

Tropical Marine Research Facilities, Cape Ferguson and Townsville, Queensland

- 7.1 The Tropical Marine Research Facilities project seeks to provide facilities to support research undertaken by the Australian Institute of Marine Science in pursuit of the National Research Priorities in the area of marine science. The estimated cost of the project is \$49.5 million (excluding GST).
- 7.2 The proposal was referred to the Committee on 22 October 2009.

Conduct of the inquiry

- 7.3 The inquiry was advertised in local and national newspapers and submissions sought from those with a direct interest in the project. The Committee received three submissions and one confidential supplementary submission detailing the project costs. A list of submissions can be found at Appendix A.
- 7.4 The Committee undertook a site inspection at Cape Ferguson, and a public hearing and an in-camera hearing on the project costs in Townsville, on 5 November 2009. A list of witnesses can be found at Appendix B.
- 7.5 The transcript of the public hearing as well as the submissions to the inquiry are available on the Committee's website.¹ Plans for the proposed works are detailed in Submission 1: Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS).

1 <www.aph.gov.au/pwc>.

Need for works

- 7.6 The Australian Institute of Marine Science conducts research that is directly relevant to the National Research Priorities, that contributes to sustainable development in tropical Australia, that explores the capacity of marine ecosystems to adapt to climate change, and that develops appropriate options to mitigate climate change.²
- 7.7 The AIMS submission states that the works are necessary to ensure:
- a reduction in experiment duration;
 - an increase in the quality and volume of seawater for research;
 - more workspaces and improved reliability of building services;
 - increased security of and access to AIMS' biological collections;
 - a reduction of energy consumption; and
 - a new vessel berthing facility to replace the current facility in the Ross River, Townsville.³
- 7.8 The Committee notes the significant contribution AIMS makes to marine science research in Australia and the opportunity it provides for training and development, particularly for doctoral students. The Committee finds that there is a need for the proposed works.

Scope of works

- 7.9 The proposed scope of the works is detailed in Submission 1: AIMS. In short, the project proposes the following:
- Australian Tropical Oceans Simulator (ATOS) - new building with 'seawater rooms' and associated equipment;
 - seawater infrastructure upgrade - upgraded pumping system, new storage ponds and tanks, and new filtering/reticulation system;
 - tropical collections facility and office extension - a three-storey extension to the main building, incorporating storage, workshops and offices;
 - power supply and backup (11 kilovolt) - new cabling network, conduits and an additional diesel backup generator;

2 Submission 1, Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS), p. 7.

3 Submission 1, AIMS, pp. 9-12.

- off-peak chiller plant – new piping system across site, new plant building and new plant including chillers, pumps and a thermal energy (chilled water) storage tank;
- energy efficiency project – new passive and active measures, including dynamic building controls and more efficient lighting; and
- vessel berthing facility – lease for land and water in the Townsville Marine Precinct (under development), as well as associated wharf construction and land improvements.⁴

7.10 The project is due to commence construction in late 2009 with completion anticipated in late 2012.

7.11 The Committee finds that the proposed scope of works is suitable to meet the needs of the Tropical Marine Research Facilities project.

Cost of works

7.12 The total estimated out-turn cost for this project is \$49.5 million (excluding GST). The Committee received a confidential supplementary submission detailing the project costs and held an in-camera hearing with AIMS on the project costs.

7.13 The Committee notes that AIMS has incorporated allowances for project contingencies in the budget and will direct these funds towards enhancements of the proposed works if the contingencies are unrealised.⁵

7.14 The Committee is satisfied that the costings for the project provided to it are adequate.

Project issues

Vessel berthing facility

7.15 AIMS currently leases berthing facilities in the Ross River, Townsville. However, a new road being built to service the Townsville Port will make the Ross River (and AIMS' current facilities) inaccessible to most vessels. In light of this change to river access, the Port of Townsville Limited is

4 Submission 1, AIMS, pp. 14-15.

5 Submission 1, AIMS, pp. 17-19.

developing the new Townsville Marine Precinct. AIMS proposes to enter into a long-term lease for a berthing facility in the new development.⁶

- 7.16 AIMS advised the Committee that it has a risk management plan in place for possible delays to the current schedule and that it has an interim vessel berthing option available should the Townsville Marine Precinct be delayed.⁷
- 7.17 In respect of the project funding and financial risk, AIMS advised the Committee that as long as the new facilities are completed within three years the sub-project will not be jeopardised.⁸

Utilities

- 7.18 The Committee sought assurances from AIMS about its supply of utilities, especially given the site's distance from Townsville. AIMS advised the Committee that its current supply of water and electricity are more than sufficient for the expanded facilities.⁹

Committee comment

- 7.19 The Committee is pleased to note the significant contribution the new facilities will make towards Australia's scientific research capabilities. In particular, AIMS indicated that the ATOS facility will:

provide capacity that does not exist in Australia and rarely exists in the world...[and] we are planning a facility that will be unique in the world, internationally unique, and therefore will add value [to science research internationally].¹⁰

- 7.20 Overall, the Committee is satisfied that this project has merit in terms of need, scope and cost.

6 Submission 1, AIMS, p. 12.

7 Mr D. Mead, General Manager, AIMS, *Proof Transcript of Evidence*, 5 November 2009, p. 4.

8 Mr D. Mead, General Manager, AIMS, *Proof Transcript of Evidence*, 5 November 2009, p. 5.

9 Mr A. Caldwell, Infrastructure Development Manager, AIMS, *Proof Transcript of Evidence*, 5 November 2009, p. 7 & 10.

10 Dr L. Llewellyn, Research Manager, AIMS, *Proof Transcript of Evidence*, 5 November 2009, p. 6.

- 7.21 Having examined the purpose, need, use and public value of the work, the Committee considers that it is expedient that the proposed works proceed.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the House of Representatives resolve, pursuant to Section 18 (7) of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, that it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work: Tropical Marine Research Facilities, Cape Ferguson and Townsville, Queensland.

Senator the Hon Jan McLucas
Chair
19 November 2009