departure point. You travel out, conduct your flying operations supported by fuel and/or off to ranges for various lengths of time and then return either very late in the day or after a number of days to Robertson Barracks. The safety case that was referred to in Brigadier Hutchinson's earlier evidence covers a corridor out to Koolpinya. It is a track from Robertson Barracks to take us away from any built-up areas, any environmentally sensitive areas, any issues like that. We would track the aircraft along at an altitude of 200 feet above height of obstacles to clear any of the airspace issues.

The other part of it is that, consistent with the remainder of Australia, the airspace changes that are anticipated to be affected—which are the reduction in the size of the control zone surrounding the immediate airfield and excised from that at the same time an altitude up to 500 feet above the Robertson Barracks environment—would enable the aircraft to depart and return without impacting on the civil operators. We are quite cognisant of the issues and the concerns in working with the remainder of air traffic—civil air traffic, in particular—in Darwin and the Northern Territory.

Senator COLBECK—Who controls most of the land surrounding that base and particularly that track out to your operational areas?

Brig. Fraser—That is Commonwealth owned.

Senator COLBECK—Who controls that in a planning sense locally?

Brig. Hutchinson—I will have to take that on notice.

Mr LLOYD—In relation to the proposals as far as airspace and safety is concerned and in light of the letter that was tabled from Airservices Australia saying that the Robertson Barracks safety case had been approved, can you give a bit more detail on what that safety case is as far as the low level helicopter corridor is concerned and how it works in relation to the airspace? That really has not been expanded on in this meeting.

Brig. Fraser—To try to take us away from the primary approach path into Darwin from the south-east to fly the instrument approaches into Darwin, we have attempted to identify a corridor that takes us to the north-east away from the Robertson Barracks environment. It will be flown at 200 feet. The immediate environment of aircraft over Robertson Barracks on an instrument approach path brings them down to as low as 950 feet on the ILS/localiser, until they are slightly west of Robertson Barracks. So we have endeavoured to deconflict it both vertically in altitude and also in the track, by taking it to the north-east as opposed to the south-east. The aircraft would then depart from Robertson, track out to the north-east to Koolpinya and conduct its flying operations elsewhere.

Mr LLOYD—Defence wishes that the works be sufficiently advanced by December 2004 to allow the establishment of 1st Aviation Regiment at Robertson Barracks. When does Defence expect to receive the new Tiger helicopters?

Brig. Hutchinson—The program for the delivery of the new helicopters delivers the first two helicopters to the Army Aviation Training Centre at Oakey. Those first two helicopters are due to be delivered there on 15 December next year. We would expect the first potential helicopters for the Robertson Barracks site to be delivered in mid-2005. There is an intention that we will be operating the Kiowa with the 161st and 162nd Reconnaissance Squadrons before the arrival of the Tiger.

Brig. Fraser—The intention is to collocate the 1st Aviation Regiment, the 162 Kiowa squadron in Townsville and the 161 that is currently at the Air Force base in order to embed and settle down the procedures so that we can introduce Tiger, which is a particularly demanding project for us, in a risk managed, controlled way. So we wish to establish our flying operations base from the Robertson Barracks prior to the introduction of the helicopters. Two will go to Oakey in December 2004 to start the training. We expect the first Tiger in Darwin about mid-2005. It should enable us to do that in as controlled a manner as we can possibly do, with progressive introduction through to the full capability in Darwin by December 2008.

Mr LLOYD—In the costings, there is a considerable amount for external areas, which I understand takes in the taxiways and take-off and landing points for this project. Is that part of

the project going to be built specifically for the Tiger helicopters, or is it going to be built to a standard which will allow other aircraft to use the facility if the need arises?

Brig. Hutchinson—There is provision within the evidence and within the project for six of the hangars associated with the project to be of a size to take Black Hawk. That goes with the other works that are associated with the project. Those other works will actually be built to a standard which will initially be able to take not only the Tiger but also up to Black Hawk capability. The aim is that we are then able to have the flexibility to have the Tiger operate from here or Townsville with the 3rd Brigade. Similarly, you could have an exchange with the Black Hawk being used in Townsville or here. The basing issue is quite different in that, from a point of view of operational synergy, training and everything else, we look to have the single regimental capability located here in Darwin and the regimental capability for the Black Hawks located in Townsville but the opportunity to operate elements of each of those regiments in either Darwin or Townsville as training and operational requirements come up.

Mr LLOYD—I have one final question. With this project being built on Defence land, is it being built to Northern Territory building standards? Do you have to seek Northern Territory government approval as such for the building and who actually then checks that the building is being built to certain standards?

Mr Green—The building certification standard we use and which is adopted Australia wide is the Building Code of Australia. It is a national code that the Australian government is implementing. Each state or territory then implements the Building Code of Australia through their own legislation. Because this construction is being undertaken on Commonwealth land, we will not be submitting building plans to the local building authorities for approvals, but we will be complying with the Building Code of Australia and any local authority requirements. In terms of approval of the plans and approval of construction, the plans will be certified by a building certifier prior to construction. It will be certified that the design complies with the requirements of the Building Code of Australia. Then, on completion, the same building certifier will have to certify that they have been constructed in accordance with the plans that were previously certified.

Mr LLOYD—Would that code also take into account local conditions, such as cyclone measures that have to be complied with in areas such as Darwin?

Mr Green—The cyclone provisions are addressed under the code itself, not necessarily locally. There are other local conditions in the building regulations. It will comply with both, including an additional raft of Defence requirements which in some cases exceed local code requirements.

