



## Farewell to a classic

### **Boeing honours RAAF F/A-18 Hornets on eve of retirement**

**November 26, 2021**

For more than 30 years, the Royal Australian Air Force's (RAAF) fleet of F/A-18 A/B Hornets have been at the forefront of regional airpower, protecting Australia and its allies in multiple military conflicts and acting as a formidable regional air deterrent.

With the fleet's impending retirement from service, Boeing is honouring the multi-role fighter that transformed Australia's air combat capability.

"The retirement of the Classic Hornets will be a sad day for many at Boeing, but it will also be filled with immense pride at our role in its success over the past four decades," said Boeing Defence Australia's vice president and managing director Scott Carpendale.

"For much of that time, Boeing – both here in Australia and in the US -- has partnered with the RAAF to deliver a world-leading platform that has remained a formidable and highly capable air combat capability for the Australian Defence Force."

#### **A new era in Australian airpower**

Boeing's long partnership with the RAAF on the Classic Hornets commenced on 20 October 1981 when Sir James Killen, Australia's then defence minister, announced the F/A-18 would replace the RAAF's aging Dassault Mirage III fighter.

The order, for 75 Hornets—57 single-seat A models and 18 two-seat B models—was to provide Australia with an unmatched regional air defence capability. It would also give the RAAF a leap forward in technology, flexibility and versatility.

The first two Hornets were built by Boeing heritage company McDonnell Douglas in St Louis, Missouri and were flown on a non-stop 15-hour flight from U.S. Naval Air Station Lemoore, California to RAAF Base Williamtown, New South Wales on 17 May 1985.

The rest of the fleet was assembled at the Government Aircraft Factory (GAF) in Victoria. GAF later became Aerospace Technologies of Australia which, through acquisitions, became part of Boeing Australia.

The Hornets officially entered RAAF service on 4 May 1985 and, over the ensuing decades, it was Australia's frontline fighter, deploying to various multinational military exercises and combat operations including Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom in the Persian Gulf. In 2015, six Hornets from 75 SQN replaced Super Hornets in Operation OKRA, the ADF's contribution to the international fight against Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

### **Transforming the Hornet capability**

The Hornet's outstanding performance during these highly complex military campaigns – most recently in its third decade of service – is a testament to the extensive fleet enhancements delivered by the RAAF in partnership with Boeing and Australian industry over the past two decades.

In the early 2000s, Boeing Defence Australia (BDA) was selected as the prime contractor for Phase 2 of the AIR 5376 Hornet Upgrade (HUG) Program. The contract was delivered under multiple sub-phases over more than a decade and included a host of major structural and technological upgrades ranging from the installation of a new centre barrel to upgraded mission computer systems, radar and weapon systems.

“Boeing demonstrated its advanced capability in structural and systems upgrades and modification during HUG,” said Carpendale. “Throughout the different HUG phases, we consistently delivered the promised capability on or ahead of schedule and ultimately improved the fleet's lethality, survivability and interoperability with allied air forces, which enabled its stellar performance during military conflicts.

“Importantly, it also established a strong rapport with the RAAF and laid the foundations for the follow-on projects Boeing undertook.”

That work included a deeper maintenance contract, awarded at the beginning of 2013 and extended in 2015, followed in July 2017 with the Classic Hornet Sustainment Services (CHSS) contract under which BDA became the platform's Weapon System Integrator, coordinating logistics, engineering and maintenance services.

“The CHSS contract cemented our role in ensuring the best F/A-18 capability and availability for the RAAF, and was a testament to our trusted and integrated partnership with the RAAF established over many years,” said CHSS program manager Gail Collie, who also served for 22 years in the RAAF in support of the F/A-18 fleet before joining Boeing.

### **A lasting legacy**

Once the RAAF confirmed its plans to retire the Hornets, BDA’s role transitioned to also providing preparation for disposal services. To date the company has prepared and delivered 20 aircraft sold to the Royal Canadian Air Force, and one heritage Hornet for display at the Australian War Memorial.

“It’s gratifying to know the Hornets will have a permanent and prominent place at the War Memorial in recognition of its impact on Australia and our allies,” said Collie. “It’s also a fitting tribute to the thousands of women and men in the RAAF, Boeing and across Australian industry who partnered to deliver a world-leading capability in the protection of Australia and its interests.”

The Classic Hornet’s legacy will live on in the RAAF’s F/A-18 F Super Hornets, which are delivering next-generation multi-role strike fighter capability, and EA-18G Growlers, the most advanced airborne electronic attack platform providing tactical jamming and electronic protection.