

Budget Estimates: May 2023  
Last updated: 23 May 2023

PDR No: SB23-000235  
Unidentified Aerial Phenomena/Unidentified  
Flying Objects

Key witness/es: Air Marshal Robert Chipman

## Unidentified Aerial Phenomena/Unidentified Flying Objects

**Handling Note:** Air Marshal Robert Chipman, Chief of Air Force, to lead on topic.

### Key Messages

- Defence does not have a policy governing the reporting or recording of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena by either members of the public or Defence members.
- The Air Force ceased the handling of reports of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena in 1996, after determining there was no scientific or other compelling reason to continue to devote resources to the recording and investigation of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena.
- Defence safety of flight incidents, including those potentially posed by Unidentified Aerial Phenomena, are handled by the Defence Aviation Safety Authority, with civilian safety of flight incidents the purview of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority.

### Talking Points

- Under Air Force Aviation Reporting protocols, there has been no records of observations or sightings of unidentified aircraft over the past ten years.
- Any unidentified aircraft identified by Air Force pilots or personnel entering military controlled airspace or posing a safety risk to military aircraft are subject to Air Force Aviation Safety Reporting protocols.
- Aircrew can report unidentified aircraft to airspace control agencies and report unusual or unexpected activity through Aviation Safety procedures.
- We are aware of the All-Domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) within the United States Department of Defense and continue to monitor their reports.
- We are aware of the latest reporting on 19 April 2023, that they are examining a number of cases, however, they have not found any credible evidence of extra-terrestrial activity, off-world technology, or objects that defy the known laws of physics.
- Air Force's position continues to be that there is no scientific or other compelling reason to divert resources to the recording and investigation of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena. This aligns resources with the priorities, mission and objective of Defence.

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## Background

- . On 19 April 2023, the United States Department of Defense, released a news article on the testimony of Senator M Kilpatrick, Director of the All-Domain Anomaly Resolution Office, at their Senate Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities.
- . The article summarises the Senator's testimony:
  - An Unidentified Aerial Phenomena is anything in space, in the air, on land, in the sea or under the sea that cannot be identified and might pose a threat to United States military installations or operations.
  - The Department is working to better understand respond to Unidentified Aerial Phenomena.
  - All-Domain Anomaly Resolution Office scientists continue to improve their data collection and implementation of rigorous scientific and intelligence analysis to resolve cases in a systematic and prioritised manner.
  - Only a very small percentage of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena reports display signatures that could be reasonably be described as 'anomalous'. The majority of reports demonstrate mundane characteristics of balloons, unmanned aerial systems, clutter, natural phenomena or other readily explainable resources.
  - The All-Domain Anomaly Resolution Office have found no credible evidence thus far of extra-terrestrial activity, off-world technology, or objects that defy the known laws of physics.
- . On 11 January 2023, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence delivered the Annual Report on Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (now Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena) to Congress as required by their National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022.
- . The Report summaries that:
  - Unidentified Aerial Phenomena continue to represent a hazard to flight safety and pose a possible adversary collection threat.
  - Since their publication of their preliminary assessment in June 2021, Unidentified Aerial Phenomena reporting has increased, however could be attributed to a concentrated effort to destigmatise the topic.
  - The All-Domain Anomaly Resolution Office has been established as the United States Department of Defense focal point for Unidentified Aerial Phenomena.