Mr JENKINS—Following up on Mr Lloyd's questions about use by other aircraft, mention is made that half the hangars would be of the size of a Black Hawk and that, of the five maintenance bays, only one will be enlarged for Black Hawk use. I find it interesting in that one is a ratio of a half and another is a ratio of a fifth. But, more importantly, the submission talks about the tarmac works being for 'higher standard Black Hawk use'. What proportion of the overall costing is for upgrade to a higher standard and what elements go to making up this higher standard? Is it just dimensions, or is it thickness?

Brig. Hutchinson—I will cover some of the broad issues and I might have to take the exact costs on notice. On the broad issues, the Black Hawk is a larger aircraft and a heavier aircraft. Clearly from the point of view of dimensions we need to have a larger hangar, and that is reflected in the indicative plans which are included in the evidence. Also, we need to design a more robust pavement to take the added weight of the Black Hawk. They are the two key elements: the size of that aircraft as well as its physical impact. Both of those elements have been taken into account in the preliminary design work and its costings.

In terms of the maintenance hangar, because we are talking about a basing option here, a large portion of the maintenance work will be of deeper maintenance. The deeper maintenance for the Black Hawk will continue to be done in Townsville and the deeper maintenance for the Tiger will be done here in Darwin. That is why there is the mismatch. Basically the maintenance requirement is a 'just in case' or for the more immediate type of maintenance that might be required if the Black Hawk is deployed across here for a short period of time.

Mr Green—I have here some estimates that were prepared by the quantity surveyors working on the project. Floor area requirements to accommodate a larger helicopter than the smaller Tiger will have an impact of approximately 1,300 square metres on building area. The cost of providing for the Black Hawks over and above the cost of providing only for the Tiger is of the order of \$1.3 million.

Mr JENKINS—Is that for hangar and tarmac? Is that the all-up cost?

Mr Green—I believe that is the building cost only. We do not have the tarmac cost to hand as yet.

Mr JENKINS—Does this project have a life cycle? When something like this is embarked upon, what is the horizon for how long it might last? The context of that question goes to the requirements, for instance, resulting from the impact of the flight path on land around. When flying over the site, we saw nothing but a quarry full of water and such things. But this is a classic case of at some stage civilisation catching up with you. What sort of time horizon is there for the project's useable life cycle? Then, with the use of the surrounding land, what type of planning restrictions might you and other planning authorities look for that might lengthen its life cycle or that might envisage uses different from those types proposed now with this facility?

Brig. Hutchinson—Your question has a number of dimensions. I will start by addressing some of the building and planning issues. I will ask Brigadier Patch to talk about the specifics of the Tiger capability, or the armed reconnaissance helicopter capability, and a time frame for that.

We generally design our buildings for a 25-year life cycle. Clearly we would then be looking at upgrades. We design for a 25-year period, as is normal with the code, but generally we expect to keep our buildings for longer than that. With Robertson Barracks and the Army Presence in the North, a lot of the considerations you have spoken about were considered in the master planning for that capability. I guess that is why Robertson Barracks is at the distance it is from Darwin; as you saw today, it is 20-odd kilometres. We continue, virtually on an ongoing basis, to do master planning exercises as to force disposition both on a national basis and on a regional basis. For example, I believe that the minister at the last estimates session mentioned the fact that

we are reviewing where our force is positioned around Australia. That is an ongoing requirement that we need to look at.

As for master planning here at Robertson Barracks, you have raised the issue that clearly Darwin is growing and will continue to expand. In answer to an earlier question, the land around Robertson Barracks is owned by the Commonwealth also, and around it we have quite extensive buffer zones. That relates to the issue of control. There are buffer zones around the barracks and we believe that there is sufficient capacity in Darwin to meet expansion without encroaching on us in the next 20-year window. But we are going to have to constantly review those sorts of issues in the future and work with the Northern Territory government to ensure that those issues will be met. We see ourselves being here for the long term, and we need to work with the government to make sure that we continue to meet those issues into the future.

In terms of airspace, we believe that the solution we have been able to negotiate in the safety case gives us a long-term solution which will not impact adversely no matter how busy Darwin airport becomes. Those aircraft will fly on a different flight path which will be separated horizontally and vertically from our use of the barracks. Therefore, no matter how much use is made of the airport long term, that should not be an issue for us. I think I have covered most areas. I will now ask Brigadier Patch to talk about the armed reconnaissance helicopter capability.

Brig. Patch—The life of type currently planned for the Tiger is 30 years from its introduction, commencing in December 2004. Procurement of the aircraft will continue until the last aircraft is delivered in April 2008, and so those aircraft also will have a 30-year life of type. Having said that, there have been numerous examples recently in military aircraft, both in Australia and world wide, where an initial estimate of the life of type was extended considerably. The Iroquois that you flew in today were purchased between 1962 and 1970. The Chinooks that the Army flies were purchased some 25 to 30 years ago. They may well go through another refurbishment program in the years to come that will see them go out to 2020. There are numerous examples within the Australian military of rotary wing aircraft that have longevity way beyond the planned time. But the Tiger's current planning is 30 years.

In terms of the Tiger's long-term operation at Robertson Barracks, Eurocopter, the manufacturer of Tiger, is without question the world leader in rotoring low-noise technologies, and the Tiger is a perfect example of that. If you add to that the fact that the Tiger will not take off from Robertson Barracks at its full mission weight because it will go elsewhere in order to be armed, which is a significant element of the aircraft's weight, the noise signature is reduced even further than that at max take-off weight. Whilst it would never be our intention to fly in a way which would affect the local population, if you chose an aircraft to fly in close proximity to residential areas then Tiger is certainly up there, particularly at the weights that we are going to operate at, in conducting these sorts of operations. If you add to that the very low volume of movements that will occur from Robertson Barracks, we again enhance the fly neighbourly capability of the aeroplane. Even now, with the current safety case that has been put forward, there is no requirement for us to fly via the corridor; however, it is our stated intention to use that corridor for noise abatement and environmental reasons, and we will continue to do so as a standard operational procedure within the regiment.

