



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

(Subcommittee)

**Reference: Relocation of selected RAAF College units to RAAF Base East Sale,
Victoria and RAAF Base Wagga Wagga, New South Wales**

FRIDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2005

WAGGA WAGGA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE PARLIAMENT

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**JOINT STATUTORY COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC WORKS**

Friday, 16 September 2005

Members: Mrs Moylan (*Chair*), Mr Brendan O'Connor (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Parry, Troeth and Wortley and Mr Forrest, Mr Jenkins, Mr Ripoll and Mr Wakelin

Members in attendance: Senator Troeth, and Mr Jenkins and Mrs Moylan

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Relocation of selected RAAF College units to RAAF Base East Sale, Victoria, and RAAF Base Wagga, New South Wales.

WITNESSES

DITTMAR, Wing Commander Geoffrey Paul, Acting Commandant, Royal Australian Air Force College; and Commanding Officer, No. 1 Recruit Training Unit, Department of Defence 2

GAULT, Mr Donald John, Operations Manager, Thiess Pty Ltd 2

GREEN, Air Commodore Dennis Graham, Director-General, Strategy and Planning (Air Force), Royal Australian Air Force 2

HULL MP, Mrs Kay, Member for Riverina, Commonwealth Parliament..... 15

HUTCHINSON, Brigadier Peter John, Director-General, Infrastructure Asset Development, Corporate Services and Infrastructure Group, Department of Defence..... 2

TOOTH, Wing Commander John Marsden, Project Director, Infrastructure Asset Development, Corporate Services and Infrastructure Group, Department of Defence..... 2

WREN, Wing Commander Graeme Geoffrey, Base Commander, RAAF Base Wagga, Royal Australian Air Force 2

Subcommittee met at 9.28 am

CHAIR (Mrs Moylan)—Before we commence the formal proceedings, I welcome the member for Riverina, Mrs Kay Hull, and members of the community to this public hearing today. I think Mrs Hull is going to be making a submission after we hear evidence from Defence. Clearly she has been a big supporter of the developments at this base.

I declare open the public hearing into the proposed relocation of selected RAAF college units to RAAF Base East Sale, Victoria, and RAAF Base Wagga, New South Wales. This project was referred to the Public Works Committee on 23 June 2005 for consideration and report to parliament. In accordance with subsection 17(3) of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, which concerns the examination and reporting on a public work, the committee will have regard to the following:

- (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.

Yesterday morning the committee received a confidential cost briefing from the Department of Defence and earlier this morning we inspected this base. The committee will now hear evidence from the Department of Defence and Mrs Kay Hull MP, the member for Riverina.

[9.31 am]

DITTMAR, Wing Commander Geoffrey Paul, Acting Commandant, Royal Australian Air Force College; and Commanding Officer, No. 1 Recruit Training Unit, Department of Defence

HUTCHINSON, Brigadier Peter John, Director-General, Infrastructure Asset Development, Corporate Services and Infrastructure Group, Department of Defence

TOOTH, Wing Commander John Marsden, Project Director, Infrastructure Asset Development, Corporate Services and Infrastructure Group, Department of Defence

GREEN, Air Commodore Dennis Graham, Director-General, Strategy and Planning (Air Force), Royal Australian Air Force

WREN, Wing Commander Graeme Geoffrey, Base Commander, RAAF Base Wagga, Royal Australian Air Force

GAULT, Mr Donald John, Operations Manager, Thiess Pty Ltd

Witnesses were then sworn or affirmed—

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee has received a statement of evidence and 13 supplementary submissions from Defence. These will be made available in a volume of submissions for the inquiry. They are also available on the committee's web site. Does Defence wish to propose any amendments to the submissions that it has already made to the committee?

Brig. Hutchinson—I have a number of minor amendments to the statement of evidence. Firstly, at paragraph 18(b) delete the words 'a combined lecture and tactical room' and add a new sentence to the end of the paragraph to read:

A new combined lecture and tactical room is proposed adjacent to the training accommodation.

At paragraph 26(b), after the subparagraph heading, amend the first 12 words to read:

The existing sergeants' mess will be modified to accommodate an expanded base clothing store.

At paragraph 38(c) delete the second sentence. Finally, at paragraph 68 amend the first sentence to read 'over a main construction period of 2½ years', not 'two years'.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I now invite you to make a brief opening statement and then we will proceed to questions.

Brig. Hutchinson—The Department of Defence seeks parliamentary clearance for the Royal Australian Air Force College relocation project at Royal Australian Air Force Base Wagga, New South Wales, and RAAF Base East Sale, Victoria. The RAAF College is responsible for the

overall training of recruits, senior non-commissioned officers, officer candidates, Australian Defence Force Academy cadets and junior officers in the Royal Australian Air Force. The RAAF College elements associated with this relocation proposal are the headquarters of the RAAF College—this is proposed to be relocated from RAAF Williams, Point Cook Base, to RAAF Base Wagga—the officer training school, also from Point Cook Base but proposed to be relocated to RAAF Base East Sale, and, finally, No. 1 Recruit Training Unit, to be relocated from RAAF Base Edinburgh to RAAF Base Wagga. The proposal will address deficiencies in the existing aged facilities that include occupational health and safety, overcrowding and functionality shortcomings.

