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Cabinet Submission JH97/0423 - Establishment of a Joint Australia - United States Relay Ground Station
at Pine Gap - Decision JH97/0423/NS

STATEMENT OF REASONS FOR DECISION UNDER SECTION 40(5)
OF THE ARCHIVES ACT 1983

Series: A14370
Control Symbol: JH1997/423
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Title: Cabinet Submission JH97/0423 - Establishment of a Joint Australia - United States Relay Ground Station at Pine Gap - Decision JH97/0423/NS
Decision Maker: D. McGlinchey
Designation: Access examiner APS 6
Date: 1 January 2019

In accordance with requirements of subsection 8(1) of the *Archives Act 1983* (Cth) (Archives Act), I am a person authorised by the Director-General, pursuant to an Instrument of Delegation, to make a decision in relation to access to the requested record.

Basis for decision

In making my decision, I considered:

- the content of the record requested
- the relevant provisions of the *Archives Act 1983*
- policy and guidelines of National Archives of Australia that relate to the access examination of Commonwealth records
- information provided by Commonwealth agencies which I have relied upon in formulating my decision

Decision

I have decided that this item is Open With Exception under section 33(1)(a) of the Archives Act for the reasons set out below.

Thirteen folios (1 - 11, 14 and 16) have been partially exempt from public access.

The findings of facts

Section 33(1)(a) of the Archives Act provides that:

a record is exempt from public access if it contains information or matter the disclosure of which under this Act could reasonably be expected to cause

damage to the security, defence or international relations of the Commonwealth.

This record contains:

- Information pertaining to Defence plans, operations or capabilities of continuing sensitivity.

Reasons for decision

- Public disclosure of such information could reasonably be expected to compromise current or future Defence operational procedures, thus jeopardising Australia and her allies' success in Defence operations.

Review of decision

The National Archives of Australia (the Archives) carefully examines records before deciding to exempt any part of them. As part of that process we may consult with other agencies which have expertise on specific national and international matters.


If you do not agree with the decision, you can formally appeal within 28 days of receiving:

1. by first applying to the Archives for an internal reconsideration of my decision; and
2. if you still do not agree with the decision, you can apply to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal for a review.

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3 September 1997**CABINET MINUTE**
NATIONAL SECURITY COMMITTEE

Submission JH97/0423 **ESTABLISHMENT OF A JOINT
AUSTRALIA-UNITED STATES
RELAY GROUND STATION AT
PINE GAP**

1. The Committee agreed that the United States' proposal for the establishment and operation of a Relay Ground Station at Pine Gap to support the 'Defense Support Program' and the 'Space Based Infra Red System' be approved, on the understanding that arrangements have been agreed that would:
 - (a) allow Australia to exploit the capabilities of the system to address Australian Defence Force (ADF) interests;
 - (b) enable Australia to make a contribution to performance of the system's missions; and
 - (c) through the conditions set out in sub-paragraph (a) and (b) above, ensure that Australia has full knowledge and concurrence of the operations of the Relay Ground Station and the wider system it supports.
2. 
3. The Committee noted that:
 - (a) to effect the conditions set out in paragraphs 1 and 2 above, the Department of Defence would conclude an Implementing Arrangement

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with the United States on the operation of the Relay Ground Station before it becomes operational;

(b)



- (c) closure of the Joint Defence Facility at Nurrungar and the United States Air Force withdrawal from Woomera is being jointly managed in accordance with mutually agreed procedures, including compliance with relevant environmental, heritage and native title regulations;
- (d) the future of Woomera as a viable community after the closure of the joint facility at Nurrungar remains in doubt; and
- (e) Australians would be posted to work in the central mission control station in the United States.



Secretary to Cabinet

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JH97/0423/NS



CABINET SUBMISSION

TITLE: ESTABLISHMENT OF A JOINT AUSTRALIA/UNITED STATES RELAY GROUND STATION AT PINE GAP

Copy No. 6

MINISTER(S) RESPONSIBLE: Minister for Defence The Hon Ian McLachlan AO MP

MINISTER'S EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE: (Why issue needs to come to Cabinet and not be dealt with by other means; any time constraints)

To seek Government approval for the establishment of a Relay Ground Station at the present Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap, replacing the Joint Defence Facility Nurrungar.