In addition, as you saw this morning during your flight, the land immediately to the west of Robertson for some considerable distance is inundated land owned by the Commonwealth. Once mining operations on that land are concluded, I would see it as being unacceptable for other sorts of development. Therefore, it will always offer us the sort of buffer zone that we would be looking for at all our bases because, as we are aware, there have been some noise issues at other bases.

One other thing I would like to mention is that it was mentioned to us this morning during our tour of the RAAF base that there has been a considerable increase in the noise complaints made even at the airport. By bringing the Tiger into the Darwin airport, we would not overcome the noise issue; in fact, if anything, we would exacerbate the noise issue that is currently occurring at Darwin airport. By taking it 25 kilometres west for the foreseeable future, we certainly will significantly reduce the impact that the aircraft would have upon any of the residential areas of Darwin.

Senator FORSHAW—I go back to Mr Lloyd's questions about gaining approvals and that, with it being Commonwealth land, technically you do not have to get local or Territory government approval. What is the situation with the provision of services to the base now and what impact might this development have? You have some 110 accommodation units, and obviously there will be other facilities going in. Can you give me a brief summary of the situation with the normal services to the site—power, sewerage, water et cetera—and how they are handled? Will this project have any impact upon those services now or into the future?

Mr Green—As you will be aware from your inspections this morning and our previous statement of evidence, the area preserved for this regiment is contained within the existing Robertson Barracks site. When the master plan was first established for the site, it was anticipated that the site would become fully developed at some stage in the future. Provisions were put in place—some in the initial stages and some with flexibility—for upgrade as required.

In quick summary, I believe that the first part of your question relates to liaison with local authorities. Whilst we no longer submit plans to a building department for approval, it is also becoming an Australia wide approach because of the certification process now, which has essentially been outsourced.

Senator FORSHAW—You cover in your submission the fact that you have consulted with all these groups; I understand that.

Mr Green—In relation to what might be loosely called 'utilities'—power, water, sewerage, communications—certain infrastructure has been provided. There is a certain capacity for expansion. Because it is an existing site within an existing complex, there will have to be some modification to the utilities within the site. Discussions are under way with the various utility authorities—for example, in regard to power. Basically we have given advance notice of our demand requirements for the site. This particular development does not add significantly to the total density of the site development. Additional supplies of water, power and sewage treatment are all within the expectations of what was established there previously, and finetuning will certainly be undertaken in a process of consultation with local utilities.

Senator FORSHAW—I assumed that was probably the case, given that the base is fairly new in terms of its recent history. Are those costs within your \$75 million budget?

Mr Green—Any alterations to the existing infrastructure within the site or any changes in connection to the local authorities are included in our construction costs.

Brig. Hutchinson—The site is part of the master planning for the Robertson Barracks. That site has been identified for a major unit to go into. It was always intended that something would go into that area. All those services and those sorts of things have been incorporated up to this point in our development of infrastructure.

ACTING CHAIR—Paragraph 14 states—and, to a large extent, this probably goes to the hub of the project:

The employment of the Tiger with the combined arms team will fundamentally change the way in which land forces will conduct warfighting in the future ...

Can you outline the extent and nature of the change that would occur as a result of using the Tiger in this way—and please amend and supplement where necessary?

Brig. Hutchinson—Part of my past life was as a commander of the Army's Combined Arms Training and Development Centre and the Army's Combat Arms Training Centre. The introduction of the armed reconnaissance helicopter capability is a significant enhancement to Defence's capability, as mentioned in the white paper and I think also referred to in the evidence. This has been shown by recent operations in Iraq. The success of operations in Iraq was largely based on the fact that the coalition was able to combine the effects of its joint forces and, within those joint forces—the land forces—the various sensors that it had. Included in those sensors, the key element of the sensor shooter mix, if you like, is the armed reconnaissance helicopter. That can go out and identify what the potential targets may be, what is going on out in the environment and so on. It can then provide the information back to the ground forces.

One of the key things or synergies that you achieve in the 1st Brigade is that the 2nd Cavalry Regiment and the 1st Aviation Regiment are the two key reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities of the land forces. If you put those both together and combine them with mechanised forces or special operations forces, which all feed into the equation, you will end up with a far greater synergy and far greater effect than the individual components.

ACTING CHAIR—What makes the Tiger fundamentally different? Why can the Tiger combined with armed forces or ground troops do that, whereas other aircraft may not be as effective?

Brig. Hutchinson—A number of other aircraft can also meet the requirement. But in terms of the Tiger, I would need to pass to the aviation experts. Perhaps I will ask Brigadier Fraser to speak in the first instance, as I can only speak generically about capability.

Brig. Fraser—The strength of the Tiger is its manoeuvrability—that is, it works close to the ground in the land environment, which brings speed of manoeuvre. In the Army environment it brings observation through sensors and the management of that information in being able to

distribute it through the ground and through the total combined force—the combined arms team—and then, if needs be, being able to prosecute whatever that threat is, using some sort of weapons systems. It provides a total situation awareness to the ground commanders and it works in that ground environment.

The Tiger itself is an extremely manoeuvrable helicopter. It works very closely to terrain and/or trees, using them to give it shelter and protection. Just like armoured organisations do, it uses the strength of each of these different components to bring its total capability to bear.

ACTING CHAIR—There are no further questions, so we thank you very much, gentlemen. I am about to call the next set of witnesses. Please stay because you will be recalled at some later point.

[2.12 p.m.]

