

News story: Wedgetail is on the radar, Defence Secretary announces ahead of NATO conference

The E-7 Wedgetail Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) System is able to fly for long periods of time and manage the battlespace from the sky, providing situational awareness and tracking multiple airborne and maritime targets at the same time. It then uses the information it gathers to direct other assets like fighter jets and warships. It has already been proven on operations in the battle against Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

Further discussions are set to take place before any investment decision is made, as the MOD follows a stringent approvals process to ensure the aircraft meets the military requirement and represents value-for-money. If selected, UK industry could be involved significantly with the programme, from modification work to through life support.

Speaking ahead of the meeting of Defence Ministers in NATO, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The Wedgetail is the stand-out performer in our pursuit of a new battlespace surveillance aircraft, and has already proved itself in Iraq and Syria. Running air operations from the sky, it could be an excellent asset for the RAF and give us a real edge in this increasingly complex world.

Our future with Australia will already see us operate the same maritime patrol aircraft, world-class Type 26 warships and supersonic F-35 jets. Wedgetail may join that formidable armoury and help us work together to take on the global threats that we both face.

Following market analysis and discussions with other potential providers, the MOD has concluded that the potential procurement of the E-7 represents the best value for money option for the UK against need, whilst representing a significant opportunity for increased defence cooperation and collaboration with our key ally Australia.

The MOD will work closely with Boeing to ensure Britain's leading defence industry could also benefit from any deal.

Named after Australia's largest bird of prey, the wedge-tailed eagle, the high-performing aircraft has been proven on operations with the Royal Australian Air Force, having seen action against Daesh over Syria and Iraq and impressing US Forces in the 'Red Flag' series of large-scale exercises.

The Wedgetail uses a standard Boeing 737 airliner modified to carry a

sophisticated Northrop Grumman active electronically-scanned radar and can cover four million square kilometres over a single 10-hour period. If selected, it would replace the E-3D Sentry, which entered service in 1992.

It is a proven and reliable aircraft that has been in-Service with the Royal Australian Air Force for some time, with potential to considerably reduce the risk normally associated with acquiring a complex new platform of this nature. The aircraft is based on the Boeing 737 airliner family as is the P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft due to enter service in 2019.

The news represents a further development of the UK's increasingly close military capability and industrial relationship with Australia, who recently selected the British Type 26 design for its future frigate. That decision confirmed the UK's world-leading ship design capabilities, whilst strengthening collaboration in anti-submarine warfare and demonstrating the value of the global five-eyes partnership.

With its proven interoperability, the Wedgetail could also link up with the RAF's latest arrival, the F-35 Lightning, providing pilots with the latest intelligence and situational awareness demonstrating how a modernised next generation Air Force can fight and win in an increasingly complex and dangerous environment, characterised by high speed and low observability.

With Australia also a partner in the F-35 programme, the RAF and the Royal Australian Air Force will have further opportunities to work together across platforms and with other allies such as the United States to share and collect data and conduct joint training missions, all leading to faster, more effective and more integrated combat forces.