

Air-to-Air Refuelling in the RAAF

The RAAF proposed an air-to-air refueling (AAR) capability in 1971, primarily to extend the range of the F111C to be acquired. The Air Staff recommended replacing the 12 x C130A aircraft with six C130H and six Boeing 707, configured with the boom for refueling of the F111Cs. However, the civilian bureaucrats in Defence rejected the proposal. It was not until 1990 that the RAAF acquired an AAR capability with the four Boeing 707 aircraft, then only for the F/A18s.

Even so, many RAAF crews gained considerable experience in AAR when on exchange with the USAF and USN. In addition, all crews who trained on the F111A in 1968 with the USAF, in preparation for ferry of the RAAF F111Cs, were qualified for AAR.



*F4E 97220, flown by FLTLT Brendan Roberts receiving fuel
Photo Lance Halvorson*



*RAAF Crew in USAF F111A before refuelling from a KC135.
Photos Lance Halvorson*

RAAF Boeing 707 aircraft were fitted with the probe and drogue system for air-to-air refueling of F/A 18 aircraft. In addition to receiving fuel from RAAF tankers, F/A 18 crews flew many sorties which required air-to-air refuelling from allied aircraft in overseas deployments and exercises.



*F/A 18 air refueling with probe and drogue system
Photo RAAF*



The KC135 boom at the pre-contact position

Following the delays in 1968 of F111Cs, caused by problems with the 'wing-carry-through box', RAAF crews trained on F4E aircraft in the USA in 1970; many of them had previous AAR experience on the F111A.

While the F111C did not need air-to-air refueling for the eventual ferry to Australia in 1973, the F4E Phantom did. Each of the 24 F4Es required four refuellings for each of the ocean legs to Hawaii and Guam and two for the leg from Guam to Amberley.



*Two F/A 18 aircraft receive fuel from a RAAF B707
Photo RAAF*