Wedgetail Aircraft Heading to Australia for First-Ever Visit

Boeing [NYSE: BA] today announced that an airborne early warning and control aircraft for Australia's Project Wedgetail will make its first visit to Australia at the Australian International Air Show in Avalon beginning March 15.

"Hundreds of Australian defence and industry personnel are working on the Wedgetail program and this visit is a great opportunity for them to see the aircraft and the excellent progress being made, said Air Vice-Marshal (ret.) Norman Gray, deputy chief executive officer of the Defence Materiel Organisation and head of the Australian Wedgetail Project team. "We still have a lot to do before final delivery in November 2006, but the teams should be proud of what they have achieved so far," Gray said.

After traveling 7,400 miles from Seattle, the aircraft will make its first stop at Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base Williamtown in Newcastle on March 14. RAAF Williamtown is the home base for 2 Squadron, the operating unit for the new Wedgetail fleet.

"The air show is an ideal venue to showcase this powerful new capability being developed for Australia," said Patrick Gill, Boeing vice president of 737 AEW&C programs. "The program is ahead of the contract schedule allowing us to bring the Wedgetail aircraft home for the first time."

Additional visits in Australia are planned for Canberra, RAAF Base Edinburgh in Adelaide and RAAF Base Amberley in Brisbane where members of the Boeing-led Wedgetail team support the program.

At Edinburgh, BAE Systems Australia, is providing two mission support segments, an operational mission simulator, an AEW&C support facility, electronic warfare self protection and electronic support measures.

In Amberley, Boeing Australia Limited will modify four 737-700 aircraft transforming them into the Wedgetail AEW&C platform. Modification work begins in November 2005. Boeing Australia also is responsible for logistics support, and managing the production of the operational flight trainers and AEW&C Support Centre at Williamtown.

The first Wedgetail aircraft had a successful maiden flight in May 2004 and is now undergoing a comprehensive FAA airworthiness certification program. Australia has purchased six aircraft for its Wedgetail fleet. Delivery of the first two aircraft currently being modified in Seattle, is scheduled for 2006, with the other four aircraft delivered by 2008.

Turkey also is under contract for four 737 AEW&C aircraft and mission system design activities are well underway. The first aircraft is scheduled for delivery in 2007.

The 737 AEW&C is based on the Boeing Next Generation 737-700 featuring 21st century avionics, navigation equipment, and flight deck. It has an operational ceiling of 41,000 feet and a range in excess of 3,500 nautical miles.

The 737 series is one of the most popular and reliable jet aircraft in the world and that has resulted in a worldwide base of suppliers, parts and support equipment.

Northrop Grumman's Multi-role Electronically Scanned Array (MESA) radar is the critical sensor aboard the 737 AEW&C. The MESA array is designed to provide optimal performance in range, tracking, and accuracy. The radar is able to track airborne and maritime targets simultaneously and can help the mission crew direct the control of high-performance fighter aircraft while continuously scanning the operational area.

The 737 AEW&C is designed to provide airborne battle management capability with 10 state-of-the-art mission system consoles. It continues more than 30 years of Boeing tradition in airborne surveillance and command and control with the 707 and 767 AWACS fleets. Currently the aircraft are operated by the United States, NATO, the United Kingdom, France, Japan and Saudi Arabia.

A unit of The Boeing Company, Boeing Integrated Defense Systems is one of the world's largest space and defense businesses. Headquartered in St. Louis, Boeing Integrated Defense Systems is a $30.5 billion business. It provides network-centric system solutions to its global military, government, and commercial customers. It is a leading provider of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems; the world's largest military aircraft manufacturer; the world's largest satellite manufacturer and a leading provider of space-based communications; the primary systems integrator for U.S. missile defense and Department of Homeland Security; NASA's largest contractor; and a global leader in launch services.

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