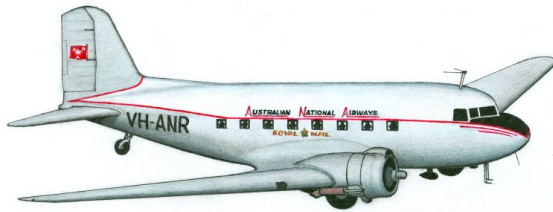


QUEENSLAND AIR MUSEUM



Founded 1974.
Located at Caloundra Airport on
Queensland's Sunshine Coast

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COPY

8 December 2010

The Hon Stephen Smith MP
Minister for Defence
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

I refer to my letter of 21 September regarding the disposal of F-111 aircraft. As we have not yet received a response from your office, I would appreciate your urgent advice on this matter.

In the absence of any official advice from your office, we have to accept the following report from *Air Force News* to be the official policy:

The remaining aircraft are then to be offered for general sale by tender for other groups or organisations to use as static displays. Any such group will be required to agree to pay the costs to make the aircraft inoperable (estimated to be in excess of \$1 million) so as to meet US Government approvals to transfer them from Defence, as well as the costs to remove asbestos from the aircraft and to restore them to displayable condition (estimated at up to \$1.5 million) before approval is given.

Presumably this offer to make aircraft available to "other groups or organisations" is intended to satisfy the Government's sole commitment to QAM that our request will be considered along with other interested parties. So once again we find ourselves at the mercy of the tender system which has consistently failed to provide for community groups like QAM. Not only do we have to come up with a competitive tender, but now we have to contend with an additional "flagfall" impost estimated to be in excess of \$2.5M. I would put it to you Minister that there is no community group in the nation that could afford that amount. In QAM's case, that is more than we have ever spent on capital works in our thirty-five year history and more than we dare aspire to in the foreseeable future.

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While we accept that an aircraft must be made safe for display, the quoted cost would appear to be nothing more than a contrived deterrent to prevent non-Government museums from displaying an F-111. The clear implication of this policy is that community group museums are not good enough to display an F-111 despite the fact that these groups are comprised of tax-paying volunteers who effectively paid for these aeroplanes in the first place. It is all very well to claim that the Government is fulfilling its heritage obligations by displaying F-111s at military establishments but are these aeroplanes accessible to the public? Clearly military establishments are obliged to have a high level of security and the level of that security is only going to increase in coming years.

It is also clearly understood that the Government has a need to prevent operational military equipment falling into the wrong hands and yet the Government has demonstrated on many occasions that where there is a will to do so, these problems can be overcome. I refer specifically to the recent gifting of Leopard tanks to various RSL Clubs around the country. While we applaud the Government's action in this case, we have great difficulty reconciling the Government's policy with the disposal of tanks with its policy on the disposal of F-111s. It is our understanding that not only have the Leopard tanks been gifted but they have also been demilitarised and delivered at Government expense. What is so different about QAM and the F-111 given that many of our volunteers are RSL members?

Another example of the prevailing double standard concerns the gifting of former RAN vessels as dive wrecks. Is it not true that these dive wrecks are gifted, demilitarised and delivered at Government expense? Surely the cost of demilitarising a guided missile destroyer would be significantly more expensive than the cost of demilitarising an aeroplane?

In the event that no appropriately constituted organisations are able to tender for an F-111, would it be a reasonable assumption that the aircraft set aside for public tender will be scrapped? If they are to be scrapped, will the successful tenderer be required to pay the estimated \$1M cost of decommissioning each aircraft? We estimate that there may be as many as eight aircraft available for public tender. If these aircraft are unsold and have to be scrapped, does that mean that the successful tenderer will be required to pay \$8M in "flagfall" just to destroy the airframes? Obviously, this amount exceeds the scrap value of the airframes by a huge margin so clearly scrapping the aircraft cannot be a commercial proposition unless the Government is absorbing the demilitarising cost. If the Government can absorb the cost of destroying taxpayers' property, why can it not absorb the cost of placing the aircraft on display to the people who paid for them?

As alluded to in my previous unanswered letter, there is more to this than the gifting of a single aeroplane to a museum. It's all about recognition. Does the Government accept that QAM's volunteers have provided a useful service to the community during the past 35 years or is it the Government view that we should give up what we are trying to do and leave it all to the Government owned museums? Clearly, if the policy pertaining to the F-111s is projected into the future, QAM can forget about acquiring any ex ADF aircraft forever.

Please do not underestimate the extent of feeling within this organisation and within our wider community regarding the Government's dismissive attitude to a group of citizens who are dedicated to nothing more than trying to put something back into their community.

We would greatly appreciate your urgent assurances that QAM is performing a valuable service to the community and that you will review your attitude to our request for an F-111 to be displayed on the Sunshine Coast. Please be advised that this matter is being followed with great interest by the local media and there is much public interest in taking up a petition.

Yours sincerely,

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Cliff F. Robinson
President