

COMMITTEES

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee

Reference

Senator WHISH-WILSON (Tasmania) (15:56): I, and also on behalf of Senator Lambie and Senator Xenophon, move:

That the following matter be referred to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee for inquiry and report by 1 May 2016:

The planned acquisition of the F-35 Lightning II (Joint Strike Fighter), with particular reference to:

- (a) the future air defence needs That the aircraft is intended to fulfil;
- (b) the cost and benefits of the program to Australia, including industrial costs and benefits received and forecast;
- (c) changes in the acquisition timeline;
- (d) the performance of the aircraft in testing;
- (e) potential alternatives to the Joint Strike Fighter; and
- (f) any other related matters.

Senator CONROY (Victoria—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (15:57): I seek leave to speak for a minute on this motion.

Leave granted.

Senator CONROY: While Labor strongly support the right of the Senate to inquire into a whole range of issues, we do not want the fact that Labor are supporting this Senate inquiry to remotely suggest that Labor do not fully support Australia's participation in the F35 project. We are strongly behind it, we have a long record of being strongly behind it and we continue to support Australia's participation in this project.

Senator RYAN (Victoria—Assistant Cabinet Secretary) (15:57): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator RYAN: The government does not support this motion, and, despite what Senator Conroy just stated to the chamber, the fact that the opposition is doing so is embarrassing. Successive Australian governments have been committed to the JSF program, including in Labor's 2009 and 2013 white papers.

Senator Conroy: We continue to be.

The PRESIDENT: Order on my left!

Senator RYAN: Both the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow minister, Senator Conroy, have made strong statements supporting the JSF. To date, Australian industry has secured contracts valued at US\$448 million. We estimate that Australian industry will win at least US\$1.5 billion in JSF related orders. This creates jobs. Last week the UK confirmed their program of 138 jets and will procure JSF earlier than planned. The government is committed to acquiring a fifth-generation JSF aircraft and the significant opportunities it provides for Australian industry and suspects that this is another deal whereby a vote in the Senate is being used for other purposes.

Senator WHISH-WILSON (Tasmania) (15:58): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: I respect the Labor Party and thank them for their support in this inquiry. This is simply about us doing our job—asking questions about what was the largest defence acquisition in this nation's history: \$25 billion for a strategic capacity around Joint Strike Fighters that many people question. There are a number of stakeholders across this public debate. This is an opportunity to scrutinise all aspects of this acquisition of the F-35, and it is simply us doing our jobs. I do not like the dog whistle politics from the government that goes with this. This is what we were elected to do and I think it is an opportunity for everybody to put the facts on the table and let the Senate look into this acquisition. It is worth pointing out that there has not been any public scrutiny of this. Our previous Prime Minister doubled down on this, financing 70 new aircraft with no warning at all. It is time we had a good look at this acquisition.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that the motion moved by Senator Whish-Wilson be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [16:04]

(The President—Senator Parry)

Ayes37
Noes27
Majority.....10

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