MINISTER UNVEILS FIRST BOMBARDIER CHALLENGER JETS FOR AMSA

News / Airlines, Business aviation



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development Warren Truss has unveiled the first batch of Bombardier Challenger CL 604 twin-jets which will replace Aerorescue Dorniers for the Australian Maritime Safety Authority's (AMSA) operations.

On Wednesday, Truss inspected the first of four Bombardier Challenger CL 604, which was currently being fitted for search and rescue purposes at Cobham Aviation Services's hangar in Adelaide.

Australia was responsible for 10 per cent of the globe for international maritime and aeronautical search and rescue services and therefore needed a world-class maritime search and rescue capability, Truss told reporters in Adelaide.

The special mission jets were being acquired by Adelaide-based Cobham Aviation Services under a $640 million, 12 -years contract that was awarded in 2014 and covered modifying, equipping, operating and maintaining the CL 604s.

A potential three-year extension to the contract would increase its value to more than $700 million.

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Truss said the aircraft would be equipped with “a whole range of new technologies” to respond rapidly, locate and assist people in distress in the water or on land.

Some of this technology was not available in the early search for missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370, he said.

The CL 604s will have forward-looking infra-red and anomaly detection sensors, live stream video to assist in planning rescues, and stores such as life rafts, survival equipment and satellite phones.

“The aircraft will also be able to live stream video of the situation in real time as they plan the rescue of those people,” Truss said.

“So this is an important investment in the safety of people on vessels or in remote areas across Australia who find themselves in trouble. The capability reflects our commitment to providing search and rescue responses in line with our international obligations for aeronautical and maritime search and rescue.”

The first CL 604, VH-XNC, arrived in Adelaide in December and was due to enter service in August, operating from a base in Perth. Two more aircraft – to be based in Cairns and Melbourne’s Essendon Airport – were expected to follow later in 2016. The fourth aircraft will be used for back-up and to replace aircraft which are off-line for maintenance.

Each of the new aircraft was valued at $6-7 million, fully equipped.

Cobham Aviation Services Peter Nottage said the company was “delighted to be bringing this sort of capability” to Australia.

Cobham was working with local companies to develop much of the equipment and technologies for the new aircraft, with most of the modification work being undertaken at the company’s Adelaide Airport facilities.

The aircraft would be operated with five-member crews – captain, first officer, visual search officer, electronic search observer and aircraft mission co-ordinator. They will be on permanent standby to enable search-and-rescue tasks to be mounted around the clock.

Truss said AMSA coordinated 429 rescues in 2015, saving 219 lives.

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