RAAF Base Wagga and RAAF Base East Sale have been identified by Defence and government for long-term retention as centres for RAAF training. The new facilities will be designed to meet the requirements of modern educational institutions. The consolidation and provision of these facilities will provide new facilities and infrastructure for the training of RAAF personnel. They will provide purpose-built administration, training and living-in accommodation facilities that will enhance the capability of the Royal Australian Air Force into the future. They will also assist in attracting the best young men and women in Australia to the Royal Australian Air Force. Finally, the relocation project supports the government's commitment to regional Australia.

The scope of the proposed work includes headquarters and administrative facilities, physical fitness and training facilities including a small arms range, messing facilities, living-in accommodation and recreation facilities, engineering services infrastructure and demolition works.

The Department of Defence is fully committed to the key initiatives of environmentally sustainable development. The facilities to be provided as part of the RAAF College relocation project will be designed, where appropriate, in accordance with the publication produced by the Department of the Environment and Heritage titled *ESD Design Guide*, which I tabled at the last meeting with the committee.

The projected outturn cost for the RAAF College relocation project is \$133.4 million. The estimate includes construction costs, ecologically sustainable development initiatives, professional fees, furniture and fittings, escalation and contingency—but excludes goods and services tax. It is expected that at least \$60 million will be spent on each of the developments at RAAF Base Wagga and RAAF Base East Sale. Subject to parliamentary clearance of the project, the proposed developments could proceed at both RAAF Base Wagga and RAAF Base East Sale with minor works packages commencing by the end of this year and the main construction packages to follow early in 2006. The project is planned for completion in 2008.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I will start by asking some questions about decisions taken to relocate the RAAF colleges. Given that one of our jobs is to look at the value for money issue, can you tell us why Point Cook base was identified for closure and why the colleges are being moved? Point Cook and Edinburgh will close and these will be located to two different sites—one here at Wagga and one at East Sale. Can you explain, for the public record, why a decision was made to close those two facilities and to move to two separate sites rather than to have one site which, I imagine, would have produced some cost savings?

Brig. Hutchinson—If I can clarify, RAAF Base Edinburgh remains a significant operational base. Defence and government have committed to maintaining that. As you would be aware, a recent Public Works Committee hearing looked at works of the order of \$40 million that we have conducted at Edinburgh in the last few years. So it remains an ongoing base for a primary purpose of maritime patrol capability. This decision reflects the consolidation of the training requirements for the Air Force recruits and for Air Force officers and consolidates them in a logical fashion. I will talk a little bit more about that, but then I will hand to Air Commodore Green to expand on it.

The recruit training that was conducted at Edinburgh is to move here to RAAF Base Wagga, which will become a centre of excellence for airmen and airwomen training for Air Force. RAAF Base Wagga already does training for airmen and airwomen and for other Defence personnel from all services, as the committee heard today in the tour, with the technical and other training that is conducted here. Wagga will become a centre of excellence, and the logic for that is moving those people from being orphans, if you like, at Edinburgh to consolidating their training here at Wagga.

Similarly, with the officer training, Point Cook base will remain under Commonwealth ownership. However, all that will remain at Point Cook base for now is the Air Force Museum. Much of the infrastructure at Point Cook base is old and tired and was not designed for the purpose of the current function of RAAF College—it was originally designed as the Air Force Academy, whose role has now been taken over by the Australian Defence Force Academy. And there are no operational Air Force units based at Point Cook. You have a number of operational Air Force units based at East Sale, which draw synergies for having the officer training at a base where they can actually see those other operating synergies.

Air Cdre Green—Brigadier Hutchinson has covered most of the issues. A key driver for the recruit training unit that is currently at Edinburgh is that it was moved there temporarily 40 years ago. It has moved into a series of demountables and World War II era warehouses, which are the accommodation blocks. It is the worst accommodation that we have in the Air Force. It is our highest priority to relocate those people, so we are going to move them to purpose-built facilities here at Wagga. We will then have a continuum of training for our airmen and airwomen in a prime location with good facilities which show off the Air Force at its best as people enter the Air Force to conduct their initial training. Then, when they graduate, many of the trainees will stay here at Wagga. Our ground training wing will have the organisation synergy of having most of the people under its direct control here at RAAF Base Wagga.

As Brigadier Hutchinson has explained, Air Force has been looking to congregate most of its activities on major bases. The move from Point Cook to East Sale is part of that plan of congregating our officer training as a centre of excellence for officer training. Many of the graduates again will remain at East Sale to conduct other skill training in air traffic control and trades—navigator et cetera.

