



SAS view: A soldier looks out from the rappelling tower at Swanbourne headquarters.

# Labor eyes SAS land for housing



Alannah MacTiernan

PAUL MURRAY

Kevin Rudd is eyeing off land around the Special Air Service Regiment's Swanbourne barracks under a plan to free up billions of dollars of Commonwealth property to counter housing affordability pressures.

The Opposition Leader said yesterday the Federal Government was sitting on more than \$6 billion of idle property while families struggled to get land for homes.

Under a policy announced at a developing housing estate in Sydney's south-west, the Defence Department would have to justify holding any "surplus" land every year.

The new policy fits neatly with a call by Planning and Infrastructure Minister Alannah MacTiernan this month for the regiment's Campbell Barracks land to be made available for medium-density homes.

Prime Minister John Howard immediately attacked the plan, saying it would create doubt and insecurity in relation to just about every military base in Australia.

Under the Rudd plan, land deemed to be surplus would be evaluated against its effect on surrounding property values, improving the amenity of local suburbs and whether it could create new jobs.



John Bell

Mr Rudd was speaking on land adjoining the Ingleburn Army Camp, which the NSW Government has been unsuccessfully trying to free up since 2004.

"The process we outline is that each year government departments will submit their surplus land and show cause as to why it

shouldn't be released," Mr Rudd said.

"Here we are in 2007 in the middle of a national housing affordability crisis and what has Mr Howard's response been back in July: 'Oh we'll have a bit of an audit'. We think it's time this was fast-tracked and we cut through the red tape to release land wherever we can."

Nedlands city councillor John Bell, who with the Boating Industry Association is promoting a marina and housing development on 13ha of council property adjoining the SAS land, supported the plan.

Mr Bell said much of the SAS land north of the rifle range was surplus and worth billions of dollars, even though army chiefs would fight to retain it. The regiment should be relocated to Lancelin.

Mr Howard said it was an outrageous proposition for the SAS to have to justify its existence at Swanbourne.

"They've got to train soldiers and fight wars, they shouldn't have to be filling out forms," he said. "It is the sort of blinkered thinking of a bureaucrat to say that on an annual basis the SAS should have to justify why they need Swanbourne."

"Swanbourne will not be touched under this Government."