Approval now will enable plans for the construction of the Relay Ground Station to proceed on schedule.

KEY ISSUES: (The matters for decision, options, issues for determination, political sensitivities or possible criticisms)

The Submission proposes establishment at Pine Gap of a jointly-managed Australian/US Defence facility, the Relay Ground Station. It would be established and run in accordance with the principles of our full knowledge of and concurrence to the operation and to the wider mission of which it plays a part, and our right to access the data that passes through the site.

The capabilities of the system supported by the Relay Ground Station would be available, subject to agreed tasking priorities, to support ADF operations.

A brief progress report on the associated issues of closure of the Joint Defence Facility Nurrungar, and the future of Woomera village post-closure, is also provided. We are confident that closure procedures will go smoothly.

The proposals are consistent with Government policy supporting an active and relevant alliance relationship. The cooperation envisaged is a practical contribution to a vital US interest and signifies our preparedness to cooperate on matters of mutual benefit.

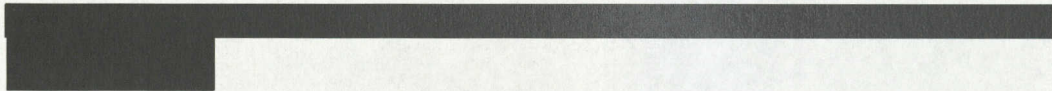
There are potential sensitivities or criticisms associated with continued cooperation with the US in this area. Given our long track record of successful cooperation, and the wide public support for the alliance, these are assessed as limited and manageable.

CONSULTATION: (Which Departments were consulted? Is there agreement? Co-ordination comments are attached)

Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The South Australian Premier's Department has been kept informed of developments relating to Woomera.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. I recommend that the National Security Committee of Cabinet agree that:
 - (a) the United States proposal for the establishment and operation of a Relay Ground Station at Pine Gap to support the Defense Support Program and the Space Based Infra Red System be approved, on the understanding that arrangements have been agreed that would:
 - (i) allow Australia to exploit the capabilities of the system to address ADF interests;
 - (ii) enable Australia to make a contribution to performance of the system's missions;
 - (iii) through items (i) and (ii), ensure that Australia has full knowledge and concurrence of the operations of the RGS and the wider system it supports.
 - (b) 
2. I recommend that the National Security Committee of Cabinet note that:
 - (a) to effect the above conditions, Defence will conclude an Implementing Arrangement with the United States on operation of the Relay Ground Station before it becomes operational (expected in September 1999);
 - (b) Defence will continue to explore opportunities for wider, mutually beneficial cooperation with the United States on space-based detection and early warning, including in the R&D area;
 - (c) closure of the Joint Defence Facility Nurrungar and USAF withdrawal from Woomera is being jointly managed in accordance with mutually agreed procedures, including compliance with relevant regulations concerning environmental, heritage and native title aspects; and
 - (d) the future of Woomera as a viable community post-Nurrungar closure remains in doubt.

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**ESTABLISHMENT OF A JOINT AUSTRALIA/UNITED STATES
RELAY GROUND STATION AT PINE GAP
BACKGROUND**

The Australia-United States Joint Defence Facility Nurrungar (JDF-N) is a satellite ground station of the United States Defense Support Program (DSP) which is the primary US system for providing first warning of ballistic missile launches worldwide. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The US proposes to close JDF-N in about 2000 after replacing it with a Relay Ground Station (RGS) at Pine Gap. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the Space-Based Infra-Red System (SBIRS). The RGS will support both the DSP and SBIRS systems.

2. The US advised Australia in 1993 of the planned closure, and in 1995 formally sought approval in principle to establish a missile early warning satellite Relay Ground Station (RGS) at Pine Gap. The previous Australian Government provided its agreement in principle in 1995 subject to agreement being reached on satisfactory arrangements for closing Nurrungar and as necessary Woomera, and on operation of the RGS. Approval in principle was confirmed in July 1996 following the Sydney AUSMIN consultations.

3. Woomera (population about 1200) is owned and administered by Defence, and currently is almost totally dependent on JDF-N for its existence. Unless other uses are found for the village, Woomera will have to close, or be sharply scaled back, when Nurrungar closes.