BAILEY, Mr Graham Stewart, Consultant Planner, Department of Infrastructure Planning and Environment, Northern Territory Government

COLEMAN, Mr John Anthony, Policy Development Manager, Department of Infrastructure Planning and Environment, Northern Territory Government

TREVENA, Mr Allen Ross, Director, Petroleum and Mining Support, Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development, Northern Territory Government

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome. The committee has received a submission from the department. Do you wish to propose any amendments to that submission?

Mr Trevena—No, but I would offer a couple of points of clarification. Firstly, until recently I was Director of Defence Petroleum and Mining Support. Secondly, I will act as the lead spokesman on point 1.

ACTING CHAIR—Therefore I invite you, Mr Trevena, to make a brief opening statement to the committee, after which we will proceed to questions.

Mr Trevena—I would also clarify that there are two departments here.

ACTING CHAIR—Let us get this exactly right.

Mr Bailey—John and I are both from the Department of Infrastructure Planning and Environment.

Mr Trevena—I am from the Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development. I have nothing to add to the submission, but I will make a statement in support of the Defence proposal. Defence generically is a major positive economic impacter on the NT, which is well recognised by the Northern Territory government. Basic parameters are \$550 million to \$600 million a year worth of expenditure; 6,000 to 7,000 Defence employees plus their families. So you are talking major direct and indirect benefit to the NT. On top of that baseline, there are some significant Defence projects which we would like to see happen, one of which is Project Air 87. That in turn offers significant benefits to the NT—firstly, the infrastructure development itself, which will provide work and jobs for the locals; secondly, the through-life support opportunities associated with the helicopters; and, thirdly, the additional employment. As a general statement of support for the proposal, I make those comments.

Senator FORSHAW—Mr Trevena, when introducing yourself you said that formerly you were Director of Defence Petroleum and Mining. Is that significant to this inquiry?

Mr Trevena—There is a logistic reason. My successor, who just took over last week, is on leave and not able to be here. I am here given my past exposure to this project.

ACTING CHAIR—Are you here acting on your successor's behalf?

Mr Trevena—I am acting on behalf of the Defence support function within DBIRD.

Senator COLBECK—Who controls the environmental and planning aspects of the Commonwealth owned land that surrounds the Robertson Barracks? Does the NT government have the capacity to impose any environmental or planning controls over that property?

Mr Bailey—Yes. The Northern Territory Planning Act would be key, I guess, but there is also environmental impact legislation which comes into play. So in general terms the short answer is yes.

Senator COLBECK—Given your stated support for Defence and the project, would there be a receptive view to ensuring the reasonable provision of buffers, if and where necessary, in the case of any future development in a planning sense of the areas surrounding these facilities?

Mr Trevena—I believe that the answer is not only yes but most of the action implementing that answer is either under way or has been taking place in the recent past.

Senator COLBECK—That was going to be my next question, so thank you for anticipating that. Going to the physical aspects of the project itself, what would be your perspective of the capacity of local industry to undertake the project as it stands at the moment?

Mr Trevena—Are we talking about the construction at the base?

Senator COLBECK—The capacity within the industry, yes.

Mr Trevena—It is largely a civil works, as I understand it. I think the capacity would be ample locally to do the great proportion of it. Picking up on some comments before about other major projects that are happening or going to happen over the next year or two, most specifically the LNG project, yes, that will use some local labour and industrial capacity. But a big focus of the LNG project will be engineering; there are some more technical oil and gas specific aspects to that. So there is not a direct overlap with that project and the sorts of works that may be required with this one. The short answer is that there is sufficient capacity to do what can realistically be done locally.

Senator COLBECK—Moving to specific environmental and heritage issues, we have heard in evidence that specific studies are being undertaken by Defence with respect to the project. As a department, are you satisfied that all of the issues that are required to be addressed are being addressed and will be encompassed within the project outcomes from those studies?

Mr Trevena—Yes.

Mr Bailey—We would be confident of that.

Senator FORSHAW—In the submission from the Department of Defence—and I am sure you are aware of this—in looking at the various options for locating the facilities for the Tiger, it has been determined that the Robertson Barracks is the ideal site but there was also

consideration of the other options at the RAAF base at Darwin itself. Has that been an issue that you have looked at? Do you see advantages in one site or another, or is its location not really a cause for concern?

Mr Trevena—To my knowledge, no. If anything, Robertson Barracks would probably have less of a noise impact. You are further out of town again, as someone was saying before. Prima facie that would be advantageous. Beyond that, I am not sure.

Senator FORSHAW—I suppose I was looking at possible negative impacts, one of which, as you have just mentioned, is noise. But the other aspect would be in terms of benefits. Are they pretty much comparable? Is it the same impact wherever?

Mr Trevena—Yes. You could argue that Robertson Barracks will preferentially impact on the Palmerston area, which Palmerston would like, but it is all greater NT. So from a generic viewpoint there is not a lot of difference. So the answer is no, we have not had or expressed a preference on either location.

Mr Bailey—I believe that we were included in discussions before decisions were made and probably our input was in line with that that the Commonwealth Defence people were talking when they were suggesting that the chosen site on balance had advantages. So the only two sites we are aware of really are those two.

Senator FORSHAW—I understand that the submission outlines all the internal synergies, operationally and logistically, that Defence says are the benefits of the Robertson site. One could argue that they are the priorities, but you are also interested in those other aspects. However, if it is six of one and half a dozen of the other, fair enough.

Mr JENKINS—Is it likely that the Northern Territory government would want to add as an overlay any planning maps to show any potential flight path impacts, whether they be those directly involved or alterations to civil considerations?

Mr Coleman—I think they are in line with the maps that we have dealt with with Defence to date.

Mr Bailey—The helicopter lane, as we understand it to have been finalised, is already plotted. It is not on any zoning plan but in line with other constraints that we have lived with for a long time—we have constraints maps with Darwin airport et cetera. That is available obviously if those people need to know.