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- Coordinated efforts between the United States Department of Defense and other Government agencies to collect and report Unidentified Aerial Phenomena events have resulted in increased data sets, spanning multiple security domains.
- On 25 June 2021, the United States Office of the Director of National Intelligence released a Preliminary Assessment: Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (the Report) to provide an intelligence assessment of the threat posed by Unidentified Aerial Phenomena and the progress the United States Department of Defense Unidentified Aerial Phenomena Task Force has made in understanding this threat.
- The Report does not draw conclusions on what Unidentified Aerial Phenomena are and most remain unexplained, mainly due to lack of data.
- The Report finds no evidence that Unidentified Aerial Phenomena are extra-terrestrial in origin.
- The Report did reach the following conclusions:
  - In a limited number of incidents, Unidentified Aerial Phenomena reportedly appeared to exhibit unusual flight characteristics. These observations could be the result of sensor errors, spoofing, or observer misperception and require additional rigorous analysis.
  - There are probably multiple types of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena requiring different explanations based on the range of appearances and behaviours described in the available reporting.
  - Unidentified Aerial Phenomena clearly pose a safety of flight issue and may pose a challenge to United States national security. Unidentified Aerial Phenomena would also represent a national security challenge if they are foreign adversary collection platforms or provide evidence a potential adversary has developed either a breakthrough or disruptive technology.
- On 23 November 2021, the United States Director of National Intelligence directed the establishment of the Airborne Object Identification and Management Synchronisation Group to coordinate reporting across United States Department of Defense and other United States agencies, with the goal to minimise flight safety and national security concerns.
- Defence has no plans to replicate a similar mechanism. The Defence Aviation Safety Authority and Civil Aviation Safety Authority already serve this function across flight safety issues and apparatus exist for concerns regarding National security.
- Historically the Air Force was responsible for handling Unidentified Aerial Phenomena reports, however that ceased in 1996. If civilians wish to report Unidentified Aerial Phenomena they should contact their local police authorities, or get in contact with a civil Unidentified Flying Object research organisation.

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- Unidentified Aerial Phenomena may also be referred to as Unidentified Flying Objects (UFO) or Unusual Aerial Sightings (UAS). Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAP) is the contemporary term for such phenomena.

## Supporting information

### Questions on Notice

#### Supplementary Budget Estimates: 9 November 2022

- In QoN 28, **Unidentified Aerial Phenomena**, Senator Whish-Wilson (Green, Tasmania) asked whether the Royal Australian Air Force had held discussions with the United States on the topic of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena.

#### Budget Estimates: 19 April 2022

- In QoN 38, **Unidentified Aerial Phenomena**, Senator Whish-Wilson (Green, Tasmania) asked for advice regarding the Royal Australian Air Force Aviation Safety Reporting and for reports of "unusual or unexpected events" in the past 20 years.

#### Additional Budget Estimates: 25 February 2022

- In QoN 20, **Unidentified Aerial Phenomena**, Senator Whish-Wilson (Green, Tasmania) asked for advice on existing processes or protocols within the Royal Australian Air Force regarding unidentified aircraft.

#### Supplementary Budget Estimates: 27 October 2021

- In QoN 29, **Unidentified Aerial Phenomena**, Senator Peter Whish-Wilson (Green, Tasmania) asked for advice on existing processes or protocols within the Royal Australian Air Force regarding unidentified aircraft.

#### Supplementary Budget Estimates: 27 October 2021

- In QoN 90, **Unidentified Aerial Phenomena**, Senator Peter Whish-Wilson (Green, Tasmania) asked for advice regarding a report published June 2021 by the United States Office of the Director of National Intelligence titled 'Preliminary Assessment: Unidentified Aerial Phenomena'.

## Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests

- Air Force continue to receive a number of FOIs on Unidentified Aerial Phenomena from constituents.

## Recent Ministerial Comments

- No recent comments.

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Relevant Media Reporting

· None

<b>Division:</b> Air Force	
<b>PDR No:</b> SB23-000235	
<b>Prepared by:</b> s47E(d) RAAF Ministerial Liaison Office Directorate Strategic Issues Management Mob: s22 Date: 6 April 2023	<b>Cleared by Division Head:</b> Air Vice-Marshal Glen Braz Deputy Chief of Air Force Air Force Headquarters Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d) Date: 8 May 2023
<b>Consultation:</b> Air Force Headquarters Air Vice-Marshal Wendy Blyth, Head of Air Force Capability	Date: 1 May 2023 Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d)
<b>Cleared by CFO / DPG / DSR:</b> Date: N/A	
<b>Cleared by Deputy Secretary (or equivalent Band 3/3*):</b> Date: 22 May 2023	
Air Marshal Robert Chipman, Chief of Air Force Air Force	

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**Questions on notice referred to within the brief:**

**Supplementary Budget Estimates (QoN 28)**

**Topic: Unidentified Aerial Phenomena**

**Senator Whish-Wilson**

**Question**

Senator WHISH-WILSON: At the US Congressional hearing on UAP back in May, the Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence, Scott Bray, confirmed that, since the release of this preliminary report in 2021, they now had 400 case reports they were considering. Most of them were from pilots like you. He was quoted at those hearings as saying that the US had brought many allies and international partners into their discussions on UAP. Given how close we are to the US, have there been any discussions with Australian intelligence services or the Air Force in relation to their approach—

Senator WHISH-WILSON: You're 'not aware'; does that mean that this just hasn't come across your desk, or can you say categorically there haven't been any?

