

Defence Portfolio

COMMITTEE INQUIRY QUESTION

(Question No.1)

Mr Josh Wilson MP asked the Department of Defence, upon notice, on 10 August 2021:

During the public hearing on Monday 9 August 2021, witnesses were asked about the interaction between plurilateral defence-industry/procurement agreements and other agreements that govern the acceptable forms of warfare/weaponry. In one answer, the Department of Defence representative (or possibly the DFAT representative) referred to Australia's active engagement in relation to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), and specifically on work being done to consider regulation of lethal autonomous weapons (LAWS).

The Committee requests in writing further information on the work Australia has done and is doing with respect to LAWS, and what Australia's present position is with respect to specific regulation of LAWS?

Mr Josh Wilson MP – The Department of Defence has provided the following answer to the Member's question:

Australia, led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and supported by Defence and Attorney-General's Department, is actively engaged in discussions in the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Group of Governmental Experts on emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems.

Australia's position is that the CCW is the most appropriate forum to discuss issues relating to autonomous weapons systems, and that an attempt to ban or to otherwise agree on a new legal framework to regulate autonomous weapons systems is premature, as there is a lack of consensus and understanding of the technology.

Australia also notes that autonomous weapons systems could have the potential to save lives by minimising casualties and collateral damage, and reducing the risk to Defence personnel. Australia's position is that the current international legal framework already covers the development, acquisition and deployment of any new and emerging capability, including future autonomous weapons systems. In particular, all weapons and weapon systems must comply with, and should only be used in accordance with, international humanitarian law. Defence will only research, develop and deploy new and emerging technologies, such as autonomous weapons systems, in line with our domestic and international legal obligations.