

**Minutes of the Williamtown Consultative Forum (WCF)
Friday 5th December 2008, 1005-1110.
Building 250, RAAF Base Williamtown.**

Item 1 – Welcome and Apologies.

1. Mr John Owens, Head of Infrastructure in the Department of Defence (Defence) and Chair of the WCF opened the meeting at 1005. Mr Owens welcomed all members to the meeting, and, in particular, Councillor Bruce MacKenzie, Mayor of Port Stephens Council, to his first meeting. Mr Owens thanked personnel at RAAF Base Williamtown for organizing the meeting room and providing lunch for members after the meeting. Attendees are listed at Attachment A.
2. Mr Owens advised that apologies were received from the Hon Sharon Grierson MP, Member for Newcastle; Hon Bob Baldwin MP, Member for Paterson; Mr Peter Gesling, General Manager for Port Stephens Council, Brian Murphy, Senior Planner from the NSW Department of Planning and Mr Ron Hunter, Regional Manager, Defence Support, Central and Northern NSW.

Item 2 - Minutes from the last WCF held on 4 July 2008.

3. Mr Owens asked members if the minutes from the previous Forum meeting were accepted. It was moved and carried that the minutes be accepted.

Item 3 – Action Items from the last meeting of the WCF.

4. **Draft Terms of Reference for the WCF.**
Prior to the discussion on the Draft Terms of Reference for the WCF, Mayor Mackenzie raised a number of issues with regard to the proposed rezoning of land at Kings Hill, North Raymond Terrace. In particular, Mayor MacKenzie advised that Council is keen to obtain a decision in relation to the rezoning. Mayor MacKenzie also advised representatives from Council will meet with the new NSW Minister for Planning in late January next year. Mayor MacKenzie also wanted to know if the information relating to the noise data was sensitive and will the proposed Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) use the Salt Ash Weapons Range (SAWR).

Mr Owens provided an update on the Kings Hill Working Group. Mr Owens advised that the NSW Department of Planning was in the process of commissioning a consultant to undertake an independent review of Defence's noise forecasts and that the Department hopes to conclude its investigations early in 2009. On the re-zoning proposal, Mr Owens reiterated Defence concerns that future residents would be potentially subject to high levels of aircraft noise which could result in community pressure to change or reduce RAAF operations from Williamtown if it proceeded. Mr Owens also advised that there are sensitivities with the noise data from an operational, security and

commercial in confidence perspective but that Defence would continue to work through the issues and the sharing of noise information through the Kings Hill Working Group. Mr Owens advised the Forum that Defence anticipates having more definitive noise data available to the Kings Hill Working Group in early 2009.

With regard to the use of the SAWR by the proposed JSF, GPCAPT Clements advised the Forum that it was likely that the JSF would use the SAWR but that Air Force is working towards minimising its usage. GPCAPT Clements noted that the Hawk Lead-In Fighter aircraft would still use the SAWR for many years to come.

Ms Collison suggested the State Member for Newcastle, Ms Jodi McKay should be invited to become a member of the WCF, having regard also to her broader role as Minister for the Hunter, Minister for Tourism and Minister for Small Business. Ms Collison also suggested the WCF should only meet two times per year, with extraordinary meetings being held as required.

Forum members agreed to the Terms of Reference for the WCF, subject to these changes. Mr Owens advised that Defence will now proceed to submit the WCF Terms of Reference to the Minister for Defence for agreement. **(Action Item).**

5. Draft Terms of Reference for the Williamstown Advisory Group (WAG).

Mr Owens introduced the concept of the WAG, highlighting the need for an officer-level working group to provide advice to the WCF on important planning, development and environmental issues relating to the Base and the SAWR. Meetings of the WAG would normally precede meetings of the WCF or as the need arises.

No objections were received from Forum members regarding the Draft Terms of Reference for the WAG.

6. Williamstown Public Affairs Plan.

Mr Owens invited discussion on the RAAF Base Williamstown Public Affairs Plan which was distributed to members on the 19 November 2008. Mr Owens summarised the key messages contained within the Plan (section 7, page 6). He suggested an additional key message that more emphasis be placed on the important economic, social and cultural role the Base has played in the Hunter region since its establishment in 1941.

Mr Broyd and Ms Collison both identified the need for the Plan to stress the economic importance of the Base to local and regional economies. Ms Collison also highlighted the importance of identifying links with the business community, including the Hunter Business Chamber, HunterNet, the Australian Industry Group and manufacturing and other regionally based industries. She also noted the need to co-ordinate with the work being done by the Defence Materiel Organisation. She also asked how the Base interacts with local schools and TAFEs. WGCdr Leeke advised that the Base works through local recruitment agencies to make contacts with local schools and TAFEs. It was

noted the Plan should include advice that the Base will work with Defence recruitment with regard to school visits, careers days and so forth.

