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Boeing today announced it is offering its Next-Generation 737-700 aircraft to the Royal Australian Air Force as an Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) system platform. Australia has named the project "Wedgetail" in honor of its native eagle.

The 737 AEW&C platform, with its advanced technology and complete interoperability with the E-3 and 767 Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft, is designed to fill the airborne-surveillance needs of Australia. This new AEW&C platform will be equipped with a Northrop Grumman 360-degree, Multi-role Electronically Scanned Array (MESA) radar, which is able to track air and sea targets simultaneously.

Joining Boeing and Boeing Australia Limited on the Wedgetail team are Northrop Grumman Electronic Sensors and Systems Division (ESSD), formerly Westinghouse Electronic Systems Business Unit; and British Aerospace Australia.

Northrop Grumman will design and build the radar, and British Aerospace will help design and develop the radar as well as other sensors. Boeing Australia will be directly involved with the aircraft and integration of the system. Boeing Australia and British Aerospace, the premier defense contractors in Australia, will assume the primary support roles for the Australian Defence Force well into the 21st century.

The 737 is the most popular and reliable jet aircraft in the world. Airlines and operators have ordered more than 3,300 737s, with more than 2,700 having been delivered. Because so many are in service, there is a world-wide base of suppliers, parts and support equipment. With its extended range and fuel efficiency, the Next-Generation 737-700 offers crews longer time on station.

"Boeing and Northrop Grumman ESSD have been the leaders in the AEW field for 25 years with their E-3 and 767 AWACS aircraft," said Larry Stamper, Boeing Team Wedgetail program manager. "The 737 will be an exciting addition to our AEW family, supported by a great Australian team."

A competitive Initial Design Activity is expected to begin later this year, with a production contract awarded in 1999. The Royal Australian Air Force plans to enter the AEW&C capability into service in 2002.

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