

Defence secretary announces new maritime patrol aircraft squadrons

DEFENCE SECRETARY ANNOUNCES NEW MARITIME PATROL AIRCRAFT SQUADRONS

The Defence Secretary announced the numbers of the UK's two new Maritime Patrol Aircraft squadrons and the first commanding officer on Thursday, 13 July 2017.

Nine new P-8A Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft will be operated by number 120 Squadron and number 201 Squadron from RAF Lossiemouth in Moray.

120 Squadron was the RAF's highest scoring anti-submarine unit in the Second World War with 14 kills. 201 Squadron can trace its origins back to the formation of No 1 Squadron, Royal Naval Air Service in 1914. Wing Commander James Hanson will oversee the formation of 120 Squadron from April 2018. 201 Squadron will form in 2021.

The aircraft's key role will be to help protect the UK's submarine-deployed nuclear deterrent and its two new aircraft carriers.

The UK Government is investing £3 billion over the next decade in its Maritime Patrol Aircraft capability.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

"Our nine new Poseidon aircraft are part of our plan to monitor and deal with increased threats to our country. They can operate at long range without refuelling and have the endurance to carry out high and low-level airborne maritime and overland surveillance for extended periods, helping keep us safe. The P-8A aircraft will allow us to work more closely with our allies, improve our surveillance coverage and will provide value for taxpayers' money."

The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier said:

"Today is an important milestone in the P-8A Poseidon programme which will bring to the Royal Air Force an unrivalled maritime patrol capability. The advanced state-of-the-art sensors aboard the P-8A will provide global protection to UK, NATO and our Allies' submarines and warships, and enhance and complement the UK's standing search and rescue responsibilities.

"It is also a great pleasure to welcome back 120 and 201 Squadrons. Both have long and distinguished records serving in the maritime role and together they will help forge the next generation Royal Air Force."

Poseidon will add to the UK's surveillance capabilities and is designed to conduct anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare, search and rescue and intelligence gathering. They can carry torpedoes and anti-shipping missiles.

As a leading members of NATO, the UK Ministry of Defence has already signed agreements with the US and Norwegian militaries to cooperate closely on operating their P-8A aircraft across the North Atlantic.

With the first aircraft due to arrive in the UK in 2020, the RAF has maintained its Maritime Patrol Aircraft skills by embedding aircrew within MPA squadrons of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA.

Poseidon will bring wider economic benefits with an additional 400+ service personnel to be located at RAF Lossiemouth, where £400m is also being invested in new support infrastructure for the aircraft.

As the Poseidon P-8A is based on the Boeing 737, it will help support several hundred direct UK jobs, and create opportunities for UK firms to bid for training and support contracts.

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