

Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
2023-24 ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES

Department/Agency: Department of Defence

Topic: Arafura-class Offshore Patrol Vessel helicopter capability

Senator: Malcolm Roberts

Portfolio Question reference number: 106

Type of question: Written, 23 February 2024

Question:

1. Vice Admiral Hammond provided at February hearings in relation to the SEA1180 offshore patrol vessel being able to land a helicopter on its deck that: "I'd characterise it as the Navy did not specify helicopter capability as a requirement." Ridzwan Rahmat reported on 25 April 2023 "Arafura-class OPVs are helicopter-capable, says Australian DoD" (<https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/arafura-class-opvs-are-helicopter-capable-says-australian-dod>). That story quotes a Department of Defense spokesperson that "The Arafura-class offshore patrol vessel deck is designed for helicopters and for support to unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) operations". Which is the accurate answer in relation to whether the Arafura class has a helicopter capability or not, Vice Admiral Hammonds Response or the reporting on janes.com?
2. What weight helicopter or unmanned aerial vehicle is the Arafura class OPV deck designed to support?

Answer:

Helicopter support was not part of the initial functional requirements set by Navy for the Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV). The OPV has a flight deck inherent to its reference design that the Navy intends to use for embarking, stowing, supporting and operating uncrewed aerial vehicles. The design will allow the conduct of daytime helicopter load lifting of supplies and winching of personnel, neither of which require the helicopter to land on the vessel. This capability aligns with the vessel's primary role, which is the conduct of constabulary operations.

The OPV flight deck is designed to support eleven tonnes.