



Submission No 13

Inquiry into Australian Defence Force Regional Air Superiority

:

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Submission

INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE REGIONAL AIR SUPERIORITY

I and many others have grave concerns about the current planning that our Department of Defence (RAAF) is developing for our ongoing capabilities for the Regional Air Defence of our nation. These concerns are being expressed openly by the great majority of former senior RAAF officers and by large numbers of those knowledgeable and experienced officers having had careers in the expertise of air offence/defense.

My own experience and expertise which encompasses a tour as a fighter pilot in Korea, flying instructional duties, extensive long term flight testing as an experimental test pilot, squadron commander, a five year term as the Project Manager for the RAAF's acquisition of the F-111C followed by two years supervising a large part of the Operational Requirements for the future RAAF. Now in retirement I am currently the Secretary for an august society of current and former military and civilian 'cream of the crop' Flight Testers – the Flight Test Society of Australia.

I and most of my associates are distressed by the rapidly deteriorating expertise being shown by those now responsible for RAAF Operational Requirements or their inability in producing valid or acceptable plans for our essential and vital capabilities for the next decade or two. There is now little doubt that Australia will have a significant deterioration in our defensive/offensive posture with serious gaps during which some belligerent may well be tempted to become aggressive.

Having devoted five years of my life in determining the potential of the F-111C aircraft and having assisted with its further development and then seeing it become the pre-eminent defensive/offensive system in our region to this day, I deplore the intention of our DOD to replace such an asset with lesser assets and which will also introduce a serious capability gap.

The plans do not take into account the intrinsic value and long standing and prevailing respect with trepidation that our neighbours have become accustomed for the capabilities of our F-111 force and the difficulties we will have in establishing anything similar with a consequent considerably lessened capability in an air superiority sense. Lessons from the past are being ignored if we do not now know that the best way to achieve air superiority is to destroy the enemy air on the ground rather than by air to air fighting.

The RAAF is obliged at this time to go hard over in support of the program of its commitment with the JSF development and production. This is not an abnormal eventuality when it is supported by an ingrained desire to procure the latest technology whilst wanting to parallel similar/same air assets and receive support from the USA. Those who continue to operate and know intimately the enormous capabilities of their F-

111s would wish to retain them through to at least 2020. The operators will be reluctant to express their opinions openly knowing that they may well be 'taken to task' by their RAAF hierarchy.

There will obviously be impediments and cost impacts in retaining the formidable F-111 assets and one should expect that these will have been over exaggerated to support the current RAAF master plans. As the one person who once had to make a decision to continue with the F-111 acquisition or not I took great care in assessing their future value. I have great satisfaction in the result and their incredible performance and capabilities have surpassed my expectations. The airframe continues to be the best available on the planet today for its purpose. Updates of its warfare systems have been progressive and can continue.

Any doubts as to the continued structural integrity of the F-111s should be dispelled by continuing Cold Proof Testing and the limiting of peacetime manoeuvre envelopes. I was a member of the engineering team which developed the Cold Proof Testing methodology. I see no significant valid reason why these aircraft should not continue through to 2020, at least, considering the large spares holdings acquired during the time when 2020 was a planned as life of type. There is adequate expertise remaining in Australia to ensure continuing structural integrity.

To cut off an asset such as the F-111s, their superbly trained crews and support infrastructure will effectively take the guts out of our air force for too long a period. Heaven forbid! The additional costs in retaining these assets should be made available even if I have to bear an additional taxation burden or make a personal contribution in the interests of my progeny, the memories of my compatriots lost in combat in achieving an air superiority and the future security of our nation.

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