**Answer**

The Royal Australian Air Force has not held any discussions with the United States on the topic of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena.

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## Budget Estimates (QoN 38)

### Topic: Unidentified Aerial Phenomena

### Senator Whish-Wilson

#### Question

What the protocols for RAAF Aviation Safety Reporting that relate to unidentified aircraft identified by Air Force pilots or personnel entering military controlled airspace or considered to pose a safety risk to military aircraft? What records of observations or sightings of unidentified aircraft have been made over the past 20 years? What records of “unusual or unexpected events” (referring to previous QoN) have been made through the RAAF Aviation Safety Reporting procedures over the past 20 years?

#### Answer

The protocol for reporting of unusual, or unexpected airborne events is through Air Traffic Control or other military control reporting agencies. If the event manifests in a safety issue, then normal, safety reporting protocols are enacted.

There are no records of observations or sightings of unidentified aircraft made over the past 20 years.

There are no records of “unusual or unexpected events” made through the RAAF Aviation Safety Reporting procedures over the past 20 years.

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## Budget Estimates (QoN 20)

### Topic: Unidentified Aerial Phenomena

### Senator Whish-Wilson

#### Question

During the last Supplementary Budget Estimates (in response to a question on notice), the Department of Defence advised that there is no protocol for reporting or recording Unidentified Aerial Phenomena or Unidentified Flying Objects.

1. In a scenario that an airforce pilot, or airforce personnel on the ground (such as monitoring radar), detects or sights an aircraft over Australian airspace, or in their sphere of operation, but is unable to identify the nature of the craft, what is the process/protocol for pilot and/or personnel to report their observation?
2. If there is an existing protocol – how many such observations or sightings have been made in the past 10 years? If there is no protocol – by what means does the air force maintain the security of Australian Airspace in dealing with unidentified craft?
3. What encouragement is given to pilots to make reports of aircraft they cannot identify?

#### Answer

1. Any unidentified aircraft identified by Air Force pilots or personnel entering military controlled airspace or pose a safety risk to military aircraft are subject to RAAF Aviation Safety Reporting protocols.
2. Under RAAF Aviation Reporting protocols, there has been no records of observations or sightings of unidentified aircraft over past ten years.
3. There is no specific encouragement given to pilots to report aircraft they cannot identify, rather to report unusual or unexpected events through RAAF Aviation Safety Reporting procedures.

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## Supplementary Budget Estimates (QoN 29)

Topic: Unidentified Aerial Phenomena

Senator Whish-Wilson

### Question

Senator WHISH-WILSON: Does the characterisation of the DOD, in relation to their report, of both intent and advanced technology concern you? Basically, they're saying they can't explain what these things are, but they would like to better understand them.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: Would it be possible for you to see if, across the other services, there has been any kind of reporting system in relation to this in Australia?

Senator WHISH-WILSON: Okay. Typically, would something like Jindalee be able to pick-up fast-moving objects, or is it more designed to look at ships and—

### Answer

The Department of Defence does not have a protocol for reporting or recording of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena or Unidentified Flying Objects.

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## Supplementary Budget Estimates (QoN 90)

### Topic: Unidentified Aerial Phenomena

### Senator Whish-Wilson

#### Question

Senator WHISH-WILSON: Does the characterisation of the DOD, in relation to their report, of both intent and advanced technology concern you? Basically, they're saying they can't explain what these things are, but they would like to better understand them.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: Would it be possible for you to see if, across the other services, there has been any kind of reporting system in relation to this in Australia?

Senator WHISH-WILSON: Okay. Typically, would something like Jindalee be able to pick-up fast-moving objects, or is it more designed to look at ships and—

#### Answer

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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