Mr Owens suggested that if members had any further comments to make on the Plan they should forward these either to him or to Mr Kerwan by the end of January 2009. **(Action Item).**

7. **Defence White Paper.**

Mr Owens gave a brief overview on the Defence White Paper process. The White Paper will identify the capability and force structure Australia needs for the future. Mr Owens outlined current reform initiatives, including the work being done through a number of Companion Reviews being prepared in conjunction with the White Paper. He indicated that the timing of the release of the White Paper is not confirmed but that it is likely to be released in the first half of 2009. GPCAPT Grady also gave additional information to the Forum on the Capability Companion Review and confirmed that RAAF Base Williamtown will be an enduring Base for air combat capability. Mr Owens will provide another update on the White Paper process at the next meeting of the Forum. **(Action Item).**

Item 4 – RAAF update on RAAF Base Williamtown matters.

8. WGCDR Leeke advised the Forum that the Base has continued to maintain a high level of operational tempo, leading to reduced activity from mid December to mid to late January 2009. Mayor MacKenzie asked how many days were flown during 2008 and how is this information promulgated to the public. WGCDR Leeke and GPCAPT Clements both advised the Forum that Air Combat Group does a 6 monthly flying program which is refined to monthly and weekly programs as activities are progressively planned and further refinements take place. Flying programs are advertised on the 1800 phone number and also in local media outlets for specific exercises.

Mayor MacKenzie also asked if SAWR was being used less often than in the past. GPCAPT Clements indicated that, whilst financial factors were a contributing factor, the main factor determining the use of SAWR was the changing evolution of training requirements to meet air combat capability needs. There were also changes with equipment manufacturer requirements for testing and training. GPCAPT Clements also advised that the Hawk Lead-In Fighter aircraft will require SAWR for training purposes and that it was also likely that the JSF would also use the Range.

GPCAPT Clements further advised that operations were slowing down towards the end of the year but operational tempo would increase again as per normal towards late January 2009, commencing with familiarisation training of Williamtown airspace and surrounds. WGCDR Leeke undertook to provide the Forum with usage statistics for SAWR and the Base during 2008. **(Action Item).**

Item 5 – Other business

9. Port Stephens Council update.

Mayor MacKenzie advised the Forum he was pleased with the manner in which Defence regional staff handled a couple of local matters recently and expressly thanked Mr Jeffery and Ms Horn for addressing his concerns.

Mr Owens confirmed that Defence will proceed to licence the 'Silo' structure located on Defence land at 16 Steele Street, Williamstown to Mrs Cano. It was noted Mrs Cano's grandfather built the Silo and she has offered to maintain it.

Mr Broyd advised the Forum that finalisation of the rezoning of the Defence and Airport Related Employment Zone (DAREZ) is imminent. Issues associated with biodiversity off-sets and the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change have now been resolved. Ms Collison mentioned that the Project Control Group established at an officer level to work through issues associated with the DAREZ was a good example of intergovernmental/agency cooperation.

Mr Owens advised the Forum that Defence is working through costing and timing issues associated with connecting the Base to Hunter Water's proposed Sewerage Scheme. Defence will be responding to Hunter Water outlining Defence's broad agreement to commit to the connection in the new year. Paul Hughes from NAL also indicated NAL would be contributing to capital infrastructure costs.

Mr Broyd also advised the Forum that Council is aiming to re-exhibit its Residential Strategy for Medowie in February 2009.

10. NSW Premiers Department update.

Ms Collison gave an update on the Williamstown Public School issue. She advised that there are only a small number of children left at the School and that there will not be a teacher at the school next year. Children will be transferred to Fern Bay and Stockton Schools. The School will be empty for 12 months and will then be divested.

11. NAL update.

Mr Hughes advised that the new ground radio service was ready for sign off. NAL has also let a contract for the construction of new apron facilities whilst construction of another 900 car parks will be commencing in the next few months. Mr Hughes also advised he will be meeting with the NSW Member for Newcastle Ms Jodi McKay next week to discuss comments in the media recently in relation to Sydney's second airport.

GPCAPT Clements advised the Forum he greatly appreciated the cooperation of NAL regarding the recent incident involving a Hawk Lead-In Fighter aircraft. GPCAPT Clements also advised the Forum there will be over \$1 billion investment in capital works at the Base over the next few years and that

construction of the Ordnance Loading Areas, which are due for completion by August 2009, is hoped to reduce disruption to civilian operations.

Item 6 – Next Meeting

12. Mr Owens thanked Forum members for a productive and open discussion and looked forward to meeting with them at the next Forum meeting.

The next Forum meeting will be held on Friday 6 March 2009. Members will be further advised of its time and location. It is proposed that Defence's New Air Combat Capability Project Team will make a presentation at this meeting.

Mr Owens closed the meeting at 11:10.