

Fight Tonight: Combat Readiness at the Speed of Relevance

18 September 2025, National Gallery of Australia

Context

The 2025 seminar series will identify and discuss strategic themes which impact the Whole of Australian Government, Defence and industry, as well as international partners in a multi-domain context. Given the increasingly complex set of threats and operational risks, it is also set within the context of the emerging issues aligned with the development of NDS26 and beyond.

The seminar series will address the need to balance near-term decisions in air and space capability to ensure Defence and industry investment also provides the sustainable foundations for future force structure planning and growth.

Aim

The aim of September seminar is to build on the theme of accelerating critical capabilities and link to the speed, responsiveness, and agility of air power to generate combat power at relatively low operational and political risk as global security settings deteriorate rapidly.

Further, with Air Force in reasonable shape in comparison to the other Services, the seminar will highlight the importance of national resilience, and that ongoing investment in air domain sustainment is imperative given its ultimate impact on combat power in terms of availability, capability, and readiness.

Background

The main contextual developments shaping the September seminar are:

- Recent observations from operations in Europe and the Middle East.
- Major changes to Australian defence policy unlikely following the Federal election.
- Defence is shifting from NDS Epoch 1 to Epoch 2 (2026 to 2030), the Objective Integrated Force, which will see ‘the accelerated acquisition of critical capabilities’.
- Broader inflationary pressures are impacting sustainment costs and preparedness.
- Acquisition budget prioritises major Navy programs and guided weapons.
- US Government maintains pressure on allies to increase defence spending.
- UK Strategic Defence Review positions for an increased likelihood of near-term conflict.
- PLA remains the pacing threat.

Strategic Themes 2025

The Sir Richard Williams Foundation strategic themes for 2025 cover mass, depth, agility, industry involvement, and redundancy.

The intent of the themes is to provide an objective consideration of those measures which balance combat effectiveness with an increasing demand for efficiency in a fiscally constrained national security environment. While all themes are relevant across the NDS planning epochs, prioritisation of near-term effort is in Epoch 1 and 2 and generating and exploiting depth in air power:

Building Combat Mass and Depth Across Domains: How can new technology be applied to the extant force structure to enhance a focussed force and achieve critical mass and depth. The ability to mass power, plus sustain and replace it includes consideration of force protection and generation requirements for sustained operations across multiple rotations in a high threat environment where success is by no means assured. This could involve reliance on international partnerships. The focus of this theme relates to Epochs 1 and 2.

Generating Tempo Across Domains: How can the ADF respond at speed and scale across a vast geographical area in strategically relevant timeframes and remain survivable. The main focus is Epoch 2 and 3.

Enhancing Industry capability and the National Support Base: How can industry be more involved in planning to mitigate key replenishment, sustainment and preparedness risks not least in relation to cost, and the broader demand for increased capacity and workforce integration. Growing the industrial base to keep pace with the need for increased combat mass across domains will involve more detailed consideration of risk tolerance, and attributable equipment and weapon systems. The focus is Epoch 1 and 2.

Survive to Operate: How does the ADF build redundancy to sustain integrated operations across multiple domains and critical nodes in the face of an increasingly complex and lethal threat. Beyond the ADF there is the broader need for an objective assessment of industry competencies, workforce preparedness, and national will. Moreover, a central question emerges around whether the nation is ready for the realities of a future war? This is predominantly an Epoch 1 and 2 effort.

Agenda

Cutting across each of the strategic themes are policy, process, technology, basing / infrastructure, and workforce considerations including, but not limited to:

- Operational Risk Management: Balancing Lethality and Survivability
- Workforce: Management, Automation, and Development
- Training System Effectiveness & Mission Rehearsal
- Future Technologies and Collaborative Combat Systems
- Accelerating Capability Development
- Preparedness, Replenishment, Basing, Logistics & Supply Chains

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Draft Program (updated 17 September 2025)

Time	Topic	Speakers
0800-0830	Registration and breakfast	
0830-0835	Welcoming Remarks	ACM Mark Binskin AC (Retd) Chair, Sir Richard Williams Foundation
0835-0840	Introduction and MC	WGCDR Sally Knox Sir Richard Williams Foundation
0840-0920	RAF Perspective post DSR-25	Air Cdre Alun Roberts Royal Air Force
0920-1000	Global Trends: Air Defence and Strike	Prof Justin Bronk Senior Research Fellow/Editor, RUSI
1000-1020	Accelerating Critical Capabilities: Lockheed Martin's Perspective on Combat Readiness in a Multi-Domain Context	James Heading Lockheed Martin Australia
1020-1100	Break – Morning Tea	
1100-1120	Industrial Mobilisation at the Speed of Relevance: Exports, Sovereignty, and the Lessons of War	Mat Jones BAE Systems
1120-1210	Synchronising Non-Kinetic Effects Across domains: Space, Cyber and the EM Spectrum Facilitator: AVM (Retd) Zed Robertson DSC AM, Sir Richard Williams Foundation	LTGEN Susan Coyle AM, CSC, DSM Chief of Joint Capabilities PROF Justin Bronk Senior Research Fellow, RUSI
1210-1230	Investing in Australian Industry	AVM (Retd) Robert Denney AM Northrop Grumman Australia
1230-1300	Fight Tonight: Command Perspective	AIRCDRE Peter Robinson CSM Commander Air Combat Group
1300-1400	Lunch	
1400-1450	Panel - Building Resilience and Capacity across Defence and Industry Facilitator: Chris McInnes, Air Power Institute	COL David Beaumont PhD. National Support Concepts and Strategies GPCAPT Travis Hallen Strategic Design – Air Force Headquarters Mike Prior Boeing Defence Australia PROF Justin Bronk Senior Research Fellow, RUSI
1450-1520	Chief of Air Force in Conversation with AIRMSHL (Retd) Geoff Brown AO	AIRMSHL Stephen Chappell DSC, CSC, OAM, Chief of Air Force
1520-1530	Formal Close	ACM Mark Binskin AC (Retd) Sir Richard Williams Foundation