4. The US now seeks the Government's full approval to proceed with the RGS. This submission advises the National Security Committee of Cabinet of the issues relevant to this decision.

ISSUES

5. The proposed RGS, linked initially to the DSP satellites now operated from Nurrungar and later to the SBIRS satellites, should be regarded as a new joint defence facility that we will host for many years. Our experience at JDF-N and Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap (JDFPG) suggests that there are two fundamental considerations in evaluating the US proposal. First, whether the functions of the system of which the RGS will be a part can be expected to be closely coincident

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with Australian interests. Second, whether arrangements can be devised such that, through Australian involvement in the operation and management of the facility, the Government has effective full knowledge and concurrence of these functions.

Functions of the RGS

6. The existing DSP satellites were designed to perform a single function: the early detection of the launch of large intercontinental ballistic missiles. This capability made an important contribution to the stability of the strategic nuclear balance in two ways. First, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] it made possible the launch of a retaliatory strike before warheads struck their targets in the US. The inevitability of retaliation played a central part in deterring a first strike. Secondly, the DSP satellites complemented other systems [REDACTED] [REDACTED] to give the US greater certainty that a nuclear attack was indeed underway. Given the finality of a nuclear exchange, it is equally important not to retaliate to a phantom attack. JDF-N therefore made an important contribution to the avoidance of nuclear war, a compelling Australian interest.

7. [REDACTED]

8. Our alliance relationship with the US has endured and deepened because we share basic common values and have very similar views on challenges to the stability of the international system. [REDACTED]

9. [REDACTED]

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10.

Full Knowledge and Concurrence

11. The capacity to assert confidently that Australia has full knowledge and concurrence in the activities of the Joint Defence Facilities is important from the standpoint of sovereignty, and has been central to building strong public support for the Facilities.

This factor underscores the importance of full knowledge and concurrence of the mission or missions performed by the facility.

12. In addition to prior agreement on the missions, our exercise of full knowledge and concurrence is accomplished at both JDF-N and JDFPG through direct Australian involvement in all aspects of the operations and management of the Facilities. Although the RGS will require different arrangements, we believe it is important to approach full knowledge and concurrence in the same way, namely to seek to make the largest possible contribution to the mission of the facility.

13. We consider that these objectives can be achieved through the following measures:

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- (a) agreement on the missions to which the data passing through the RGS will contribute, together with an undertaking to consult before new missions are initiated, and annual reviews of the operation of the system of which the RGS is a part;
- (b) the ability to have direct access to the data passing through the RGS; full Australian access, in real time, to the event reporting produced by the central processing facility in the US;
- (c) an Australian capacity to contribute to the tasking of the DSP/SBIRS system; and
- (d) involvement of Australian personnel in the team monitoring the operation of the RGS at Pine Gap.

We have received high level assurances from the US (from the Commander in Chief US Space Command, General Estes) that all these measures are acceptable and will be reflected in the Implementing Arrangements.

14. These points will give us an adequate basis for full knowledge and concurrence, but would not provide the quality of partnership and interaction which we have achieved at the Joint Defence Facilities, particularly in the last ten years. To achieve this, we would also need to station Australians in the United States to work in the central Mission Control Station. General Estes was favourably disposed to the idea (which also serves some US interests in international cooperation), and agreed in principle pending more detailed examination by appropriate agencies in the US.

15. We regard all the measures above as important points of principle to be reflected in the detailed Implementing Arrangements governing the operation of the RGS. With respect to item 13b., the extent to which we will wish to exercise this option cannot be determined at the present time. Access to the raw data derived through the RGS is potentially of interest to Australia's direct security interests.



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Defence and Foreign Policy - Other Considerations

16.



Closure of Nurrungar and The Future of Woomera

17. The joint closure process for Nurrungar established with the US Air Force is proceeding well. Although individual national requirements and priorities in some areas are different (for example, environmental and heritage), we are highly confident that mutually satisfactory closure arrangements will be achieved.

18. Proposals are being considered to retain Woomera village as a viable community after 2000. They include increased military activity supplemented by a new commercial satellite-launch enterprise. If these or similar proposals are not implemented the village will probably be mothballed or demolished, possibly leaving intact the Port Augusta to Woomera water pipeline which services regional graziers and enterprises.

