



THE HON. JOEL FITZGIBBON MP Minister for Defence

Saturday, 2 May 2009

A NEW ERA FOR NAVY'S FLEET AIR ARM

The 2009 Defence White Paper sets out a new capability direction with a significant focus on enhancing our maritime capabilities for the 21st century, the Minister for Defence, the Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon MP announced today.

The Government has announced plans to significantly increase the combat aviation capability of the Royal Australian Navy, through the acquisition of a fleet of at least 24 advanced new naval combat helicopters.

“This project will be pursued as a matter of urgency to overcome the current deficiencies in the Navy’s aviation fleet that have resulted from years of poor planning and mismanagement under the Howard Government. Introducing these new helicopters into service is a high priority for this Government and will be pursued as a matter of urgency,” Mr Fitzgibbon said.

The purchase of these advanced new combat helicopters will enable up to nine aircraft to be concurrently embarked on ships at sea at any one time. The new helicopter fleet will be equipped with active dipping sonars, which are capable of being lowered into the water while the helicopter is in a hover. This allows the helicopter’s sonar to penetrate the many thermal and noise layers found in the sea column and will therefore provide the Navy with an increased ability to detect submarines at greater ranges and depths than is presently the case.

“They also will be equipped with modern torpedos able to quickly attack and destroy any hostile submarines while also being capable of carrying short to medium range anti-ship missiles. The ability to carry these weapons will ensure that the Navy’s advanced new combat helicopters can neutralise a hostile surface or sub-surface vessel before they threaten the remainder of the surface fleet,” Mr Fitzgibbon said

This project is one of several that will significantly enhance the Australian Defence Force’s anti-submarine warfare capability. These include the new anti-submarine warfare focussed frigates, the Royal Australian Air Force’s future maritime patrol aircraft, the active towed array sonars on the new Air Warfare Destroyers, longer range sonars for ANZAC frigates and torpedo defence systems for surface ships. Collectively these capabilities address the ADF’s need to counter the growing threat posed by submarines.

A Defence Force for the 21st Century

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In addition to the new combat helicopters, the Navy will also be modernising its aviation fleet with the acquisition of six new MRH-90 helicopters to replace its Sea King helicopters.

These large state-of-the-art helicopters, equipped with an infrared system for use in low-light conditions, will be employed as a utility and general purpose helicopter on the larger support and amphibious ships” the Minister said. Out of a total fleet of 46, Navy will share seven with Army for common flight training. The MRH-90 will enter service with the Navy from 2010.

The 2009 Defence White Paper represents the most comprehensive statement on Defence ever produced. It affirms the Government’s commitment to the defence of Australia, the protection of our sovereign interests and the security and stability of our region.

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