

Department of Defence

JCPAA Disposal of Specialist Military Equipment Hearing – 14 May 2015

Question on Notice No. 1 - Ongoing monitoring program for display Caribou

Mr Taylor asked on 14 May 2015, Hansard page 6:

Mr TAYLOR: With the particular aircraft that are on public display, is the asbestos safe.

Ms Kelly: It is a slightly different case for those particular Caribou. There is an ongoing monitoring program for those particular ones. It is slightly different to the tanks, for example, which we have welded up so that they are not accessible. So that case is a little bit different.

Mr TAYLOR: When you say there is an ongoing monitoring program, the decision was made in 2009 to gift these and the asbestos is still there. Do we know whether they are safe?

Ms Kelly: I will probably take that on notice to answer it properly, because that particular one is with a heritage organisation, which is slightly different to selling it to the public, for example, like with B Vehicles. What we normally do is have a program in place to make sure that, in the case of Leopard tanks, they were welded up so that the asbestos is not accessible. I do not have at my fingertips exactly what the plan is for the Caribou, but there is an ongoing monitoring plan for the asbestos in those. We can give that to you in more detail later.

Mr Dunstall: I understand that we have two aircraft in flying condition that are being maintained by the heritage organisations concerned. We have a detailed plan in place to ensure they are maintained in an appropriate way to ensure they are safe. We can get more details for you about the nature of those plans. But obviously we would not be allowing those to be flying if the asbestos was not being safely managed.

Response:

The Department of Defence has retained three Caribou aircraft; transferred one Caribou aircraft to the Australian War Memorial; and disposed of two Caribou aircraft to the Historical Aircraft Restoration Society (HARS).

The three Caribou aircraft preserved by the Department of Defence for heritage purposes are on static display at the RAAF Museum at Point Cook, RAAF Base Townsville, and RAAF Base Amberley. Any residual Asbestos Containing Material (ACM) within the Caribou static display poses no threat to the general public. Caribou static display aircraft are maintained and monitored by Air Force Heritage. Personnel maintaining the static display aircraft and controlling public access are trained and required to strictly adhere to approved ACM policies.

A comprehensive list of hazardous material, including ACM, in Caribou aircraft is contained in the Defence Safety Manual. As part of the disposal process, Defence provided external recipients with this information.

One Caribou aircraft was transferred to the Australian War Memorial and it is also on static aircraft display in the memorial's Mitchell Annex storage area.

Regarding the safety of the two Caribou aircraft being flown by HARS, the Society has confirmed, both in its 2011 tender response documentation and as recently in writing as May 2015, that it has engineering procedures in place to deal with hazardous substances, including asbestos parts, as identified in the documentation provided by Defence.

HARS' technical staff are familiar with the procedures and are trained in management and removal of hazardous substances. Being a historical restoration society, HARS has considerable experience and understands the safety requirements of managing and maintaining heritage aircraft.

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Question on Notice No. 2 - Staff turnover at Australian Military Sales Office

Mr Wyatt asked on 14 May 2015, Hansard page 10:

Mr WYATT: Given that there would be a turnover of staff, in approximation how many staff would you have turned over since 2011?

Mr Dunstall: I will have to take that on notice. I have to say that we have done a significant rotation and change out of staff, including that we now have a different Director-General leading the organisation. So we have made significant changes to staff and we have invested a lot in training and development.

Response:

When the Australian Military Sales Office was established in July 2012, it incorporated the existing Defence Disposals Agency which had 11 staff members. Seven of these staff members, including the director, have since left the Australian Military Sales Office.

As mentioned during the hearing by Mr Harry Dunstall, acting Chief Executive Officer of the Defence Materiel Organisation, a new Director-General now leads the organisation, the appointment started on 27 January 2015.