

NEWS

But the financial hardship out of the situation has been extreme.”

Anthony O'Rourke, chairman of a body corporate of nine units in Airlie Beach, told the committee insurance premiums had risen 225 per cent in one year.

“In 2009-10 our insurance was \$4,500. That increased in the following year, 2010-11, to \$14,500. Then last year, 2011-12, it went up to \$32,500. It was actually \$35,000 but I managed to get our broker to waive his fee, so we made a saving there.”

He said there was a glimmer of hope with an increasing number of miners coming to the town looking for places to rent.

While Airlie Beach appears to have been particularly badly affected, the financial difficulties caused by insurance hikes are affecting towns right along the coast, including Mackay and Proserpine.

Mackay resident and treasurer of a 20 unit body corporate, Mark Faulkner said their insurance costs went from around \$25,000 to \$102,000 in just a year.

“Our research has shown that if you have a stand-alone, four bedroom, split level house, your average insurance costs for that sort of dwelling are around \$2,000 to \$2,500, depending on your provider. On our calculations, we are paying in excess of \$5,000 per unit for having our insurance cover,” he said.

Mackay body corporate manager, Susan Seymour, said the insurance increases are impacting coastal areas.

“I am a branch manager for Body Corporate Services in Mackay. We look after over 120 buildings in Mackay, Moranbah, Emerald, Airlie Beach, Yeppoon and Rockhampton. The increase in insurance is coastal. You can get insurance for the inland and it has remained fairly stable. Airlie Beach has been hit significantly harder than any other region on the coast,” she said.

“Airlie will become a ghost town with empty units.”

The committee's report was released in March. •

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Strike fighter may fall short

Concerns raised over combat capabilities.



DEFENCE DIGITAL MEDIA

DOG FIGHT: *Aircraft performance questioned*

Aviation experts have warned federal parliament's Defence Committee that Australia's multi-billion dollar Joint Strike Fighter program looms as an expensive failure due to the jet fighter's limited stealth ability to avoid radar and weapons systems.

Peter Goon from the aviation think tank Air Power Australia told the committee he believes the F35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters, due for delivery in 2015, will struggle in combat against more stealthy fighters being developed by both China and Russia. He said the F35 was developed to complement the faster, more agile F22A Raptor, which the United States government will not sell to its allies.

“The Joint Strike Fighter is now more expensive than the larger and over three times more capable F22A Raptor,” Mr Goon said.

“Russia and China are now well advanced in their production of advanced stealth fighters specifically intended to be competitive with the superior United States F22A Raptor. The inferior Joint Strike Fighter, defined in aerodynamic performance and stealth only to attack lightly defended battlefield ground targets, has no prospect of ever successfully competing against these larger, more agile, higher flying and

much faster foreign stealth fighters, which also happen to be better armed.”

Mr Goon said the very limited stealth capabilities of the Joint Strike Fighter were inadequate for avoiding and surviving from threats such as advanced long range surface-to-air missiles and modern counter-stealth sensors and detection systems.

Air Power Australia's Dr Carlo Kopp queried the limitations in modern warfare of an aircraft with only enough stealth to evade attack from battlefield surface-to-air missile systems. He claimed the JSF's joint operational requirements document set very low expectations for the aircraft's speed, turning performance and agility and also for its stealth performance.

Dr Kopp told MPs that of the current range of stealth aircraft out there, the only ones that are difficult to see from nearly all directions and by a wide range of radars are the B2 batwing bomber and the F22 Raptor. He believed the JSF was really only stealthy in performance from the direction over the aircraft's nose, meaning it is only hard for radars to detect from the front, but can be seen from the sides, behind and below.

“That has big implications in combat, because if you are going up against a 1980s Soviet air defence system

of the type that we saw destroyed very effectively in Libya 12 months ago, a Joint Strike Fighter would be reasonably effective in that environment, because these older Soviet radars would not see it,” Dr Kopp said.

“But if you are putting it up against the newer generation of much, much more powerful Russian radars and some of the newer Chinese radars, the aircraft is quite detectable, especially from behind and from the lower sides.”

Defence simulations expert and former air force fighter pilot Christopher Mills, who works for RepSim, showed the committee computer simulations of a hypothetical air battle in 2018 between either 240 F35s, 240 F22 Raptors or 240 Super Hornets against an equivalent number of Chinese Sukhoi Su-35s off the northern coast of Taiwan. The hypothetical scenario proved devastating for the JSFs and complete annihilation for the Super Hornets.

“We sent out 240 F35As against the Su-35s, and 30 came back — out of 240,” Mr Mills said. “We sent out 240 Hornets and not a single Hornet came back. We sent out 240 F22s — 139 came back, and only 33 Sukhois came back. You would not expect an F35 to be able to take on an advanced fighter like the C35. It is an attack aircraft. To reinvent it as an air superiority weapon is a complete mistake. It is not.”

The managing director of RepSim Michael Price explained the simulations were done for global policy think tank RAND Corporation under a hypothetical scenario that by 2018 China would have developed high frequency over-the-horizon radar which would defeat the stealth characteristics of both the F22 and the F35. He was particularly damning of the upgraded Super Hornets that Defence hope will cover any delays in delivery of the JSF.

“The Super Hornet has got no stealth at all,” Mr Price said. “At the end of the day, it is a technological lemon

for a modern air-to-air combat aircraft. It has got one speed, so it will fall out of the sky as soon as you shoot it.”

When asked by MPs, neither Air Power Australia nor RepSim were able to provide the committee with any alternative jet fighter to purchase instead of the JSF. At previous hearings Air Power Australia had suggested keeping F111s operational for longer. They implied at this hearing that more pressure should be placed on the United States government to change its longstanding policy of not selling F22 Raptors overseas and then acquiring them for the Royal Australian Air Force.

The Defence Department and Lockheed Martin, which makes the JSF, are both expected to answer these criticisms at later hearings. •

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Wine quality may decline

Tasmania’s rich biodiversity and agricultural production are under threat from rising temperatures and falling rainfall, according to new climate change research.

Detailed climate modelling conducted by the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre shows average temperatures will rise by 2.9 degrees by the end of the century.

While significantly below the predicted global rise of 3.5 degrees over the same period, research centre CEO Dr Anthony Press told a House of Representatives committee inquiry into biodiversity that such a rise would still be enough to change the face of Tasmanian agriculture.

“The example we use a lot to demonstrate just how significant this might be is that Tasmania’s reputation as a pinot noir growing region will change significantly,” Dr Press said.

By the end of the century areas that grow pinot noir at the moment will be

far too warm to grow good pinot noir, he said.

The research also points to changes in rainfall patterns across the state, with the east and northeast receiving more rain while the southwest wilderness becomes drier, particularly in summer and autumn.

“Those kinds of changes to rainfall, rainfall patterns and temperature have the potential to significantly impact biodiversity,” Dr Press said. “There will be some species that will not be able to exist in the range that they are in at the moment.”

One example is Tasmania’s famous Miena cider gums, which exude a sweet drinkable sap in spring and are endemic to the region. The species is already facing extinction due to recent drought, and the projections made in the research do not point to a promising future.

Droughts, floods and bushfires are all predicted to increase in frequency and severity, which would be potentially devastating for Tasmania’s fragile wilderness ecosystems. •



WINE DECLINE: Climate change may affect vintages

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