Brig. Hutchinson—Air Commodore Green mentioned consolidating the two in one location. We have looked at some overseas studies on having the officer and recruit training located together. Those studies indicate—both New Zealand and the UK did some trials—that that is not a good approach.

CHAIR—Can you explain how that fits with the postgraduate corporal promotion units remaining at RAAF bases at Richmond and Amberley?

Air Cdre Green—Those training activities are short courses which are conducted at the junior NCO level. That is postgraduate training which is done on location with a very small number of training staff outposted but controlled, in terms of their standardisation of skills and the training delivery methods, from the ground training wing headquarters here at Wagga.

CHAIR—Given the obvious fiscal benefits of partial co-location, has Defence considered the consolidation of all RAAF College units in a single area? Or does that go back to the answer you gave, Brigadier Hutchinson, that you have looked at other—

Brig. Hutchinson—That is correct. That was one of the early options that were considered. However, it was seen that this separation of the officers and the other ranks was the best way to go.

Senator TROETH—Brigadier, you mentioned in your opening statement the occupational health and safety requirements, and I think we saw some of the deficiencies when we inspected the existing kitchen facilities. Would you like to specifically outline the deficiencies at the existing facilities overall?

Brig. Hutchinson—I will talk first about the RAAF Base Edinburgh and the location of the first recruit training unit. As Air Commodore Green has already pointed out, this is the worst living accommodation we have in Air Force throughout Australia in that the recruits at the moment are accommodated in refurbished World War II warehouses and temporary buildings. Whilst those buildings would have been built to meet the standards of the time, those standards have changed a lot over the last 40 to 50 years. Again, as Air Commodore Green pointed out, they have been in temporary accommodation for 40 years.

We have had waivers of requirements because clearly you need to have the investment to come up to the new standards. We have had to make management decisions about the existing facilities in order to get by, and we are now looking to redress those issues. We have those management solutions which we can continue until we put this project in place. We will ensure that there are no urgent or critical requirements there—we cover those through our ongoing programs—but this is the investment to actually take us to contemporary standards, if you like.

Senator TROETH—What about the kitchen facilities?

Brig. Hutchinson—I would ask either Wing Commander Tooth or Mr Gault to talk about the kitchen facilities in detail, but we have looked at a number of options with the kitchen there, ranging from a minimal refurbishment to a total rebuild. The solution we have come up with is to basically do a major refurbishment of the kitchen area that will meet those requirements in the best way to ensure meeting the occupational health and safety issues and also extending the life of the facility for a further 20 years.

Wing Cmdr Tooth—We saw in the tour this morning the state of the current kitchen. A lot of the issues there relate to the flooring being slippery, the extraction equipment within the kitchen and the walls. It is very much beyond its economic life and is in urgent need of an upgrade.

Senator TROETH—Have there been any safety incidents arising from the condition of the existing facilities?

Brig. Hutchinson—I will pass to the base commander.

Wing Cmdr Wren—No, there have not been any issues. We conduct a very close OH&S regulatory environment here on base, not only with the training activities but also with all of the support activities.

Senator TROETH—That is good. I think you said in your submission that next year East Sale will provide training to some 690 officer cadets, while Wagga will train approximately 1,200 recruits. So what would be the anticipated maximum base population for both East Sale and Wagga when the works are completed?

Air Cdre Green—I will get Wing Commander Dittmar to dig into his book and find out the exact figures, but I would preface it by saying that our training populations are constantly changing. As our recruiting targets change, so we adjust our training rates and the numbers. We have a typical number of courses that we have put through for each of the schools for both officer and ground training, but we adjust the numbers and the number of courses to match our resignation and retirement rates from the service. We will give you a figure that is current, but it is going to be different next year and different from last year, as those figures are adjusted to meet the recruiting and training needs of the service.

Senator TROETH—How far out do your projections of those numbers go?

Air Cdre Green—We project out over the five- to 10-year plan but, again, that is adjusted with different skill levels and different numbers. For example, we are currently reviewing our recruiting rates at this time for next year, and we have increased those slightly for next year. It is always a dynamic activity to match supply and demand for the training rates.

Brig. Hutchinson—Rather than trying to give a rushed answer, perhaps we will take that on notice and give a detailed answer when we are recalled. Just adding to Air Commodore Green's comments: we have done extensive studies into those training flows, and there is some spare capacity built into what we have already so that we can meet peak demands and that sort of thing. That would be by looking at the reuse of facilities in each of the two bases to meet peak demands. So there will be some spare capacity there, but it is not that we are building an extra accommodation block to meet that spare capacity; it will be spare capacity within the normal flow of courses. For example, when we looked at the flow of the exact number of rooms we needed for the recruit training unit, I looked at that in great detail because I was trying to see whether we could get by with one less building. We had some significant movement in the planning phase as we were going through that, to the extent where we started looking at when you could start courses, your instructor loads and the gap between courses, so that we programmed it. With some minor adjustment, you can show that you can get a little bit more capacity out of it if you have a peak requirement. Expanding on what Air Commodore Green had to say: if, for example, our retention rate got worse and we had to recruit more, we need to have the capacity built into the area to be able to handle that. We are confident that we have come up with a solution which will allow us to do that.