ACTING CHAIR—Have you brought a map in?

Mr Bailey—We always come with something in case we are asked. Will I hold this up?

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, just so that we do not go away completely confounded. The flight paths? It might be easier if two people hold this up.

Mr Bailey—There are two plans here. The one I am holding is the zoning, and that one shows land tenure. The lane is fairly easily seen on both plans. The beginning point is the base. I

believe some discussion is still occurring as to how far out that will go, and I think I heard earlier that is because of the reduction of control around the airport that has been discussed elsewhere. Essentially this crosses over the pale blue colour, which is vacant crown land, although I think you are referring to it now as Commonwealth, because there has been a lot of discussion over the years about the transfer of that land. Essentially this is in control of the NT government. It is in a lease and held by the land corp I think. This is a hunting reserve and this is a fairly newly gazetted conservation reserve. In short, with that translated into zoning, nothing there really would concern you in terms of future development. That all reflects the real world situation with there being so many constraints anyway in so much of this country that you would not expect anyone to be zeroing in on it as a development site.

Mr JENKINS—Will those maps ever get status?

Mr Bailey—They are accepted plans, yes.

Mr JENKINS—So they are part of a planning scheme?

Mr Bailey—Yes, that one is. This one is just a picture of the tenure of the day.

Mr JENKINS—Over time, experience has been had with other Defence projects around this city. Is the Northern Territory government satisfied with Defence's attempts at sourcing locally? Do greater efforts need to be made, or have such efforts until now indeed led to new opportunities for businesses to commence in the Top End?

Mr Trevena—We are very satisfied with the contribution that Defence makes. There is always some up side. We would like to think that we could achieve a little bit of up side from this project versus what we might have got otherwise. Can I leave it at that?

ACTING CHAIR—I suppose it is a given that an economic boon or windfall results from the ADF investing so much of its resources in this region. Are there occasions when things that might be raised are not raised because you do not want to lose the resources coming to this area?

Mr Trevena—No. We raise concerns we have. Another point of elaboration would be that, if you look at the total project—not just the focus of this inquiry, but the total Air 87 project—the biggest opportunities from an industry development sense are the through-life support for the helicopters themselves. I do not know what the number is but let us say it is many tens of millions of dollars per annum times 17 to 20 years or thereabouts. So we would be targeting to get as big a percentage of that annual spend in the Territory as possible. That is the biggest macro opportunity in the total project. When it comes to the \$75 million being spent on the construction, we would anticipate the great percentage of that being expended in the Territory.

Mr Bailey—We have talked about this in general planning development terms that the synergy potentially between having helicopter capacity for Defence and going into private industry with offshore rigs and the petroleum gas developments that we see occurring already and anticipate to be more so—we see that as pretty relevant to this discussion.

Mr Trevena—And there are other opportunities or spin-offs that could come from this—training, for example, upskilling the local work force on the back of some of the requirements.

ACTING CHAIR—Up until now has any sort of in-depth analysis been done?

Mr Trevena—We are in the process of doing it.

ACTING CHAIR—Will that be looking at short-, medium- and long-term benefits in areas of employment and training and that sort of thing?

Mr Trevena—Bearing in mind too that a lot of the engagement by necessity is with Australian Aerospace as distinct from Defence itself. But there is plenty more to do.

ACTING CHAIR—As there are no further questions, I thank the three of you for coming in this afternoon. We do need to keep a copy of maps that have been referred to, if possible. We will table as exhibit No. 2 the maps that have been tendered by the Department of Infrastructure Planning and Environment, Northern Territory Government.

[2.30 p.m.]

LAWFORD, Mr Ronald Edwin, Convener, Northern Territory Regional Airspace Advisory Committee

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome. The committee has received a submission from the advisory committee. Do you propose any amendments to that submission?

Mr Lawford—Yes, I do. The situation has changed somewhat since this submission was made. The major underlying concern we had and still have to a very minor extent is that the flow of civil traffic into Darwin could be interrupted in a situation where a CASA representative may deem to be unsafe the proximity of Army helicopters to the civil traffic on instrument approaches to Darwin. To an extent it is a subjective thing, but we could foresee that happening at some time in the next 20 to 30 years. For that reason we have been seeking (a) a safety case being undertaken and (b) that safety case being put to CASA for formal approval. A safety case has been done. I received a copy of it only about three hours ago, and so I have not been through it in detail. I have also been told orally that CASA has approved that safety case but, as of two hours ago, I have not received written confirmation of that.

ACTING CHAIR—I understand that an exhibit tendered earlier in evidence to this committee reflects what you are saying.

Mr Lawford—That CASA has approved the safety case?

ACTING CHAIR—As I understand it, yes. It was tendered earlier by the Department of Defence—I think by Brigadier Hutchinson. It is a short letter. Having a copy of it now before you, you will see that it has been signed by Peter Coburn, Airspace and Military Liaison Manager. That would indicate that the oral advice you received has now been certified in writing.

Mr Lawford—All we would like now in addition to that is a letter from CASA confirming that advice. We can then put that on our files and in the future, if need be, say ‘CASA approved that in 2003 they should not object in 2015’ or whenever.

ACTING CHAIR—That makes sense.

Mr Lawford—There is one additional minor thing, which appears to have been largely addressed, but some doubt still exists as to whether all the land in the corridor has been quarantined as being land which cannot be alienated at some time in the future. I spoke to Mr Trevena yesterday and, if I understood him correctly, some land may still be subject to some question mark as to whether it can be effectively quarantined or isolated, or whatever the phrase is.

ACTING CHAIR—For the purposes of what exactly?

Mr Lawford—For the purposes of ensuring that the helicopter lane will remain free of any occurrences which could cause future objections to helicopter operations.

