Senate Standing Committee Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Additional Estimates – 04 March 2020

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: SSCFADT - AE - 4 March 2020 - Q84 - MRH90 design - Kitching

Question reference number: 84

Senator: Kimberley Kitching
Type of question: Written
Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 17 April 2020

Question:

With reference to page 186 of the Australian National Audit Office's 2018-19 Major Projects Report which states that major project issues with the MRH90 acquisition include: "The current design of the self-protection weapons system is not meeting capability requirements":

1. What are the problems with the MRH90 self-protection weapons system?
2. What steps are being taken to address these problems?

Answer:

1. The design of the MRH90 requires the weapon system to be mounted in the cabin door. The weapon therefore cannot be used simultaneously with other role equipment such as the fast roping, rappelling and extraction system, which is an essential part of the special operations role. The current gun mount, known as the Enhanced MRH90 Armament System (EMAS), was designed and procured separately from the prime acquisition contract subsequent to the initial NATO Helicopter Industries (NHI) gun mount which was assessed as not fit for purpose. The EMAS is a temporary solution as it cannot accommodate the preferred weapon system, the M134 mini gun, and does not provide sufficient clearance in the door for the safe conduct of fast roping and other Helicopter Insertion and Extraction Technique (HIET) operations required for special operations.

2. Airbus Australia Pacific (AAP) has been contracted to design and produce a new gun mount known as the Taipan Gun Mount (TGM). The TGM can accommodate the M134 mini gun or the MAG58 machine gun. It can be moved into an outboard stowed position that allows sufficient clearance in the door for HIET operations. However, the weapon system still cannot be fired whilst HIET operations are being conducted. These operations must be managed sequentially within the aircraft. Whilst an improvement over the existing system, risk will continue to be carried in the special operations role. The TGM has completed live firing flight testing and is scheduled to be released into service in August 2020.