Senator TROETH—That is good. I also want to look at your standards of recruit level accommodation. You have said in your submission at paragraph 38(b) that the live-in accommodation for the recruit training unit here at Wagga will be constructed ‘in accordance with Defence standards’. Could you tell us what those accommodation standards are?

Brig. Hutchinson—The standards for recruit training are that we look to have up to four recruits per room. The size of the rooms that we are building here is about 36 square metres. We do that because it is part of building the ethos, the teamwork and so on and also part of the duty of care, in that they have people who can look after each other and look out for each other all the time. We think that is an important part of this. As you are changing culture, coming from being a civilian to joining this military culture and joining the Air Force culture, we want to have people looking out for each other.

Senator TROETH—I also want to ask you about local community consultation. You have provided us with a list in paragraph 64 of authorities that have been or will be consulted. Could you just bring us up to speed on who has been consulted so far, who is yet to be approached and whether there were any outcomes from that consultation?

Brig. Hutchinson—I will get back to you on that when we come back for the second hearing. I will just talk about the consultation. There has been extensive consultation here with the community. Two community consultative meetings were conducted here in Wagga Wagga last year and similarly another two were conducted in East Sale last year. As you would see from the number of supportive submissions that we have from both areas, those regions are well aware of what we are doing. There has also been an ongoing consultative process in each case with the base commanders, who conduct their own consultation sessions with the local councils and other interest groups.

Senator TROETH—So everyone is pretty keen, basically?

Brig. Hutchinson—It has been pretty positive.

Wing Cmdr Tooth—Very keen.

Brig. Hutchinson—But I will update you on exactly who has been consulted and who will be.

Senator TROETH—That would be useful, thank you.

CHAIR—When we inspected the site this morning you mentioned that there would be a lot of dry firing facilities along, I think, the eastern boundary.

Wing Cmdr Tooth—That would be the western boundary.

Senator TROETH—Right. There is the drainage area, then an open area and then housing, right on the boundary. For the public record, what consultation has taken place with those adjoining owners? I have noticed that all of the submissions are very supportive of this development, but what consultation has taken place and what is Defence planning to do to provide a buffer between the housing estate on the border and, particularly, the dry firing facilities on that boundary?

Brig. Hutchinson—My understanding is that specific consultation with those landowners along the boundary has not been undertaken yet, but it is our plan, subject to the committee's clearance of the works, that one of the first things we will do will be to look at specific consultation with the landowners. For example, in the notes that I have been provided by our managing contractor they recommend a letter drop to those people, and that we look at getting a consultative process going very quickly. Regarding the second part of your question, we are looking at constructing a bund or earth mound, if you like, with a wall on top of it, which will provide an acoustic barrier in order to mitigate any noise that might come from the training that will be conducted in those shelters or in the rest of the precinct. So we will consult with the community on the exact details of what we are doing there. There is also, as you have mentioned, a retention basin that we will be building in the north-west corner of the base.

Air Cdre Green—Those particular facilities are designed as a shelter so that the recruits can undertake their training out of the heat, particularly in summer, and the rain. The loudest noise that will come from them will basically be a human voice giving commands, similar to drill square type commands.

CHAIR—Yes, they look like little shelter sheds on the plan. I just think it is important for the public record to have that outlined.

Wing Cmdr Tooth—Also, they will be facing inwards and have a back wall. Most of the sound will project away from the living-in accommodation.

Mr JENKINS—Going back to the standards for the living-in accommodation, there will be four recruits to a room. What is the ratio for ablutions?

Brig. Hutchinson—We go above the building codes for the ratio of ablutions to recruits that we will have on the basis that they have a very tight schedule in the 10 weeks that they are here. They have to do things like move quickly from one period to physical training, drill or something different. Therefore they need to cycle through the ablutions quicker than people would normally. The ratio, as I understand it, is one toilet or one shower per four recruits—approximately one to four.

Mr JENKINS—As an equal opportunity employer, what is the gender breakdown of Air Force recruits?

Brig. Hutchinson—The gender breakdown varies. Wing Commander Dittmar might be the man to talk about that. We have put flexibility in the facilities to be able to cater for varying percentages over time so that we are able to adjust to that.

Wing Cmdr Dittmar—In my three years as the commanding officer of No. 1 Recruit Training Unit, on average the number of females per course is about 20 per cent, which is reflective of the Air Force wide percentage. However, it does vary depending on recruiting. Sometimes we have 60 recruits turn up and there is one female and then the next fortnight a recruit course will turn up and you might have up to 25 females. So there is not a consistent figure, unfortunately, because it is difficult to manage and accommodate. On average, I would say it is about 20 per cent.

