



Public Statement by the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit Major Projects Report

Defence acquisition projects are characterised by their high cost and the fact completion within budget, to schedule, and according to the intended capability, continues to be a challenge.

In 2008, the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit expressed its view that greater transparency in Defence acquisitions was required—at the time there was an absence of clear, consistent and precise information on which to make an assessment about the status and history of troubled acquisition projects.

For the past eighteen years, the Committee has scrutinised Defence acquisition governance and performance through the Major Projects Report, prepared by the Department of Defence and the Australian National Audit Office at the request of the Parliament.

In that time, the Committee has observed some improvements in Defence accountability and project governance, including in risk management, compliance reviews, budget reporting, records management, lessons, and oversight of projects of concern and projects of interest.

While the need for scrutiny of Defence acquisition governance and performance remains as critical as it always has been, the means by which it best occurs has to evolve in the broader context of changing strategic circumstances where information on aspects of Defence acquisitions has become increasingly classified.

In this context, the Committee has observed a steady reduction in the number of projects that can be reported on publicly through the Major Projects Report. As more capability programs become highly classified, the ability of the Parliament and the public to scrutinise major Defence acquisitions through a single consolidated report has been progressively constrained. This trend has reinforced the need to adapt the Committee's approach to oversight to ensure meaningful scrutiny of Defence expenditures continues, even as the nature of the information involved becomes more sensitive.

The Committee has resolved not to request the Department of Defence and Australian National Audit Office continue to produce the Major Projects Report. However, maintaining scrutiny of Defence acquisition governance and performance by the Parliament remains imperative.

The Committee will transition to a process where it examines in greater detail the Auditor-General's performance audits in the Defence portfolio. The Committee will also decide in the coming months on a structured and robust program of scrutiny that will require Defence to furnish information to the Committee for its examination.

When established, the Committee expects to work with the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Defence to ensure appropriate scrutiny of the Defence portfolio continues to occur.

As a statutory committee, the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit has wide ranging powers to self-refer inquiries and will make use of its powers and authorities to ensure there remains accountability for what are very significant public expenditures.

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