

# RAAF base at Laverton could be shut down, sold off

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LAVERTON's RAAF base would be shut down and its valuable land in Melbourne's west sold off under Air Force plans to consolidate its facilities across the country.

The 1200 personnel currently employed at the base would be shifted to fellow RAAF Williams base at Point Cook or moved to either Queensland or South Australia under a recommendation to the Federal Government.

RAAF chief Air Marshal Leo Davies said yesterday it would be decision for the federal government and any closures could still be more than a decade away. But Defence Minister Marise Payne said yesterday the Government was not currently considering the closure of any bases.

The Air Force has urged the Commonwealth to consider closing two long-established bases, Laverton and Richmond in NSW, to distribute their units to other bases and dispose of the real estate.



Air Marshal Leo Davies.



Defence Minister Marise Payne

The strategy is part of the RAAF's plan to consolidate its bases, saving costs on their long-term upkeep and giving personnel a more stable career path, without need for frequent moves.

The proceeds of any sale, which would be millions of dollars in high-growth areas, would likely be put back into the government's coffers. Most of the plans were not yet ready for government decision and any implementation could be 15 years away.

Laverton, opened in 1925, is the RAAF's third-oldest base and home to the academic and technical training units for the Air Force including the school of languages, the Air Force Band and an Army reserve unit.

It is also home to the 8th/7th Battalion of the Royal Victoria Regiment as well as part of the Defence Materiel Organisation.

It hosted some of the shooting events for the 1956 Olympics, with airfield and runway decommissioned in the 1990s to be later developed into the suburb of Williams Landing.

Labor member for Lalor, Joanne Ryan, said the Government needed to "come clean" on its plans for any base consolidation process.

"We're concerned about the prospect of losing good local jobs if, as reported, local civilian jobs could be transferred interstate," she said.

"Before the site is sold, the Government must also confirm that appropriate soil testing has been carried out."