Mr JENKINS—Thank you. What is the standard used for the officer training school at East Sale?

Brig. Hutchinson—At the officer training school we are going for level 3 accommodation, which means an individual room per trainee and shared facilities—ablutions and so on—but at a lesser ratio than other areas. Looking at the actual detail of what we are doing, each floor consists of 15 bedrooms, a shared unisex bathroom, a couple of laundries, storage areas and a central common room with facilities for relaxation and also to make a cup of coffee and that sort of thing. It will have two living-in accommodation floors per building, so there will be 30 students per building.

Mr JENKINS—Thank you. Your submission indicates that neither RAAF Base East Sale nor RAAF Base Wagga has a current master plan, but that one is being developed for RAAF Base East Sale. When we had a look at, I think, RAAF Base Richmond, the lack of a master plan was only an issue in that you were not too sure where all the infrastructure was. Given that this base was probably built fairly quickly as the OTS training centre, do we expect that there are going to be problems because of a lack of information about what have been past events? Whilst the submission says that you do not see that there is a difficulty in what you are proposing vis-a-vis possible future master plans, it just strikes me that the lack of a master plan, given that these are major decisions that are being made to rationalise the use of a number of bases, may cause us grief further down the track.

Brig. Hutchinson—I honestly do not think that it is an issue, because we are looking at master planning writ large, if you like, in terms of where units go, and that is part of the decision-making process for locating the units here. We have done the detailed studies of the base infrastructure in each case, for example, to look at the details of how that infrastructure is standing up and whether it has the capacity to handle the additional people that we are bringing here. We have done those studies also.

Whilst there is no formal master plan document as such, there are old documents that we can draw off. They are historic documents; they are not current documents. We go through a siting board process for each of the facilities that we are locating in each of the bases. That siting-board process involves a wide range of stakeholders from both the base point of view—all the different elements on the base—and from a Defence point of view. So we have environmentalists looking at it who work for Defence and people from our central policy areas looking at some of those issues as well to make sure that we are not siting something in a way that is going to give us ongoing issues. Whilst we do not have those formal documents written as such, the processes that you would go through to produce those documents are largely processes that are being followed for the individual siting anyway. Therefore, I am confident that we have a well-reasoned solution which is not going to lead to ongoing problems. In each case on these bases we have identified brownfield sites, which were previously used for housing, I think. So we have been able to look at a better reuse for those areas which were available. There is still capacity, at both East Sale and here, in terms of potential future land use.

CHAIR—Are you still on the master plan?

Mr JENKINS—I can probably move on now; I am pretty satisfied. It struck me, from driving around here, that there was actually water lying around. Somebody is doing the right thing:

dancing for water. Open drains are quite visible. I appreciate the site is down in nearly the lowest point of this part of the base. This means that there have been some opportunities for water reticulation, but to what extent would the hydraulics of this site be either a problem or an opportunity?

Brig. Hutchinson—We see it as an opportunity. With the selection board, all the engineering aspects of that site were part of the process. In the other sites we looked at a range of environmental and engineering factors and the access to base facilities. As you have seen, we have to have reasonable access to the mess facility, for example. We would not want to have the recruits five kilometres from the facilities they need to use. As you have seen, this has excellent access to the medical and dental facility and the parade ground. One of the other factors we were looking at in the master planning was to provide a separate precinct for the recruit training unit. Providing a separate precinct was a very big consideration in the selection of the site. Some of the other options that we looked at would not necessarily have provided a defined separate precinct for the recruits. The selection process becomes a compromise among all of those factors, including the engineering. But we have looked very closely at the engineering and we are confident that that is an opportunity for us rather than a threat.

Mr JENKINS—I have one quick question. I am not into great conspiracies but, on the map we got today going around the base, it appears there is nothing on the other side of the oval. Yet on the map we got yesterday there is a proposed abseiling tower and confidence course. I have no idea what you are going to do on the confidence course but there is a big yellow patch on that map which says 'New building'. We were told yesterday how much that facility is going to cost and I wondered what is going on up there. The bus did not take us there.

Brig. Hutchinson—I think that was just a timing issue.

Mr JENKINS—I am sure it was.

Brig. Hutchinson—I mentioned yesterday in the briefing, I think Wing Commander Tooth—

Mr JENKINS—I am sorry, other hostilities had me away at other places.

Brig. Hutchinson—I mentioned in the briefing yesterday a number of these training facilities which are being built. The confidence course is involved in those training facilities. It is just another one of the physical and other training activities that we undertake with the recruits that helps build esprit de corps, teamwork and those sorts of things. It is a standard sort of course that we would build on the bases where we have done this sort of training in the past. The confidence course involves an area that tests the skills, agility and teamwork abilities of recruits in a physically challenging environment. We are talking about having a confidence course in adventure training, with abseiling and that sort of thing. I guess this is to take trainees out of their comfort zone, and that is part of the issue. We use flying fox towers and equipment sheds. Basically, at the moment, it is just a space on the other side of the oval.