Senator COLBECK—Are you talking about the lane from Robertson Barracks to the helicopters' operational grounds as opposed to the main airport approach?

Mr Lawford—Yes, I am. That lane, I think, is a two-mile wide corridor, which initially was going to go right out to Koolpinya. I am still not 100 per cent sure that all of the land in that lane cannot be built on, or whatever. If it were to be built on, there would be future objections to the helicopters. Again, that could change the flight path of the helicopters and affect the operations of civil aircraft.

Senator FORSHAW—Where you were coming from now appears to be largely resolved through the advice from Air Services and CASA. But your comment a moment ago suggests that you have a concern about what might happen years down the track in terms of future development. Is the concern you had twofold? You are concerned about the interaction with operations at Darwin airport, and your concern goes to both commercial aircraft and light aircraft. Is that correct?

Mr Lawford—They are one and the same.

Senator FORSHAW—I thought you might have been talking about privately owned aircraft.

Mr Lawford—No. The committee that I represent covers the whole of the civil aviation industry in the Northern Territory, including Qantas as they operate into Darwin, for example.

Senator FORSHAW—As well as small, light planes flying around?

Mr Lawford—Yes. Our concern is that, if the lane were not properly quarantined and if the lane were the only means of ingress and egress and if there were objections to the helicopters, they might seek to operate across to the south, for example, which would bring them into potential conflict with civil aircraft on the approaches to runway 29 and that could cause problems. Once the land is quarantined, the problem would seem to disappear, but there is still some doubt, in my mind at least, as to whether all the land has been put into that category.

Senator FORSHAW—I understood that that is what you meant. I am not familiar with how Darwin airport operates as I come from Sydney. But we do know that in other parts of the country—Richmond, Sydney itself, Canberra, Fairburn—issues arise where you have both Air Force jets or helicopters operating and nearby you have commercial aircraft operating. Is there anything different about the situation that is envisaged here that is not able to be managed? From my inexpert knowledge in this area, the sorts of issues you could foresee arising are not ones exclusive to Darwin. They are problems that do exist or could exist in other parts of the country and are managed.

Mr Lawford—Until recently the operation of aircraft into Sydney Harbour had not been drawn to my attention. The Sydney Harbour helicopter operations are very similar in terms of the proximity to aircraft landing on runway 16 at Sydney. They are in fact closer to Sydney airport than Robertson Barracks will be to Darwin airport. To that extent, that also would provide

us with an argument against CASA raising an objection. There was also the problem of the Victor 1 lane past the coast of Sydney, which we are aware of, but that is in a slightly different category because the aircraft are flying virtually parallel with the houses that are there, whereas here they are flying significantly higher. Being aware of those issues, a lot of our concerns have gone away.

Senator FORSHAW—I was just making the point—and, as I have said, I am no expert in this by a long shot—that where you have aircraft, whether civil aviation or Defence or whatever, operating in close airspace, these issues are able to be managed through a whole series of mechanisms including, as you said, exclusive corridors.

Mr Lawford—Yes.

Senator FORSHAW—So there is nothing unique about the situation here or what is proposed that makes it largely any different?

Mr Lawford—It is unique in the sense that Sydney Harbour helicopter operations are the only other area of Australia where there are very close low-level helicopter operations nearby with instrument flying traffic going into a major airport. The significant difference is that Sydney Harbour operations are obviously bounded by the boundaries of Sydney Harbour, whereas here they are not. Apart from that, they are quite similar. I was really unaware of how close the Sydney Harbour operations were to Sydney airport operations until it was drawn to my attention about two or three weeks ago.

ACTING CHAIR—I am not sure whether you have the answer to this, but you were to appear with Mr Kew and Mr Liepa.

Mr Lawford—Mr Kew and Mr Liepa are here, by the way.

ACTING CHAIR—Our view was that there were to be three witnesses. My concern is with witnesses who may have a problem in appearing, but the indication I am getting is that there is no problem. We will call Mr Kew and Mr Liepa next. I apologise to you for any misunderstanding in when you were to appear. As there are no further questions, Mr Lawford, I would like to thank you for appearing here this afternoon.

[2.41 p.m.]

KEW, Mr Richard Ian, Chief Executive Officer, Darwin International Airport Pty Ltd

LIEPA, Mr Andrew, General Manager, Operations, Darwin International Airport Pty Ltd

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome. Perhaps the reason for some of our misunderstanding was our receipt of a joint submission signed by Mr Lawford and Mr Kew. Perhaps that is why we chose to get them to give evidence concurrently. However, we have easily managed to hear from them separately. Would you care to make any additional introductory comments?

Mr Kew—I have one comment in clarification. I am the CEO of the Airport Development Group, which is the overall holding company of Northern Territory Airports Pty Ltd, which is responsible for Darwin International Airport, Alice Springs airport and Tennant Creek airports.

Mr Liepa—Additionally, I am the General Manager, Operations, Northern Territory Airports Group, which is responsible for Darwin, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.

ACTING CHAIR—Mr Kew, as I said previously, you have co-signed with Mr Lawford a submission to the public works inquiry. Would you like to supplement that at all?

Mr Kew—I will not repeat what Ron Lawford has already said. You have received our submission. Our concern here is in representing the civilian airport at Darwin. Indeed, as the airport lessee company, we have a large investment in that airport. It was privatised by the FAC some five years ago. Currently we still have 94 years of an original 99-year lease to run. Our concern about the proposed operations of the Tiger helicopters at Robertson Barracks was based on potential safety issues and also the potential opportunity to restrict civilian aircraft operations, not only now but at any time during the further 94 years that we have remaining on our lease.

