

VIII Thus, as mentioned in its interim report tabled in the House of Commons on 20 December 1989, the Committee recommends that a decision on the purchase of conventionally-powered submarines should be taken without delay.

2. Maritime Air Group (MAG)

a. Helicopters

Maritime Air Group (MAG) is a component of Air Command, but its aircraft, both helicopters and fixed-wing patrol aircraft, are under the operational command of Maritime Command. Because of their speed and their ability to patrol wide areas of territorial waters, aircraft are an essential element of any maritime surveillance force, especially one like Canada's, which has such a long coastline to protect. Although designed primarily for anti-submarine warfare, the aircraft of Maritime Air Group also contribute significantly to the protection of Canadian maritime sovereignty through their participation in search and rescue and other operations assisting civil authorities.

The operation of anti-submarine helicopters from small warships like destroyers, which Canada in part pioneered, substantially enhances the capabilities of Maritime Command's small surface fleet. Equipped with torpedoes, and a sonar system they can dip into the sea while hovering, the Sea King helicopters now in use can work in close cooperation with the destroyers to detect and attack submarines or operate on their own some distance from the surface ships, thereby increasing the area these ships can patrol. Thus, the Sea Kings not only supplement the capabilities of Maritime Command's surface ships, but also provide the fleet with the flexibility it needs to meet its anti-submarine patrol commitments in Canadian waters and in areas of the Atlantic and Pacific for which it has responsibility. The availability of the Sea King helicopters for search and rescue missions and general surveillance operations in Canadian coastal waters also contributes to Canada's ability to monitor activities in its waters and to respond to new threats to its maritime sovereignty. In view of the ever-increasing strategic and economic importance of Canada's Pacific coasts and the need to bolster Canadian naval resources in the area, the Committee welcomes the recent decision to move all of 443 Squadron from the East coast to Patricia Bay airport near Victoria, British Columbia, instead of keeping only a detachment there.

However, the Sea King helicopters have now been in service for over 25 years, and maintenance is becoming a problem due to shortages of some spare parts and the age of the equipment. The need to replace the Sea Kings around the mid-1990s has already been addressed by the Department of National Defence, which has established the New