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DEFENCE NEWS

F-35As to transform Australia's air combat capability

The Prime Minister announced on 23 April that Australia will acquire another 58 F-35A Lightning II (joint strike fighter) aircraft in a major boost to the nation's air combat capability. The additional aircraft will lift the total number of F-35As Australia will acquire to 72, after a previous decision to purchase 14. This will create a total of three operational squadrons – two at RAAF Base Williamtown and one at RAAF Base Tindal – and a training squadron at RAAF Base Williamtown.

The F-35A will replace the RAAF's fleet of F/A-18A/B Hornets. The first aircraft will arrive in Australia in 2018, with Number 3 Squadron operational by 2021. All 72 aircraft are expected to be operational by 2023. The total cost will be \$12.4 billion including about \$1.6 billion for new facilities at RAAF Bases Williamtown and Tindal.

The F-35As will be complemented by the RAAF's 24 F/A-18F Super Hornet (multirole fighter) and 12 EA-18G Growler (electronic warfare) aircraft.

Department of Defence