



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Ordnance Storage: Privatisation

SPEECH

Thursday, 7 September 2000

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Fitzgibbon, Joel, MP

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Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (9.52 am)—For some years now, the military has been contracting out what are described as non-core activities. The question I want to pose today is: when are services provided by our armed forces core and when are those services non-core? I expect that most Australians, if asked what they considered to be non-core activities, would nominate services such as cooking, cleaning, construction, ground maintenance and maybe even administration. But I doubt that too many would nominate the storage of our explosive ordnance. Most, I suspect, would nominate those activities as very much a core responsibility of our armed forces. Yet the Minister for Defence is giving his imprimatur to the contracting out of these core activities.

In future, the responsibilities for the storage, maintenance and distribution of our bombs will not fall to the military but, rather, will be in the hands of the private sector. In addition to the obvious implications of that policy, for the townships of Denman and Sandy Hollow in my electorate it could prove to be disastrous. Myambat Logistics Company is a key employer in the Muswellbrook local government area. Its privatisation flies in the face of the Prime Minister's commitment that:

... there should be no reduction in Defence presence in regional Australia.

Not only are there employment implications, but the privatisation of Myambat threatens the viability of the local school and may leave local defence housing at risk of falling into disrepair.

The Mayor of Muswellbrook, John Colvin, is a person with some expertise in defence matters and he is very concerned about the military's and the government's approach to the contracting out of what I would describe as core activities. He has written to the Minister for Defence expressing his concerns and I am aware that he is attempting to establish a meeting with the minister so that he can express his concerns face to face.

Today I appeal to the minister to meet with John Colvin. He is a sensible guy who, as I said, has some expertise in these matters. Understandably, he has some very grave concerns about the implications that the contracting out of those core responsibilities at Myambat will have for the Muswellbrook local government area. I appeal to the minister to give him that hearing.