19. No public or private organisation is likely to purchase Woomera village and South Australian officials have reaffirmed the State's reluctance to accept it as part of a normalisation process. If necessary the ADF, which requires the Woomera airfield and adjacent Prohibited Area for the long term future, can use these facilities without support from the village.

20. Regardless of whether or not Woomera village remains viable, JDF-N's closure will result in fewer local jobs, the quantum being uncertain at present, and some small businesses in the village will no longer be viable. This, although peripheral to SBIRS and the RGS, concerns local and regional inhabitants and is referred to in the accompanying Press release.

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SENSITIVITY/CRITICISM

21. Given the minor nature of the proposed changes at Pine Gap, and the general level of community support for a US presence, we do not anticipate criticism locally. On the national scale, some criticism by issue motivated groups opposed to a US presence in Australia, or to cooperation with the United States in ballistic missile early warning, may eventuate. In particular, we anticipate isolated criticism that Australia is following the US down a path that leads to withdrawal from the ABM Treaty and to deployment of weapons in space. However, the very high levels of public support for the alliance are grounds for confidence that, properly handled, the new arrangements would be well accepted. The logic developed in our current public handling line for cooperation at the Joint Facilities (including our ability to assure the public that the cooperation is genuinely joint and serves mutually held interests) is equally relevant to cooperation on the RGS and ultimately more widely on SBIRS.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

22. The fact that Nurrungar will close and the uncertain future of Woomera have been matters of public record since February 1994, and are well understood at Woomera. A Press release in July 1996 announced the Government's approval in principle for an RGS to be established, and our expectation of continued cooperation into the next century.

23. A draft Press release is attached that: announces Government approval for the RGS; confirms Australia's commitment to continued involvement in the US missile early warning program through the RGS; highlights SBIRS; indicates the possibility of further mutually beneficial cooperation; foreshadows the profile changes at Pine Gap; reaffirms that Nurrungar will close in about year 2000; mentions the future of Woomera.

24. Defence is also developing an extensive list of Questions and Answers on these issues with the US which will be available to assist in response to media inquiries.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

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26. The costs of closing Nurrungar and scaling down Woomera, including the potential for realising the residual value of unwanted assets, are expected to be incurred largely after 2000. We do not expect the closure of Nurrungar and its environmental restoration to be unduly expensive. Costs of scaling down operations at Woomera will depend on the outcome of current negotiations on its future (examples of costing options are shown at Attachment D).

27.



CONCLUSION

28. The RGS proposal would prolong cooperation in a mission that has been a central strand of the alliance relationship for over 25 years. The core missions to which the RGS will contribute - minimising the risks of nuclear war and protecting US and coalition forces in regional conflicts - are both strong Australian interests.



Further, SBIRS has the potential to make a useful contribution to ADF surveillance capabilities.

September 1997

IAN McLACHLAN

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ATTACHMENTS REFERRED TO IN SUBMISSION JH97/0423

COPY NO. 6

**ESTABLISHMENT OF A JOINT AUSTRALIA/UNITED STATES
RELAY GROUND STATION AT PINE GAP**

INDEX OF ATTACHMENTS

		<u>Page No.</u>
Attachment A	Draft Press Release	Submission
Attachment B	Coordination Comments	Submission
Attachment C	SBIRS Data	2
Attachment D	Woomera Closure Costings	3

DRAFT MEDIA RELEASE
GOVERNMENT APPROVES CONTINUED AUSTRALIAN COOPERATION WITH US
IN MISSILE EARLY WARNING PROGRAM

The Minister for Defence, the Hon Ian McLachlan AO MP, announced today that the Government had approved the construction at Pine Gap of a Relay Ground Station for the US space-based ballistic missile early warning program. The Relay Ground Station will replace some of the functions currently carried out by the Joint Defence Facility at Nurrungar.

Previously, approval in principle had been given, with full approval subject to comprehensive briefings from the US on the role and functions of the future US ballistic missile early warning system and the Relay Ground Station's place in it, and satisfactory arrangements made for operation of the RGS on similar principles of jointness and full Australian access which apply at the Joint Defence Facilities at Pine Gap and Nurrungar. The Minister said that fully satisfactory arrangements had been agreed with the United States in respect of these issues.

