

## Missiles go cheap: defence's fire sale

THE AUSTRALIAN: (See story [HERE](#))

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Weapons sell-off. *Source:* TheAustralian

**AUSTRALIA is quietly exporting dozens of missiles to other countries to try to recoup some of the \$200 million it has wasted on them in botched military purchases.**

The Australian Defence Force has sold 30 anti-ship Penguin missiles to Brazil via Norway, several to New Zealand and two Popeye air-to-surface missiles to South Korea since the start of last year. The sales have been conducted without publicity, in part, because they are an embarrassing reminder of failed defence projects that have cost taxpayers more than \$1.4 billion.

The sale of any missile is highly unusual for Australia, which is an active participant in global efforts to prevent the proliferation of larger long-range missiles. Defence says the sales do not breach military export laws.

The missile sales are an attempt by the ADF to reduce its stockpile of redundant missiles which it can no longer fire because it has no suitable helicopters or fighters to carry them.

The ADF has been left stranded with \$201m worth of AGM-119 Penguin missiles it purchased between 1998 and 2002 for its Super Seasprite helicopters, which never took off.

In one of Australia's most expensive defence fiascos, 11 Seasprites were ordered by the Howard government in 1997 but serious flaws in the helicopters saw the project delayed by seven years before it was scrapped in 2008 at a cost of more than \$1.4bn to the taxpayer.

To try to recoup some of the \$201m it lost on the Penguin missiles, the ADF has struck a deal with their manufacturer, Kongsberg Gruppen of Norway, to offer Australia's Penguin missiles on the international market, with the profits split equally. "Kongsberg markets the weapons for sale and overhauls the missiles for sale," a Defence spokesman said. "Australia retains a right of veto over all sales."

Defence confirmed that 30 Penguin missiles were sold to Brazil via Kongsberg last year, while another five were broken into parts to support the sale. The deal was reportedly worth \$US42m, meaning Australia received about \$US21m.

Defence also confirmed that this year New Zealand bought an undisclosed number of Penguin missiles for its own Seasprite helicopters. Defence refused to say how many Penguin missiles it originally bought or how many it still had, saying such information was classified despite the ADF having no means to fire any of the missiles in anger.

Defence has also sold two of its Israeli-built, air-to-surface, Popeye AGM-142 missiles to South Korea. "South Korea has been a user for some time," a Defence source said. "They carry them on their F4 fighters with their mission to take out nasty things hidden in the mountains on the other side of the demilitarised zone. Popeye is not a deep penetrator, but it can go through quite a bit of concrete if it needs to."

The missiles were supposed to be fitted to the F-111 strike bombers, but when the planes were retired in 2010 Defence found itself with a surplus of Popeyes that it could not use. However, only two have been sold. Defence said the remainder were disposed of by "explosive demolition".

In 2001, the navy described the Penguin missiles as "an outstanding new capability".

"It will be effective and potent across all the areas of RAN operations," a navy spokesman said at the time. "Weapons with the degree of sophistication in the Penguin, able to be launched from a low-speed launch vehicle such as a helicopter, with the range and

hitting power that this missile has, are few and far between. It is clear that the RAN has acquired an outstanding new capability.”