



# Submission No 41

## **Inquiry into Australian Defence Force Regional Air Superiority**

**Organisation:**                   **1972 Industrial Mobilisation Course Association  
(Melbourne)**

SUBMISSION TO THE JSCFADT INQUIRY INTO  
AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE REGIONAL AIR SUPERIORITY  
BY THE 1972 IMC ASSOCIATION, MELBOURNE

The members of the 1972 Industrial Mobilisation Course Association (Melbourne), in following the arguments surrounding Australia's air superiority in our region and the questioned ability of the Joint Strike Fighter to achieve this, are concerned that:

- Australia has lost air superiority in our region, which is now arming with advanced Russian aircraft and IADS capabilities, and
- current Defence planning will not redress this situation.

Our members also feel that your inquiry could do much to pressure Defence to return to those rigorous selection processes that will lead to a fully informed and supportable decision on aircraft choice.

The attached submission sets out our concerns, and we wish you all success with your inquiry.

E.J. Bushell, Air Cdre (Retd)  
Chairman

J. Kennedy, Project Manager, PC9  
(CAC/HdeH, Melbourne)  
Secretary

Attached: Paper 'AUSTRALIA'S REGIONAL AIR SUPERIORITY'.

## ***AUSTRALIA'S REGIONAL AIR SUPERIORITY***

### *Background.*

The comments and observations that follow have been compiled by a group of graduates of the 1972 Industrial Mobilisation Course. Coming from service and industry backgrounds, the group has met regularly each year since 1972, maintaining an active interest in defence and defence industry matters through a programme of visiting speakers, visits to defence-related industries, and discussion sessions. The group also published its 25 Year Review of Defence and Industry in 1998. The group has been prompted to record their comments and observations as a result of the directions that the Department of Defence has taken since the imposition of the Defence Efficiency Review (DER), the Defence Reform Programme (DRP), and the Commercial Support Programme (CSP). The final impetus was provided by Defence's plans and attitudes in relation to Australia's air power as reflected in the Joint Strike Fighter Project. Our comments will thus focus upon RAAF capabilities and Defence management.

### *The Past.*

Before the restructuring of the RAAF as part of the DRP, with the resulting widespread downsizing and de-skilling of that Service, the RAAF was a force which had the span and depth of operational, technical, personnel, and supply expertise required to specify, evaluate, select, contract, introduce, operate, and maintain, either within its own or industry facilities, each new generation of aircraft. Robust systems and procedures, evolved over some 70 years of experience, supported these activities. The RAAF was thus justifiably proud of its ability to bring aircraft and their supporting systems into operation, fully supported, and generally on time, cost and to specification, and this capability was recognised amongst many foreign air forces. However, the new Defence organization has demonstrated a continuing inability to emulate the past competence of the RAAF, and as a result its string of unsatisfactory major projects has impacted severely Australia's air power as well as the public purse.

### *Air Power and Air Superiority.*

When one speaks of air power, we feel that two quite different RAAF responsibilities must be recognised:

- There are activities which are overwhelmingly the province of the RAAF and the most important of these is to achieve and maintain air superiority. This aspect of air power is currently the subject of the current Joint Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) Inquiry into Australian Defence Force Regional Air Superiority. With air superiority (or 'friendly air'), our military, tactical air support, and naval forces will generally be free to operate at will. Without air superiority, these forces may have to operate under 'hostile air', which they have not had to do since WWII. Army, close air support, and naval operations under hostile air are at best risky and at worst disastrous, and Australia would have no way of redressing such a situation. It has been generally accepted that Australia has now lost air superiority in our region.
- The second general responsibility of the RAAF is to provide a range of support to Army and Navy in what are called 'joint operations'. These are most important roles, but they can only be delivered with confidence if the RAAF (or a supporting air force) can provide air superiority in the theatre where Australia wishes to operate.

Much of Defence's attention and planning are currently being directed towards networking and other joint operations capabilities, but we have to be very careful that this concentration of attention and effort does not distract from ensuring that Australia will have that degree of independent air superiority needed to mount and sustain joint operations. We must never lose sight of the role and significance of air superiority.

*The Joint Strike Fighter Project.*

Traditionally, the RAAF has operated different, specialised aircraft in support of its air superiority and strike roles. At present, these are the F/A-18 and F-111 respectively. However, the Government then announced that Australia had selected the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) to replace both the F-111 and the F/A-18. The proposition that one aircraft can satisfy both air superiority and strike roles has been mooted before, but we have yet to see an aircraft that has been able to meet both objectives to the level required. Attempts so far have been frustrating, time and effort consuming, very costly, and have failed.

The Government's decision to halt the normal source selection process and opt for the JSF was unnecessarily early and inherently wrong. In effect, the decision:

- Gave an open-ended acceptance of all the unknown risks associated with capability, costs, and timing that are invariably part of a lengthy, high-risk project.
- Effectively deterred or prevented the evaluation of other contenders, despite the political, strategic, operational, and commercial changes that occur inevitably over a lengthy developmental project.
- Stifled debate about the practicality and wisdom of the political decision. Views contrary to those of Defence, and hence the political decision, even where supported by verifiable analysis, have been rejected and those presenting seem to be at best ignored. This has been reflected in the evidence placed before your Inquiry.

Much of the debate in the press and in the evidence given before the JSCFADT Inquiry relates to the increasing attractiveness of the F-22A Raptor over the JSF. Our group is not in a position to join in this debate, although clearly a debate is warranted. Our main concern is that the aircraft Australia eventually purchases must give us a clear margin of air superiority in our region, not a hopeful parity with fingers crossed! The increasing numbers of very advanced Russian fighters entering our region place great pressure on the need for Australia to have clear air superiority in our region.

*For Australia's Future Security.*

It is critically important that our Department of Defence takes timely, correct, and clearly validated decisions in regard to Australia's regional air superiority, but past performance and the quality of the evidence put to the JSCFADT Inquiry raises serious doubts that this will be the case.

The Inquiry is thus urged to press the Department of Defence to return to normal capabilities-based and rigorous requirements-based source selection processes so that Australia can be assured that the best decision will be taken.

E.J. Bushell, Air Cdre (Retd)  
Chairman

J. Kennedy, Project Manager, PC9  
(CAC/HdeH, Melbourne)  
Secretary

(For 1972 Industrial Mobilisation Course Assn.)