The establishment of the RGS, and the subsequent closure of Nurrungar, are part of the process by the US of consolidating in the United States the processing of data from its ballistic missile early warning satellites. For budgetary and technical reasons, the US preferred to co-locate the new facility at the present Pine Gap site near Alice Springs.

The Relay Ground Station will initially support satellites in the US Defense Support Program (DSP), as Nurrungar does now. A follow-on system to replace the DSP, known as the Space Based Infra-Red System (SBIRS), is currently under development in the United States, and the Relay Station is expected to also support that program.

Establishment of the RGS will involve construction of additional antennas and some additions to existing buildings at Pine Gap. As the RGS is essentially an automated function, only a small number of Australian and US personnel will be required to operate it. On current plans we expect Nurrungar to close in the year 2000, some time after the Relay Ground Station becomes operational. While Nurrungar remains, the town at Woomera will continue to support its operations, and facilities there will be maintained at an appropriate standard. The Department of Defence will continue to manage actively the closure process and its impact on the town of Woomera, in close consultation with the townspeople, the Premier's Department of South Australia and the US Air Force.

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ATTACHMENT B

COORDINATION COMMENTS

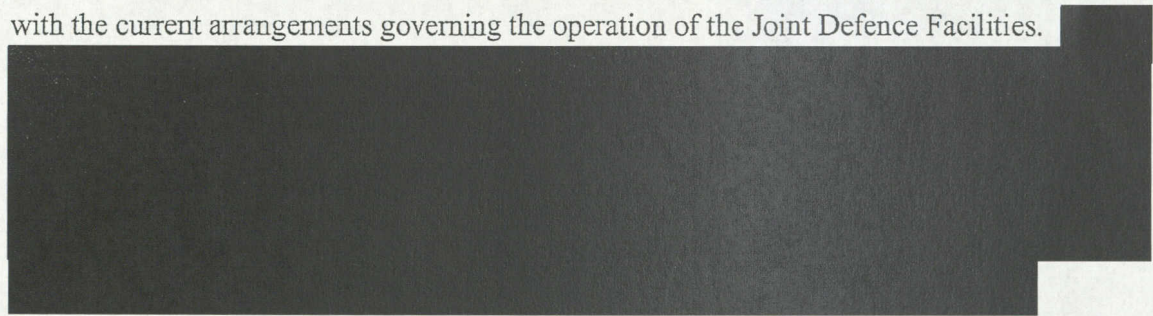
The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet supports the recommendations of the submission, but considers that Australia's agreement to hosting the Relay Ground Station should be subject to the United States' firm agreement to the measures outlined in paragraph 13 and to the operational involvement, upon request, of Australian personnel in the central Mission Control Station in the United States (referred to in paragraph 14). Defence should absorb any additional costs associated with posting personnel to the United States.

The Department notes that the media statement will not be issued until fully satisfactory arrangements have been agreed with the United States in respect of these issues.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade concurs with the recommendations and assessments in this submission. The proposals are consistent with our alliance objectives and with the current arrangements governing the operation of the Joint Defence Facilities.



The Treasury

Treasury supports the Submission's recommendations, but considers that any costs to Australia arising from the project should be met from within existing Defence budget.

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12.

Attorney-General's Department

The Attorney-General's Department supports the recommendations of the submission. The Department, however, notes that there is no mention of the effect the closure of Nurrungar and the subsequent establishment of the relay ground station at Pine Gap will have on the Australian Protective Staff currently providing security at JDFN. Presumably this will be considered as part of the project to establish the relay ground station in the future.

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ATTACHMENT C

SBIRS DATA

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ATTACHMENT D

WOOMERA CLOSURE COSTINGS OPTIONS

1. The option of demolishing the village (leaving roads and heavy infrastructure behind) would cost an initial estimated \$6 million, and ongoing about \$1 million per annum for bare base caretaking and operation of the water pipeline, offset by receipts from water sales.
2. The option of caretaking the village would require an initial \$0.4 million for security fencing and ongoing about \$1.5 million per annum for caretaking, operation of the water pipeline and maintenance (also offset by receipts from water sales).
3. In both cases there would be some further cost for environmental remediation, whose cost cannot be estimated until a required standard of remediation is identified.

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