



Senator the Hon David Fawcett

Deputy Chair, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Senator for South Australia

MEDIA RELEASE

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STATEMENT ON 9NEWS REPORT ON THE MRH-90 TAIPANS

I acknowledge the broadcast today by 9News of a report on the MRH-90 Taipans, which highlights that concerns were raised by the Army Aviation Test and Evaluation Section regarding a particular software load in the Thales TopOwl Helmet-Mounted Sight & Display which has been assessed as posing an unacceptable risk to flight safety.

This was the topic of Defence Question on Notice (QON) no. 229 during Supplementary Budget Estimates in October 2023.

During my time in the Australian Defence Force (ADF), I flew with early versions of the TopOwl HMSD and fully support the decision to include it as a pilotage device for ADF aircraft.

The fault referred to in QON 229—and identified in 2020 by the Army Aviation Test and Evaluation Section—was with a particular software upgrade to the TopOwl, not with the TopOwl itself.

The update to the software introduced an ambiguity in the symbology that should have been rectified. My concern is with the potential flaws in the process that followed detection of this deficiency.

I will continue to work to understand the process that was applied and ensure that appropriate processes are in place to ensure both the safety and the mission effectiveness of ADF aircraft.

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