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Submission: Equipping Our Forces

The Howard Government in its defence policy statement, Defence Update 2005 described:

"The first duty of the Australian Government is to provide for the security and defence of Australia and Australian interests."

It therefore remains important for the nation to continue providing the men and women of the Australian Defence Force with the equipment to give them an edge over any adversary in the performance of their roles in the defence of the nation.

Purchase of the F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter

Australia now stands on the brink of the most significant fighter aircraft acquisition in our history. The decision to acquire the F-35 Lightning II to replace the F/A-18A/B Hornet fleet is the correct choice for the future of our air force. In joining the project to develop this aircraft, we have an opportunity to become an operator of an exceptional aircraft that will be adopted by some of our most important allies. We need to ensure we capitalise on the defence synergies this provides.

The notion that Australia should chose another aircraft is misinformed. The alternatives mentioned, the Eurofighter Typhoon, the F/A-18E Super Hornet and the F-22 Raptor are unsuitable for Australia. The Eurofighter and the F/A-18E are both fourth generation fighters and their ability to give Australia the edge in air combat would be lower than the fifth generation F-35. The F-22 currently has an export ban imposed by the United States Congress and is prohibitively expensive per unit; any purchase would result in Australia's fleet size and capability being greatly diminished. Few, if any of our allies outside of the United States would use this fighter, reducing the suitability of this aircraft.

As part of our purchase of up to 100 F-35 Lightning II we strongly encourage the Government to purchase one-third of the total fleet as the short take off and vertical landing (STOVL) F-35B variant. This would allow the Australian Defence Force to increase force projection capability greatly beyond our borders when combined with the new Canberra-class amphibious assault ships planned for the Royal Australian Navy. With the Royal Australian Air Force retiring the F-111 as Australia's front line strike aircraft and replacing it with the F/A-18F Super Hornet, our maximum strike range will be reduced. By adopting the STOVL F-35B for naval operations the inherently portable nature of Australia's fleet will allow us to position this flexible aircraft in fields of deployment across the globe and increase our potential strike range. This type of deployment proved especially effective during the 1982 Falklands Conflict when the United Kingdom was able to deploy the Harrier aircraft, the F-35B's direct predecessor, from her aircraft carriers to provide close air support and air defences to British troops engaged in conflict on land. In addition, the Harrier's STOVL capability allowed it to operate from the low grade, short airstrips on the Falklands otherwise unsuitable for conventional fighters. The F-35B presents a great opportunity for Australia to augment our military with this kind of tactical advantage. It would be exceptionally beneficial for likely future operations that the ADF may be involved in as it could be readily deployed and its STOVL capabilities allow for flexible operation from a variety of platforms.

A Review of Australia's use of Landmines

Australia has ratified the 1997 Ottawa Convention that bans the use and stockpiling of anti-personal landmines. This treaty fails to distinguish between "dumb" landmines and smart landmines and as signatories we deprive our armed forces of an important tool

that can be used to protect our servicemen and limit the military effectiveness of our enemies.

There must be a clear distinguishing between humanitarian efforts to clear mines in post-conflict environments and the use of land mines by our armed forces. The indiscriminate and irresponsible use of landmines by other states and non-state parties ought not have bearing on Australia's choice to use smart land mines. Those landmines that continue to injure civilians in conflict and post-conflict environments are "dumb" landmines that do not contain any self-destruction features.

The technology exists to allow the manufacture and deployment of smart landmines that deactivate automatically after a period of time has passed. The United States has manufactured landmines that self-destruct with testing of some 32,000 smart landmines since 1976 showing a rate of self-destruction of 99.996 percent.

Smart landmines can be responsibly used by our armed forces to protect our troops and deny territory and safe passage to our enemies, while minimising the risk to civilians. Australia can continue to provide valuable assistance to remove landmines from post-conflict environments, this however should not be confused with the responsible use of smart landmines by our armed forces, which have and continue to act with honour in the field with the highest consideration for the life and safety of non-combatants.

The use of smart landmines by the Australian Defence Force ought to be determined by military necessity and not restricted by other considerations. Our emphasis must be on the deployment of smart landmines by our armed forces and to work on limiting the use and spread of land mines that do not enjoy such safeguards.

We therefore urge an immediate review of Australia's commitment to the Ottawa Convention and other agreements that would prohibit the use or stockpiling of "smart" anti-personal landmines. This review should investigate the types of smart landmines available for use by our armed forces as well as the need for our armed forces to use smart landmines in current or future deployment.

#### Contributors

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I agree to my submission being published on the Defence website

I agree to my submission being quoted in the Community Consultation Report