



THE HON. JOEL FITZGIBBON MP Minister for Defence

Saturday, 2 May 2009

NEXT GENERATION OF AIR COMBAT CAPABILITY FOR AIR FORCE

The 2009 Defence White Paper, released today, delivers an Air Force for the 21st century that will be better equipped, fully networked and better prepared to meet Australia's air power requirements.

The Government today confirmed that it will acquire around 100 F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters for the Royal Australian Air Force.

"After an extensive Air Combat Capability Review and further detailed analysis associated with the White Paper, I am confident the Joint Strike Fighter is the right aircraft to meet Australia's future air combat needs," the Minister for Defence, the Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon MP said.

Mr Fitzgibbon said that the fifth-generation Joint Strike Fighter represented value for money for the Australian taxpayer and the detailed review of the program gave him confidence that the aircraft presented the best available option to guarantee the Royal Australian Air Force maintains air superiority in the Asia-Pacific region well into the future.

"The Air Combat Capability Review found that a potent and flexible air combat capability is a cornerstone of Australia's defence posture. The review concluded that control of the air over our territory and maritime approaches is critical to all other operations in the defence of Australia." Mr Fitzgibbon said.

The Review determined that the transition of Australia's air combat capability to fifth generation air combat aircraft technology, will enable Air Force to maintain a regional air combat superiority and a significantly enhanced ability to contribute in a broader Asian and global context if required.

The Review concluded that a fleet of around 100 fifth generation multi-role combat aircraft would provide Australia with a potent and flexible air combat capability to 2030 and that the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter is the preferred platform. Other combat aircraft considered by the Review were judged to be unsuited to Australia's multi-role air combat capability requirements.

The findings of the review were subsequently supported through extensive analysis in support of the White Paper. Importantly the Force Structure

A Defence Force for the 21st Century

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Review considered the mix of military capabilities needed to ensure the security of our nation and to protect our strategic interests. This included the vital enabling capabilities provided by the KC-30A Multi-Role Tanker Transport and Wedgetail Airborne Early Warning & Control aircraft.

Separate projects will also be undertaken to deliver state of the art air-to-air, air-to-surface and maritime strike weapons to complete the capability that will be delivered for use by Australia's Joint Strike Fighter multi-role aircraft.

The first stage of the acquisition will be to acquire not fewer than 72 aircraft, to provide three operational squadrons and a training unit. Second Pass approval for the first stage of acquisition is scheduled for the third quarter of 2009 at which time the detailed delivery schedule will be considered.

Acquisition of the fourth operational squadron of Joint Strike Fighters will be made at a later date in conjunction with a decision on the timing of the withdrawal of the 24 F/A-18F Block II Super Hornet bridging air combat fleet.

"Australia's future air combat capability will therefore be based on four operational air combat squadrons consisting initially of three squadrons of Joint Strike Fighters and one operational squadron of Super Hornet aircraft, which will eventually be replaced by a fourth squadron of Joint Strike Fighters," Mr Fitzgibbon said.

"The Australian public can be reassured that the exhaustive review conducted into our future air combat needs has proven the Joint Strike Fighter has the flexibility and growth potential to meet our needs. Additionally, our knowledge of the cost, capability and schedule risks surrounding the Joint Strike Fighter project has also matured to the point where we now have greater confidence committing to what is undoubtedly one of the largest and most important military acquisition in our nation's history," Mr Fitzgibbon concluded.

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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