Mr JENKINS—So it is not large. The diagram makes it look like a large structure but it is more a series of things.

Brig. Hutchinson—Yes, a series of smaller things that you have probably seen on other bases.

CHAIR—My question builds on Mr Jenkins' question about the lack of a master plan. I think it was before your time, but while I have been chair we had a hearing at Point Cook for some expansion and improvement of the training room, as I recall. It must have been back in about 2000. In any event, we spent quite a bit of money there. I would just like to pursue that in terms of a master plan because, if we are going to now mothball Point Cook, that money is wasted. The idea of bringing all the training together is not a new one.

Brig. Hutchinson—I may have to take that question on notice, unless someone else at the table can help me on this. I was not aware that there were any large amounts of money spent on Point Cook.

Air Cdre Green—I think you might be thinking of Laverton.

CHAIR—No, not Laverton; it was Point Cook. We did an inquiry on Point Cook. I do not have the detail, but the committee secretary will get it for me. We might get you to take that question on notice. It always concerns us if these things are not planned out reasonably well, because then we are throwing a lot of money around which is not providing maximum benefit to the Commonwealth and to the public basically. We wonder about that sometimes in the context of there not being a master plan to look at this idea of co-locating training and closing one and opening others. So we might pursue that a little a more in writing.

Air Cdre Green—One of the important issues we are really addressing very seriously with the government at the moment is the basing options that we should have in the long term. So the government will be considering in due course options in that sense, to get the best value. Once that planning is agreed, we can move forward with individual projects at specific locations.

CHAIR—I do understand that it is a bit of a moveable feast, because nothing is static. Things do change and different decisions have to be made. We just want to be assured that we are not throwing good money after bad and spending a lot of money on temporary facilities if there is going to be a major shift in training.

Brig. Hutchinson—Firstly, I will take on notice the issue over the Point Cook area, and perhaps the secretariat can provide some details of what we are talking about there. I also want to reinforce my earlier comments about the master planning factor. I think what we are getting tied up in here is probably a nomenclature issue. Defence forces plan all the time, it is just that we have not actually got formal documents that say, 'This is the current East Sale master plan,' and 'This is the current RAAF Wagga master plan.' A great amount of planning has gone into this. The decisions that have been taken are basically that the department and the government are committed to the plan that both Wagga and East Sale are going to be long-term centres of training for the Royal Australian Air Force.

CHAIR—I guess we need to separate the microplanning and the macroplanning.

Brig. Hutchinson—Yes, I think that is what we are talking about.

CHAIR—It is obvious that a lot of thought has gone into the development of East Sale and Wagga as training facilities, but we are talking about the macro level of planning in terms of training.

Brig. Hutchinson—Yes.

CHAIR—In the confidential cost briefings yesterday we talked about the need to demolish certain buildings, but defence had not yet, as I understand it, made a final determination as to what buildings will be demolished. Again, for the public record, can I ask for that information to be made available to the committee as soon as practicable, because clearly the number of buildings that need to be demolished has an impact on the cost of the project. I wanted to raise that in the context of the public hearing as well. Again, could you explain to us what you are doing to analyse the buildings that need to be demolished and to determine what hazardous materials there are and what steps will be taken to ensure that they will be removed and disposed of in a safe way.

Brig. Hutchinson—I should just clarify for the committee that I am not sure exactly what I said yesterday in relation to the hazardous waste surveys for each of the bases, but I became aware yesterday that some of the information I had been given was incorrect and I am not sure whether I actually put any of that information on the record.

CHAIR—Hansard was recording yesterday, so we will have a record of that, but you could give us a copy of the updated information, when you have it, for the purposes of the committee and the secretariat.

Brig. Hutchinson—The updated information is that RAAF bases Wagga and East Sale have buildings that contain asbestos, the condition of asbestos in the buildings is recorded in registers that are comprehensive and current, at both sites asbestos remediation programs are active and it is anticipated that both sites will be substantially clear of known asbestos by the end of 2007. There is an ongoing program to look at asbestos. I think I also indicated that defence is serious about its identification of asbestos and hazardous materials Australia wide. We have ongoing programs to identify, record and remediate those asbestos issues.

CHAIR—In any event, it would be very helpful if you could provide to the committee the details of the buildings you are planning to demolish and whether they contain hazardous materials.

Brig. Hutchinson—To put on the public record what I said yesterday, the approach we have taken at Edinburgh is that we have costed to demolish all of the temporary buildings and old World War II warehouses which are currently being used by the recruit training unit. However, we do not expect that that will actually occur, because some of those buildings have heritage value, and we are still doing the assessment to work at which ones are retained. We will undertake to get back to you as those reviews occur—which will be over a period of time and not in the period of the review of this project. We will come back to you in due course with the details of exactly which buildings will be demolished.

