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Defence Portfolio

SENATE ESTIMATES QUESTION

(Question No.90)

Cleared
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Senator Peter Whish-Wilson asked the Department of Defence the following question, upon notice, on 05 November 2021:

1. Has the Department of Defence had the opportunity to formally review the report completed by the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence titled 'Preliminary Assessment: Unidentified Aerial Phenomena' published in June 2021?
2. What guidance, if any, has the Department sought on the publication of the US report and the implications for Australian aerospace?
3. Is the 'Unusual Aerial Sightings Policy' still in effect, and if so when was it last reviewed? If it is not in effect or has been superseded,
4. In 2011, the Department of Defence reported that, in response to a FOI request from the Sydney Morning Herald, it had 'discovered one file, which had not been destroyed but could not be located'. If it could not be located, how would the Department know that the file had not been destroyed? Were all the files referenced hardcopy only (i.e. not digital)?
5. A response from the Department dated 8 June 2011 states that members of the public making reports of "unusual aerial sightings" are directed to their local police authority. What is the protocol for members of the defence forces when reporting such sightings during military operations and/or normal duty?

Senator Peter Whish-Wilson – The Department of Defence provides the following answer to the Senator's question:

1. The Department of Defence has not formally reviewed the report.
2. The Department of Defence has not sought guidance on the publication.
3. The Unusual Aerial Sightings Policy was last reviewed in November 2003 and cancelled 25 March 2013.
4. A file was confirmed in 2008 to be at the National Archives of Australia. The interest of its location was raised again in 2011, however Defence was unable to verify its location nor held record of the file being destroyed. As such and to date, the Department of Defence cannot confirm its current existence.
5. The Department of Defence does not have a protocol for reporting or recording of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAP) or Unidentified Flying Objects (UFO). The Air Force ceased handling reports of UAP or UFO in 1996 after determining that there was no scientific or other compelling reason for the Air Force to continue to devote resources to the recording and investigation of UAP or UFO.

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