



# Ministry of Defence

Air Command Secretariat  
Spitfire Block  
Headquarters Air Command  
Royal Air Force  
High Wycombe  
Buckinghamshire  
HP14 4UE

Ref. 2016/00113

[REDACTED]

19 January 2016

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your e-mail of 5 January 2016 asking for information about damaged aircraft and aircraft availability.

You requested the following information:

*Further to FOI 2015/10982 I note that 3 RAF fighter aircraft are Damaged Beyond Repair' and are therefore inactive.*

*I would like to know:*

- 1) How these aircraft were rendered into this state?*
- 2) Whether they will be replaced to maintain fleet numbers?*
- 3) What defines whether an aircraft is counted as being 'Damaged Beyond Repair' rather than counted in the 'Sustainment Fleet'?*
- 4) Whether the total 'available' RAF force consists of 87 aircraft (the total 'Forward Fleet Availability')?*

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. A search for information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence and I can confirm that some information within the scope of your request is held.

I must first inform you that the purpose of Section 1(1) of the Act is to provide an applicant with access to recorded information held by the Department at the time of the request, subject to certain exemptions. It does not require public authorities to answer questions, provide explanations or give opinions. In a decision notice of 15 February 2011 (FS5027927), the Information Commissioner stated that *"the Act does not provide a right to ask questions from public authorities. It provides the right to ask an authority for a copy of any recorded information that it holds....Although this is the case, the Information Tribunal has clarified that any written question to a public authority can be considered to be a freedom of information request. If a question can be answered by simply providing the applicant with copies of recorded information that it holds then it should do so. Otherwise it should simply state that it does not hold relevant information."*

Tornado aircraft ZD743 and ZD812 were damaged following a mid-air collision over the Moray Firth in 2012, whilst Typhoon ZJ943 was damaged on landing at China Lake in the United States in 2008. All three aircraft were replaced by existing aircraft from within the sustainment fleets.

An aircraft is considered as being *Damaged Beyond Repair* when it is no longer economically viable to repair it. Such aircraft are recorded as being part of the sustainment fleet until such time any investigations are complete and they are designated for future disposal action.

The figure of 87 aircraft refers to those Typhoon and Tornado aircraft in the Forward Fleet that were in flying condition on 1 December 2015. Modern combat aircraft are highly complex pieces of machinery that require considerable work to maintain in safe flying condition. The number of aircraft available for flying duty at a squadron can alter from day to day. The figure of 87 is therefore a snapshot of the position on one particular day.

Under Section 16 of the Act (Advice and Assistance) you may wish to note that the RAF's Forward Fleet comprises aircraft which are serviceable and those that are short term unserviceable. Typically these short term unserviceable aircraft are undergoing minor works, forward maintenance or other unforeseen rectification or inspection work that can arise on a day to day basis at a flying squadron.

The sustainment fleet comprises those aircraft currently undergoing planned depth maintenance or upgrade programmes. It also includes aircraft held in temporary storage (eg to manage airframe flying hours) but excludes those which have been made redundant, declared surplus or are awaiting decommissioning or disposal.

You may also wish to note that aircraft from large fleets such as the Typhoon and Tornado are purchased in bulk and not on an individual basis.

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail [CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk](mailto:CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk)). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.ico.gov.uk>.

Yours sincerely,

  
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