CHAIR—There was an amount allocated to these projects. That is what I am talking about. If those buildings are going to be demolished as part of this \$133.4 million project we need greater clarity on what is going to be demolished and what the ultimate cost will be so that we do not end up with a cost blow-out somewhere down the line once we have approved the project. The sooner we receive the costings the better.

Brig. Hutchinson—We will not know that detail for a number of months. That is part of the project development—we have to go through the environment and heritage requirement. A heritage plan will be developed for that site and as a minimum we would be looking at things such as recording the pictorial record of the site before we do anything so we can put that in context. I imagine that that could be used as a particular reinforcement of the history and heritage of the area.

CHAIR—When we inspected the site this morning we saw a stockpile of hazardous material out of the service station site. Has the cost of removing this been factored in, and where and how is that going to be disposed of?

Brig. Hutchinson—That is a project separate from our particular project. It is being conducted by the base to remediate the service station site. That is not incorporated in this project.

Mr JENKINS—I have some questions to do with the ESD initiatives. There are some pretty impressive diagrams on the wall about the passive cooling and heating of the accommodation and things like that. The submission talks about using a four-star rating for the office accommodation, which seems on the low side unless it is a different rating system from I am used to. AGO recommends 4½ stars for office accommodation. I would like to see five stars, but I am only an individual. I realise that because of the special uses that are involved in some defence buildings you cannot really use the outside community standard rating system, but there is nothing about these buildings that would indicate to me that you should not be trying to strive for those outside ratings.

Brig. Hutchinson—I mentioned the ESD design guide. I could table a document which talks about what we have done in each of the 10 opportunities that are mentioned in the ESD design guide so that you can see the detail of what we have on the project.

CHAIR—If the committee has no objections you could table that.

Brig. Hutchinson—Yes, I will table that document. In terms of the four, 4½ and five stars, we aim for as many stars as we can get within the budget.

Mr JENKINS—I was not talking about you as individuals. That was a cheap shot—keep going.

Brig. Hutchinson—There are two different systems here. One has a minimum standard of four stars and the other has a minimum standard of 4½ stars. The rating that we have at the moment shows that we should comfortably achieve the required four-star ABGR—the greenhouse performance rating. We have the greenhouse performance thing, which is the four stars and—

Mr JENKINS—I will get you to take it on notice.

Brig. Hutchinson—We can get back on that one.

CHAIR—For the benefit of members of the public here today, it is proposed that after we have had the submission from the member for Riverina we will probably recall defence at the end of the hearing at East Sale. Thank you very much.

Brig. Hutchinson—Madam Chair, could we give you those personnel numbers?

CHAIR—Yes.

Wing Cmdr Dittmar—Before I table these indicative figures, I would like you to note that, firstly, as Air Commodore Green has already stated, these figures will be based on our targeted future recruit numbers, which will ebb and flow depending on our attrition rates and operational tempo et cetera; and, secondly, because of the demand on our resources at our training units, they will tend to ramp up at the start of each year as recruits and officer trainees arrive and then ramp down towards Christmas for reduced activities. So I will be looking at peak figures.

In the case of Wagga, the current permanent staff is at 510 and the average student strength at any one time is 640. So you are looking at about 1,150 personnel on base. When 1 RTU arrives with its 98 permanent staff and an average recruit strength of 360—giving an impact of 1 RTU of about 458 against the 1,150 current—you are looking at almost a 50 per cent increase in the current capacity. East Sale currently has 710 permanent staff, and an average student strength at any one time of 90. That gives you 800 permanent people on the base. Given the OTS impact of around 213, with its 63 permanent staff and an average student strength of 150, you are looking at about a 25 per cent net increase in the case of East Sale. They are two fairly significant statistics.

[10.27 am]

HULL MP, Mrs Kay, Member for Riverina, Commonwealth Parliament

CHAIR—Mrs Hull, the committee extend a warm welcome to you and thank you for the interest you have taken in these projects at Wagga and East Sale. We appreciate your interest and the submission you have made in regard to this. The committee have received your submission, which will be made available in a volume of submissions for the inquiry, and it is also available on the committee's web site. Do you wish to propose any amendments to the submission you have made to the committee?

Mrs Hull—No, thank you.

CHAIR—I invite you to make a brief opening statement to your written submission.

Mrs Hull—I welcome my colleagues to the City of Wagga Wagga. It is a very chilly morning, but usually Wagga Wagga provides a very warm welcome. On behalf of the residents of the entire Wagga Wagga community, I can say that our residents are very keen to have you here. They are very supportive of this expansion taking place. I think they are so supportive of it that, if they had to, they would perhaps take to it and build it with their own bare hands. They have run a campaign on this for many years, and it is to their great credit that they have never given up. I believe that 1 RTU are actually coming home. Forty years ago they were temporarily moved from Wagga Wagga; they are now being restored to their original housing. There is a sense of excitement not only for the people of Wagga Wagga but for the many people who have trained through the defence base in the past and who obviously will in the future.