We asked for a safety case to be done. I understand that one has now been prepared and signed off by CASA. We would have liked to have seen it earlier than 10 minutes ago in this room. Be that as it may, if CASA have reviewed the proposed operations of the helicopters and are satisfied with them, we would not take any other issue with that. Like Ron Lawford, we would like to make sure of one other precondition; that is, the permanent quarantining of Commonwealth and/or Territory government land where the helicopters, both now and into the future, are allowed to operate away from Robertson Barracks and that no change be required to those operations at some stage in the future. If those two preconditions are met, then we fully support Army reconnaissance helicopters operating at Robertson Barracks.

However, I would just say that the safety case is today's best view on what will be safe operations in the future. If at some stage a safety issue occurs in connection with those helicopter operations or an opportunity occurs to restrict civilian aircraft operations, then we would ask that civilian aircraft operations take precedence over military aircraft operations, except in times of emergency or conflict.

Mr LLOYD—Isn't that already the case?

Mr Kew—No Army reconnaissance helicopters operate from Robertson at this point.

Mr LLOYD—But don't commercial aircraft take precedence over military aircraft and military movements at Darwin airport at the moment?

Mr Kew—They do, but they are all being controlled by the aircraft traffic controller at Darwin airport at present. Now we are talking about independent operations at Robertson Barracks.

Senator COLBECK—But isn't air traffic control at Darwin airport managed by the military anyway?

Mr Kew—On behalf of Airservices Australia at present.

ACTING CHAIR—I will just clarify the exhibit so people are clear, because I may have confused some. The evidence we have been presented is a signature on behalf of an airspace and military liaison officer, on behalf of Airservices Australia, indicating that they have received advice from CASA. We will clearly need written advice from CASA itself to the committee and indeed to other bodies that want that confirmation. We will rely upon this of course, but clearly that needs to be resolved. I just make that point.

Senator FORSHAW—Can I just follow that up. It says, 'Airservices Australia has received verbal advice from CASA that the Robertson Barracks safety case has been approved.' Just so we understand this completely, are you familiar—I assume you are—with what the safety case is that has been put to CASA and that has been approved?

Mr Kew—We are relatively familiar, although we had not seen the actual tender reference of what the study was to review until 15 minutes ago in this room. We have not looked at the findings of CASA in detail, but we would not seek to challenge CASA's skills in that area.

Senator FORSHAW—We just want to be certain here. I do not know what it says either, and how much we understand the technicalities of it is another issue. But from what we have been shown and told here today about the corridor, the distances, the flight paths and so on, essentially it has been put that it should not interfere. I suppose the one thing that we would need to know just to complete the file, if you like, is whether CASA has identified any issues, recommendations, conditions or restrictions that are of significance to your operations.

Mr Kew—I do not know the answer to that because we do not have CASA's review.

Senator FORSHAW—That is right. We do not know either.

Mr Kew—If there were significant restrictions or conditions, we might take a different view on it.

Senator FORSHAW—I did not want you to be saying one thing and then later suggesting another.

Mr Kew—We are not contemplating that those restrictions would be—

Senator FORSHAW—You are confident, but you want to have the rider that you need to have a look at what CASA actually say.

Mr Kew—That is correct.

Senator FORSHAW—Okay. That might be something that we need to have clarified in due course.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Liepa—Can I add to that too. What Mr Kew said was fairly important about the 94 years of lease and commercial viability that we have got left. If the safety case is developed around the number of helicopters that are going to operate for the next couple of years, then the safety case probably needs to be looked at a bit further.

ACTING CHAIR—Are there any further questions? Would you like to make any further comments? If not, thank you very much for appearing this afternoon. We will now recall the Department of Defence witnesses.

[2.50 p.m.]

FRASER, Brigadier Anthony Peter, Commander, 16th Brigade (Aviation), Department of Defence

GREEN, Mr Michael Wayne, Project Director, Infrastructure Asset Development, Department of Defence

HUTCHINSON, Brigadier Peter John, Director General, Infrastructure Asset Development, Department of Defence

PATCH, Brigadier Mark James, Director General, Armed Reconnaissance Helicopter Branch, Defence Materiel Organisation, Department of Defence

SMITH, Mr Richard, Project Manager, Connell Wagner Pty Ltd

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome back. I now invite you to make any supplementary statements in support of your submissions and a comment on the evidence given today. After that, we will proceed to questions.

Brig. Hutchinson—The first point I had is that, from what I heard, I believe the Northern Territory government submission probably answers the question I had taken on notice about who controls what land. So I will take it that that answer has now been provided. I did have a separate answer to provide to you, but I do not think I can explain it any better than the Northern Territory government already did.

I will just take a couple of the points that have been raised by other witnesses, starting with the one that is most recent in my memory from Mr Liepa about whether the safety case covers the whole of the Tiger capability into the future or whether it is just looking at the next couple of years. I have been advised that the safety case looks at the whole capability and a long-term view of the requirement. So it is not just the short term of what is happening in the next couple of years; it is looking at the long-term issue of the capability.

In terms of whether this is the only case in Australia, the issue of helicopters into Sydney airport, into Mascot, was mentioned. There is also as I understand it another example, which is the Army facility at Holsworthy. It is directly underneath one of the main approaches into Mascot airport.

Brig. Patch—The Army has previously operated at Holsworthy for a considerable time. It is immediately adjacent to Bankstown airport, which I understand is the busiest airport in Australia. It is under Sydney controlled airspace. It is directly under the 07 ILS. We operated there with no major concerns, in consultation with CASA and other air authorities, for a considerable period of time, and we will continue to do so well into the future. So the Defence Force does not consider that this is a unique situation.

