

Borneo Barracks petition is on its way to Canberra

The campaign to keep the Borneo Barracks at Cabarlah has gathered more momentum as Federal Member for Groom Ian Macfarlane prepares to present a petition to Federal Parliament calling for the base to remain on the Darling Downs.

Mr Macfarlane has accepted a petition bearing almost 2000 signatures from Toowoomba Regional Councillor Bill Cahill and Highfields businessman Ashley Heckels.

"The future of the Borneo Barracks is an important issue for the people of Toowoomba, Highfields, Cabarlah and the Darling Downs and I am determined to ensure the Rudd Government understands its significance both to our region and the Australian Defence Force," Mr Macfarlane said.

"It is clear from the response to this petition that local community members are adamant that the base should stay in our region.

"Losing the base would come at a substantial cost to the local economy as it is one of our most significant local employers, supporting hundreds of jobs both directly and indirectly.

"It also makes a critical contribution to the Austral-

ian Defence Force," Mr Macfarlane said.

The petition was organised by the Highfields Better Business Group in response to concerns raised at a meeting of local business operators, then further discussed at a community forum facilitated by Mr Macfarlane.

The chairman of Highfields Better Business, Ashley Heckels, said the number of signatures collected was impressive, given the petition had been in circulation for only a few weeks.

"We've had a great response since the very first day the petition was open for signature," Mr Heckels said. It's not just the business community that has come out in force to support the petition, there's also been overwhelming interest from residents in Highfields and surrounds and further into Toowoomba."

The petition has also been supported strongly by Highfields-based Toowoomba Regional Councillor Bill Cahill.

Cr Cahill said the petitions ends a strong message and gives the community a voice in addition to the formal process.



Member for Groom Ian Macfarlane, left, with Cr Bill Cahill and chairman of Highfields Better business Ashley Heckels.

"The Toowoomba Regional Council is right behind the campaign to keep the Barracks and we see clearly the benefits to the region, not only in terms of jobs, but also in terms of local infrastructure," he said.

Mr Macfarlane will present the petition to Federal Parliament during the upcoming sittings.

It will also coincide with

the release of the Defence White Paper, which is now overdue.

"While I have been in ongoing contact with the Defence Department on this issue, both under the Howard Government and with the current Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon, the petition is a powerful addition to the campaign," Mr Macfarlane said.

"No matter what the Defence White Paper recommends, the final decision still rests with the Defence Minister.

"In addition to presenting this petition I will also seek another meeting with the Minister to make sure there is no doubt about how our community feels about keeping the barracks," Mr Macfarlane said.