Australian businesses listed for fighter maintenance

HAYLEY SORENSEN

Australia has been chosen as one of four regional hubs to service the new F-35 Joint Strike Fighter jets but it's not yet clear what, if any, role the Northern Territory will play.

In announcing the deal worth up to $100 million to the Australian economy yesterday, Defence Industry Minister Christopher Pyne said the economic benefits would be spread across Australia, including Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney and Newcastle. Darwin was not mentioned.

A spokeswoman for Mr Pyne said the NT was not being forgotten in the deal.

She said the decision as to which companies would be involved in the maintenance work would be based on competitive tender.

"There will be more decisions made by the United States over which companies in Australia will have a role in maintaining the Joint Strike Fighter made over the next two years," she said.

"If Northern Territory companies wish to bid for that work they will have every opportunity to do so.

Companies already announced as lead contractors in the project include BAE Systems Australia, Northrop Grumman Australia, GE Aviation Systems Australia and RUAG.

None have operations based in the NT.

Australia is buying at least 72 of the advanced F-35A jets, and perhaps up to as many as 100, to form the core of the RAfF's air combat capability out to mid-century. Some will operate out of Darwin and Tindal Royal Air Force bases.

The RAfF plans to have the first two squadrons operational by 2020. The first aircraft do not arrive in Australia until 2018. As more aircraft enter service, the US plans to roll out repair capabilities. So far it has only assigned 65 of 774 repairable components with most work going to the UK and the Netherlands and just three going to Australia.

Production has been riddled with delays and budget blowouts as well as problems with flying in lightning and extreme heat.

NT snubbed in F-35 list

Peking joke now a reality

TAMARA HOWIE

It was a half-joking comment that scored the Darwin Entertainment Centre one of the biggest productions ever to come to the Territory.

The Australian exclusive of Peking Opera performance in Darwin later this month came about when DEC general manager Alan James mentioned in passing to the Opera's touring co-ordinator that he would love to bring the show to the Top End.

"I said to her almost half joking... if there was ever an opportunity for the Peking Opera to come to Darwin, we'd love it."

Two months later his phone rang offering Darwin an Australian exclusive.

"When I threw out the line, it was almost half joking but we're not shy on taking on a challenge and that's what we've done," Mr James said.

The Peking Opera will bring an entourage of 70 to Darwin, including 35 performers, for two separate shows - One Good Turn Deserves Another and White Snake Legend, plus a Gala Program from November 29 to December 1.

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