Brig. Hutchinson—Finally, in relation to the point that was raised about civil aircraft and military aircraft deconfliction, when General Cosgrove was Chief of the Army he wrote to Darwin airport and NT RAPAC to highlight that Army aircraft would always provide right of access and time to civilian aircraft, so they will always take a lower priority. That was from the Chief of the Army at the time. That is not a temporal issue. That is committing Army to that as an ongoing policy. Again, we do not see that as being a short-term thing; we see that as being a policy.

We believe that we have taken a number of measures which address the concerns that have been raised. If additional concerns were raised over time, we would immediately look to address those concerns as well and come up with suitable alternatives. If things were to change, we would look to address those concerns as well. We are here for the long term. We are here to make sure that the system is able to work and that safety issues are always addressed. It is something that we do in all of our operations, so it is not something that is a peacetime requirement. We have to do it operationally as well, so I think we get quite good at doing that sort of thing. I think we can assure the local authorities that we will meet those requirements.

Mr LLOYD—I want to hopefully alleviate Mr Kew's concerns. He stated that he had only seen the air safety case 15 minutes ago and obviously this other document a few minutes ago. Maybe you could outline the time frame of how this document arrived today, just to alleviate his concerns.

Brig. Hutchinson—To start with, there has been ongoing consultation—I think it was acknowledged by the Northern Territory government but also with all the agencies involved today—for a number of years now. The safety case that you have seen is the culmination of a fairly extensive process, so it is not something that we just started a week ago, a month ago or something like that; it has been ongoing for a number of years. I will pass to Brigadier Fraser to go through the exact detail, but we have been working on this for some time. Brigadier Fraser has had one of his people, Colonel Simpson, who is in the room today, working particularly on this case for quite some months, if not longer. I will ask Brigadier Fraser to talk about it.

Mr LLOYD—Have the people involved in the management of Darwin airport been involved with those discussions so they would be familiar with the ongoing issues?

Brig. Fraser—Yes, they have. My predecessor and a number of others over the last 18 months that I am aware of have been involved on and off with attempting to address the issues. We believe that our people are part of the Darwin community when they are here, and we believe that we are part of the Darwin community when we bring Tiger to here. We would like to work together with all of those agencies to solve those issues.

The safety case was developed specifically under the current standing arrangements for airspace management, where the control zone runs significantly much larger than what it currently is—almost out to Koolpinya at a 15 nautical mile mark, out towards that eastern side. So we looked to identify a way of separating the aircraft within that still control zone that goes from ground level up. It is proposed that, by the end of this year, they will reduce those control zones throughout Australia in accordance with other international work. A way of doing that, and with the consultation in the safety case, is to bring that lower level 500-foot step over the top of it. I acknowledge that there are changes. Our endeavour is to work with the local operators, not

to interrupt them. It is the only way we can achieve our safe and effective flying operations and not affect their commercial viability.

Senator COLBECK—Is there any potential for future growth in this particular project, and what sorts of processes would you go through in the circumstance of that arising?

Brig. Hutchinson—There is certainly the potential for future growth at Robertson Barracks. I think you saw today that there are still some buffer zones and other potential areas out there. My understanding is that there are no further major moves planned in the next five to 10 years, as far as I am aware from my wider understanding of what is going on with force disposition studies and that sort of thing. Whilst there is still some potential expansion space out at Robertson Barracks, there is no plan for any major expansion in the base beyond this proposal at this time.

Senator COLBECK—What airspace management controls will exist over that site with the introduction of the Tiger?

Brig. Fraser—The control zone for Robertson Barracks will still be 500 foot and above. So if the aircraft are, for example, to fly into Darwin, they would need to seek, as we currently seek, an airways clearance and wait until they gain that clearance and then be authorised to become airborne and track into Darwin. In order to operate outside controlled airspace, if we were to go to the east and conduct our flying operations or if we were going way out to the eastern side or tracking to the south or the west, we would use the corridor to take us well clear of any areas and then proceed on track to go and conduct that flight training or 'tracks away'. They are standing arrangements at the moment. The control zone, as it is right now, runs further to the east. For example, when the committee flew this morning we had to await a clearance to gain some flight time. As you saw with delays in traffic, to get the aircraft out there they took a 12-minute delay in order to effect the departure from the 161 location in order to fit in with the civil air traffic control and the civil flights.

Brig. Patch—In the situation of Holsworthy, there was a fixed landline from the operations cell into Sydney, so whenever there was a requirement for any direct communications from the Army airfield at Holsworthy to Sydney it was done via a fixed landline. It certainly would be possible—and I cannot confirm one way or the other whether it is to be done—for that to be established here. In the main, though, our intention is that aircraft will not go into Darwin; they must remain outside controlled airspace via the route that we have discussed and will train outside controlled airspace. So I do not see that as being the issue that it is at Sydney.

Senator COLBECK—With the proposed lane out to the operational areas, what restrictions will apply to that in a formal sense? Will there be formal air traffic control restrictions on that? Will it be formally designated for military use only, or will that lane be formalised in some way?

Brig. Fraser—My understanding is that it will probably be promulgated as a helicopter lane. There is no restriction on civil aircraft tracking through it. All that we need to do is make them aware that it is a helicopter lane. But it is at 200 feet, so our helicopters flying that low should be below most civil aircraft operations that I understand could possibly be in that location. We have a radio communications as part of the normal flight procedures. There are radio communications for broadcasting your intentions and we are tracking what you are doing, so we can deconflict

ourselves separately that way. We envisage being able to track that by day and also by night on night vision devices.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. Before closing, I would like to thank the witnesses who have appeared before the committee today and those people who assisted our inspections and private briefing this morning.

Resolved (on motion by **Senator Forshaw**):

That, pursuant to the power conferred by section 2(2) of the Parliamentary Papers Act 1908, this committee authorises publication of the evidence given before it and submissions presented at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 3.03 p.m.