We look forward to being a centre of excellence for training not only for RAAF Wagga but also for 1RTB in Kapooka, right here in Wagga Wagga. Kapooka is known as 'the home of the soldier', and we would now like to consolidate our credentials as the 'home of the airman' here in Wagga Wagga as well. The centre of excellence and the delivery of superior training outcomes are greatly assisted by the quality of life and the successful integration of defence into our communities. This reflects well in the positive work ethics required to deliver good outcomes for defence, the Commonwealth and the Australian taxpayers.

Proof of this successful defence and community integration is the fact that we have 220 contractors who provide the training at the technical training centre. They are retired Air Force defence personnel who have resettled here in Wagga Wagga. We have a \$110 million TAFE contract here, which I have spoken of in my submission, which was won on merit. It also enables TAFE to underpin a significant amount of education right across the Riverina. That \$110 million has been a significant injection to technical training here in Wagga Wagga, so it is something that we are very proud of. As I said, we are able to keep the defence ethos and philosophy by using all ex-defence personnel to carry out the training. That is of great benefit not only to RAAF Wagga but also to this community, because these people are able to get employment. In a world where we are looking forward to keeping everyone employed well past the old use-by date and moving forward into having long and productive retirements, this is a perfect opportunity to do this in a rural and regional area.

We have Wagga Wagga City Council here today, represented by Mr Gary Wells. They are having a cost-benefit analysis done that will prove the economic flow-on benefits from the project. They have worked very hard. They always been part of the 'save the base' task force. These figures have not yet been completed, but Mr Wells has asked whether he might be able to provide the figures for the flow-on benefits to the community to the committee at some other stage when they have been completed. We also have the Regional Express airline here, represented by Lindsay Tanner. I had to think this morning: 'Is his name really Lindsay Tanner?' Lindsay is here representing Regional Express. They are looking forward to providing the movement capacity required for the Defence Force families who move in and out of Wagga Wagga for their training.

On the social side of things, there is a march out every two weeks. You have extensive numbers of families and friends who travel to see their children march out. You need to have accommodation and amenities to give these people an opportunity to come and experience a once-in-a-lifetime thing with their child. This is what we offer here in Wagga Wagga. We have the accommodation to support all of these families who come into the communities every two weeks to see their sons or daughters march out of this facility.

We have heard the technical side of this morning's exchange with defence. But we really need to consider that this has been an established base. It is part of the ethos of Australian defence. It is well situated between Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Queensland, and it is two hours away from the headquarters personnel in Canberra. Last night I left the House and was home in 2½ hours by car. So that is very important for ease of access to a very significant defence area.

We have plenty of room for future expansion. We are not landlocked here. It may take in the golf course, but that is okay. We would like to expand and grow. We have made the case and had a successful announcement from the Prime Minister, which I call the 'Nyngan' announcement. He was in Nyngan when he called and said that he had determined that this base would stay open. You then have to build a business case to ensure that it is bringing returns to the taxpayer, to the Commonwealth and to defence itself. I think we have well and truly established that. This community is a defence community; it embraces defence. As I mentioned in my submission, defence housing are placed here. They control all of the housing movements and shifting requirements of all defence personnel right across Australia.

We have undertaken to embrace the defence community in a holistic fashion, and I think this is the very next step forward to ensuring that we continue to expand and provide a very successful business case for a very successful decision to keep RAAF Base Wagga open for business.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for a very comprehensive submission and overview.

Senator TROETH—I congratulate you on your enthusiasm, Mrs Hull. It is great to see in rural and regional areas the presence of defence bringing such a vibrant economic framework to an already thriving regional city.

Mr JENKINS—Mrs Hull explained something to me that I thought was very interesting when I was going past the workshops. The relationship with Riverina TAFE is a very positive

thing. But she has me thinking: I thought the Nyngan declaration was about something else but I cannot remember what it was.

Mrs Hull—This is my Nyngan declaration.

Mr JENKINS—That will puzzle me for the rest of the day. I hope that this does not sound too patronising but as the only member of her majesty's opposition here today I say that, in a fortnight where the member for Riverina has shown her fearless representation of her people, today's inquiry into the relocation of No. 1 RTU to Wagga must be a very bright light on her horizon, and I congratulate her on her efforts.

Mrs Hull—Thank you. This is the reason I stood: to represent the people of the Riverina and particularly this place we are sitting in now. I decided that I would want to fight for something that was well worth fighting for. RAAF Wagga is well worth fighting for. I can only encourage you to view these works with the enthusiasm that we in this community and in this room have viewed them—as great announcements for the benefit of not only the Commonwealth and defence but also the taxpayers of Australia.

Mr JENKINS—I do have a question: is this Wagga or Wagga Wagga?

Mrs Hull—Wagga Wagga.

CHAIR—I thank the witnesses who appeared before the committee and those people who have assisted our inspections. The committee will reconvene this hearing at RAAF Base East Sale at 1.20 pm.

Subcommittee adjourned at 10.38 am