

## Beware of the pollie in the sun

By Dr Carlo Kopp

The ALP's entry into the fighter debate and commitment to retaining the F-111 is a clever political move, which effectively captures the high ground.

The \$1.3 billion for a 2015 withdrawal, which spokesman Chris Evans cited (page 1), is a conservative number, including operating cost for five years and an allowance for necessary upgrades. It effectively sets up the aircraft to go until 2020.

Numbers from Defence at the joint committee hearing demonstrated that the retirement of the F-111 chops RAAF strike capability by at least 43 percent, compared with White Paper planning. Also, F-111 upgrade costs were inflated by "double counting" hundreds of millions of dollars in guided munition war stocks. Defence also admitted it had no hard data to support the early retire-

ment decision.

Defence Minister Robert Hill's criticism of the ALP proposal failed to mention that Defence has for two years been sitting on an industry proposal to provide an interim gap filler for the F/A-18A, as fatigue life expires in the fleet.

With costs of the order of \$750-850 million, the proposal involves acquisition, overhauling and upgrading to Mil-Std-1760 capability 25 mothballed Pacer Strike F-111Fs, very similar to Australia's F-111C. These aircraft would be used as dual-role, air-defence interceptors and strike aircraft, supplanting the 77 Squadron F/A-18 inventory and reducing F/A-18A fatigue life consumption by at least 25 percent – enough to avoid the need for expensive fuselage rebarrelling.

The news on the JSF will get

worse before it gets better. A 2012 delivery remains unlikely. With the prospect of further bad news from the US and the region, and more disclosures on the extent to which Defence guessed and inflated F-111 costs, Defence has provided the ALP with a big stick to beat the Coalition.

This is a political freebie which the ALP is certain to exploit to full advantage, given the acrimonious pre-election rhetoric.

During the 1980s the hard left of the ALP wanted to kill off the F-111. It failed because of resistance by the Coalition and ALP right. Today we observe a Coalition Defence Minister implementing a 1980s hard-left ALP policy position, while the ALP espouses a 1980s ALP right and Coalition policy position. Any more surprises this year?

## Hawker P snaps up Flight Support

SYDNEY – Hawker Pacific has continued its strategic expansion with the acquisition of Sydney rotary wing maintenance repair and overhaul company, Flight Support International (FSI).

Hawker Pacific is the exclusive sales representative for Bell Helicopters in Australia and PNG and has the sole Bell Helicopter customer services facility in the Philippines and New Zealand.

Hawker Pacific is also the sales

representative for Bell Helicopter Textron and Bell/Agusta Aerospace Company in the Arabian Gulf States of Bahrain, Qatar the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman.

Hawker Pacific CEO Alan Smith said the acquisition is a further step in the strategy to establish Hawker Pacific as a leader in rotary wing.

## Shackleton joins Austal

PERTH – The former Chief of the Royal Australian Navy, Vice Admi-

ral (Rtd) David Shackleton AO, has joined Austal as an advisor.

Executive chairman John Rothwell said Shackleton will provide general strategic advice on Australian and international naval and defence industry opportunities including those expected to arise from the Australian Government's naval shipbuilding program.

Rothwell said Shackleton was instrumental in shaping the Navy's future combat capabilities during his tenure and particularly in achieving a broader strategic partnership between the United States Navy and the Royal Australian Navy.



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