



Submission No 8

Inquiry into Australian Defence Force Regional Air Superiority

:

Name: Dr Duncan H Steven

Address: Perth, WA

To: The Hon Bruce Scott MP, Chairman, Defence Subcommittee, JSCFADT

Submission to Inquiry into Australian Defence Force Regional Air Superiority

Dear Sir,

I am a retired engineer, consultant, formerly engineering academic, with extensive experience in the defence industry. This experience includes the design of heatseeking missiles for fighter aircraft.

I am quite mystified by the currently proposed planning for the future of the Royal Australian Air Force. From my perspective, current planning for the future of the Air Force is a recipe for a disaster.

The Joint Strike Fighter, which Defence see as their preferred choice to replace Australia's F-111s and F/A-18As is a small single engined fighter which is not competitive. This aircraft is not competitive against the F-111s we already operate, it is not competitive against the alternative F-22A Raptor fighter, and it is not competitive against the advanced Russian Sukhoi fighters widely used throughout Asia.

I am incensed as a taxpayer, that the F-111s are being retired prematurely for no good reason, as we taxpayers have spent a fortune on building up the infrastructure to support these jets almost indefinitely. If the Americans can operate numerous aircraft of similar age, or older by construction, why can't Australia do the same and save a fortune in taxpayer's dollars?

I am no less unhappy that Defence prefer to spend my taxpayer's dollars on the Joint Strike Fighter, when it is patently inferior to the F-22A Raptor, and it is going to cost us taxpayers the same if not more compared to a buy of F-22A Raptors. In fact, in many respects the Joint Strike Fighter does not even measure up to the legacy F-15 fighter, also widely used in the region.

I am also unhappy that the Joint Strike Fighter is not very competitive against the new Russian jets in the region. The Sukhois are bigger, faster, more agile, can carry more weapons further, and have more growth potential than the Joint Strike Fighter has. Defence wishfully argue that stealth and networking will make the Joint Strike Fighter competitive. Unfortunately, this will not be for long, if at all. The Russians have used networking in their fighters for many years, and continue to market such equipment. The stealth in the Joint Strike Fighter performs best in the X-band which makes it not very effective against many regional capabilities. I am particularly concerned, given my earlier experience, with the fact that the Russians are exporting long range heatseeking missiles which care not about the Joint Strike Fighter's radar stealth.

It defies my comprehension that Defence have invested so inadequately in aerial refuelling tanker aircraft. The hard truth is that the strength of an air force today is measured by the number of aerial refuelling tankers, because fighters without support from tankers can do very little useful work. Australia's geography is not that of Israel or Central Europe where an enemy is 10 minutes flying time away. Australia's area of strategic geographical interest extends all the way to China.

The importance of properly equipping the Air Force for the future cannot be overstated. The region today is not entirely stable and making enormous investments in high technology weapons, especially of Russian origin. This is reminiscent in many ways of what I witnessed during the late 1930s. Unlike many younger Australians, I have vivid memories of sleepless nights while bombers flew overhead.

I do not want my children and grandchildren to live in a precarious future, where they have to confront an impotent nation in a heavily armed and not entirely stable part of the world.

I sincerely hope, Mr Chairman, that you share these thoughts with me.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr Duncan H Steven
Perth, Western Australia