



THE FAWCETT FLYER

JANUARY 2024



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Parliament resumed this week for the first time since the Christmas and New Years break, with Budget Estimates due to take place next week. In this January edition of the Fawcett Flyer, I have provided updates on several key developments regarding my work in the Senate.

For months now, I have engaged with the Albanese Government regarding its plans to disassemble and bury the entire retired fleet of Army MRH-90 Taipans rather than donating them to Ukraine—despite the fact that a large number of the aircraft remain airworthy and largely intact.

You can read more on the topic and watch a recent exchange I had with the Government on page 4.

This week, the Senate passed my private Senator's bill—the Defence Capability Assurance and Oversight Bill 2024.

The measures in the Bill are designed to expedite procurement while providing increased assurance that the weapons systems we acquire will do what we expect them to, will be available for use when required and will be effective against extant and emerging threats.

Read my full update on pages 2 and 3. I have also provided a link to my Second Reading Speech on the Bill.

Finally, in this update, I provide some brief comments on the Albanese Government's decision to break a key election promise and abandon the Stage 3 tax cuts.

I also provide an explanation of the Coalition's response to the Government's actions. You can find that piece on page 5.

As always, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like further information on any of my work.

Kind regards,

**SENATOR THE HON
DAVID FAWCETT**

Cover Photo: Israel, December 2023.



DEFENCE CAPABILITY ASSURANCE BILL PASSES SENATE

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2022-2023

The Parliament of the
Commonwealth of Australia

THE SENATE

Presented and read a first time

Defence Capability Assurance and Oversight Bill 2023

No. , 2023

(Senator Fawcett)

A Bill for an Act to establish the Defence Capability Assurance Agency, the Inspector-General of Defence Capability Assurance and the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Defence, and for related purposes

This week, the Australian Senate passed my private senator's bill, the Defence Capability Assurance and Oversight Bill 2024, with amendments.

The Bill will establish an independent statutory body (the Defence Capability Assurance Agency) to conduct risk assessment for defence materiel programs, and an Inspector-General of Defence Capability Assurance to ensure that Defence complies with the requirement for accurate risk assessment.

While there are many people in Defence who work hard to deliver good capability outcomes, we have long seen deficiencies in risk management.

Sometimes risks are not assessed at all or are assessed by people without appropriate qualifications and training—and therefore, decisions are not made based on accurate understanding of technical and scheduled risk.

On other occasions, qualified test agencies do an assessment and make an adverse finding, but those reports are either set aside or proactively dismissed. This has had a significant impact—sometimes on safety, often on capability.

Several ANAO reviews and parliamentary inquiries into Defence test and evaluation have resulted in a flurry of new process—but this has not been applied consistently, is inadequately resourced, and even when it is applied, is often ignored.

This Bill will ensure that risk is assessed by qualified people and that those people are suitably resourced. Additionally, it makes sure that their reports

are transparently available—to capability managers, senior decision-making committees in Defence, to the Minister for Defence (and therefore, the National Security Committee of Cabinet), and to an oversight committee of parliament.

The Government and Defence have both acknowledged that there is a problem given that internal reform efforts have not worked—despite attempts under both sides of Government over the past few decades.

The approach of independent risk assessment is consistent with that of our closest allies—including the United States and the United Kingdom.

It would rectify a longstanding problem that has degraded the operational effectiveness and safety of Defence equipment—costing billions of dollars of taxpayer money.

The risk of conflict is greater now than at any time since the Second World War. If there is ever a time to ensure that every dollar of Defence funding and every month is spent effectively, now is that time.

While I was pleased that a majority of the Senate voted to support the Bill, I was disappointed that the Government chose to align with the Defence Department in resisting reform.

The task ahead of me is to ensure that the legislation passes the House of Representatives.

You can watch my full second reading speech here:



GIVE THE TAIPANS TO UKRAINE

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Image: With the Ukrainian delegation in Copenhagen in October last year.

I have been deeply disappointed by the Albanese Government's appalling management of the Taipan helicopter fleet's retirement.

During Question Time recently, I challenged their inexcusable and wasteful decision to bury the Army's entire fleet of retired MRH-90s.

This includes those helicopters that are currently still airworthy—which could have instead been provided to Ukraine for use in casualty evacuations.

In October last year, while at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Parliamentary Assembly, I spoke with a Ukrainian military and political delegation about the retirement of the fleet and the potential to repurpose them in Ukraine's defence—especially for use in medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) roles.

Even before I left Copenhagen, I

ensured that the Government was made aware of my discussions with the Ukrainians, and of their interest in the proposal.

Despite this, the Government persisted with its plans to scrap the aircraft—arguing that the helicopters were beyond repair.

More recently, in direct contradiction to the Government narrative, photos have emerged showing that a number of the Taipans remain largely intact, and it has been confirmed that they are still airworthy.

I continue to urge Defence Minister Richard Marles to reverse his decision and donate the airworthy Taipans to Ukraine.

Watch my exchange with Minister Wong (representing Minister Marles) during Question Time:



ALBANESE GOVERNMENT TAX BROKEN PROMISE

Anthony Albanese's tax cut lie one more shot in Labor class war

THE AUSTRALIAN*



In late January, the Albanese Government broke a key election promise by abandoning the Coalition's Stage 3 tax cuts.

While Labor's plan to compensate for this with other tax cuts looks good in the short term, it leaves unsolved the systemic bracket creep problem that will leave numerous Australians paying more tax in coming years.

We need long-term solutions, not short-term band-aids.

Because the Coalition is committed to lower, simpler and fairer taxation, we will not oppose the tax cuts that are included in Labor's plan. But we have also committed to taking a tax reform package to the next election in keeping with the Stage 3 tax cuts that Prime Minister Albanese has abandoned.

Our package will provide for Australia's future security and guarantee the essential services on which Australians rely, delivering lower, simpler and fairer taxes that fight bracket creep and enshrine aspiration in our tax system.

As Liberals, we believe in "government that nurtures and encourages its citizens through incentive, rather than putting limits on people through the punishing disincentives of burdensome taxes..." ("Our Beliefs")

The Coalition believes in rewarding those who work hard and supporting a strong economy where anyone can get ahead. And we have a demonstrated record in government achieving just that.

Abandoning the Stage 3 cuts is just the latest in a long list of broken promises by the Prime Minister. As I pointed out in a speech late last year, far from the \$275 reduction in power prices promised by the Prime Minister, South Australian prices have gone up on average by \$512 for households and \$1,310 for small businesses. That is 24% for households and 29% for businesses.

You can watch my speech online by scanning the code:





At a Last Post Ceremony this week with my colleague Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds—remembering Private Frank Noel McGowen, who served during the First World War.



Left: Her Excellency Ms Arjaree Srirattanaban, Ambassador of Thailand to Australia. Right: United States Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi.



Left (and below): With Her Excellency Frances Adamson AC, Governor of South Australia, and others celebrating the launch of the SPiRiT Satellite late last year.



Right: Official opening of the Honorary Consulate of Romania in South Australia with Dr Petronela Adina Certog, Honorary Consul.





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