

White paper reveals RAAF plans

PETER LA FRANCHI/CANBERRA

PLANS FOR THE Royal Australian Air Force to acquire the four Boeing 737 airborne early warning and control aircraft put on hold earlier this year, along with 100 new frontline fighters for service by 2012, are included in a 10-year, A\$5.3 billion (\$2.8 billion) aerospace development package.

The plans, revealed in Australia's defence white paper released on 6 December, include new requirements for an additional squadron of marinised Sikorsky S-70 Black Hawk helicopters to operate from the Royal Australian Navy's amphibious transports.

The Australian army's long delayed project Air 87 armed reconnaissance helicopter is also given the green light, with a new tender for 20-24 aircraft to commence within three to four months. The army will also have a tactical UAV in service by 2007 and a replacement for its ageing Matra



Australia's defence white paper means Caribous will be retained in service

BaE Dynamics Rapier surface-to-air missile batteries by 2009. Additional Saab RBS70 air defence systems are to be acquired over the next four years.

The white paper also outlines plans for either a major airframe overhaul or a replacement of the RAAF's Lockheed Martin P-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft. Meanwhile, Boeing 707 in-flight

refuelling tankers will be replaced by up to five new refuellers, which are to enter service by 2006. The RAAF's 12 Lockheed Martin C-130H Hercules transports are also to undergo a life extension programme by 2008, which effectively terminates Australian plans to exercise 12 C-130J options.

The paper confirms that the suspended Light Tactical Airlifter

project will remain shelved. Instead, the RAAF's ageing de Havilland Canada DHC-4 Caribous will be refurbished, with a new project to explore the acquisition of new airlift capability by 2010.

Senior defence department officials say the new airlift project will explore a range of options including additional heavy-lift helicopters, but stressed that aircraft such as the Boeing C-17 Globemaster will not be considered.

Existing upgrades to the RAAF's F/A-18s are to be expanded to include major structural refurbishment to ensure the fighter remains operational until 2012-2015. Upgrades are to be completed by 2007.

The Air 6000 fighter programme will acquire 75 F/A-18 replacements, with the other 25 aircraft destined to supplant General Dynamics F-111s. Australia will continue to consider long-range strike alternatives including cruise missiles and unmanned combat air vehicles. □

Spending ceilings drive Danish and Swiss transport aircraft purchases

STEWART PENNEY/LONDON

DENMARK and Switzerland have selected new transport aircraft although neither country has been able to afford solutions that fully meet their needs.

Switzerland has added two EADS (formerly Casa) C295Ms to its 2001 procurement bill. The Swiss defence ministry, however, says the evaluation of the C295 and the Alenia/Lockheed Martin C-27J revealed that the latter's transport and flight characteristics are superior, but the C295M has lower acquisition and life cycle costs. Says a defence ministry source: "The aircraft meets most requirements and the armed forces can live with the capabilities of the C295M, so costs are the final driver."

A ministry source says the C-27J is able to perform most of the

required missions and can carry the Swiss Army's HUMVEE-based reconnaissance vehicle, which the C295M cannot transport, therefore "several smaller off-road vehicles will be purchased".

For larger loads a Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules will be hired from Spain. The source says a separate deal with the Spanish air force is to be finalised and that Italy offered a similar package. Including the new army vehicles, the deal will cost SFr120 million (\$69.2 million). Industrial offset of 100% is included and final approval requires a referendum to change the law to allow Swiss armed forces to transport military equipment overseas. EADS says it expects a contract to be signed next October and deliveries in 2003.

Denmark has ordered three C-130J-30 Hercules and has taken

an option on a fourth transport. Deliveries are set for the fourth quarter of 2003. The Danish air force is to sell its three C-130Hs.

The Danish defence ministry was to select a transport in April this year, but the decision slipped because of the strength of the US dollar against the Danish Krone. An air force source says the exchange rate is still an issue and has forced the inclusion of an option rather than purchase of a fourth airlifter. The contract is worth DKr2.184 billion (\$255.7 million).

Unless a major shift in exchange rates occurs, the option is unlikely to be exercised until the next Danish defence plan, which will become active in 2005, says the source.

The contract includes the integration of an electronic warfare management system built by Denmark's Terma. □

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ RBS15 TIE-UP

Saab Bofors Dynamics and Diehl have signed a deal to co-operate on the former's RBS15 Mk3 anti-ship missile. Initially the pair will concentrate on integration and testing but later they will co-operate on production and maintenance. Saab will act as system co-ordinator and Diehl will be responsible for assembly and missile testing.

■ ARMED EXPLORER

MD Helicopters has completed testing of an armed Explorer helicopter at Fort Bliss, Texas. The helicopter is now cleared for use with the 0.5in General Dynamics GAU-19A gatling gun, 70mm (2.75in) unguided rockets and a 0.5in door mounted machine gun. The company says the work was for an international naval customer. Mexico is the only known naval Explorer user.