



Jane's Defence Weekly

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Publication:

Jane's Defence Weekly 2012

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Section:

ASIA PACIFIC

Country:

Japan

Last posted:

2012-09-13

The Japanese Ministry of Defence (MoD) has decided to prolong the service life of some of its Kawasaki (Lockheed) P-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) until the first replacement Kawasaki P-1 MPA enters service in Fiscal Year 2016 (FY16).

"This programme aims to keep the aircraft in operation by extending its estimated service life," an official at the ministry's Maritime Staff Office told

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on 12 September. "It is not intended to improve the aircraft's capabilities."

The Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF) has so far requested a budget to refurbish three P-3Cs - one in FY11 and two in FY13 - and officials said the service plans to refurbish "a few of the aircraft every year" from FY14 until the first two P-1s are deployed to Naval Air Facility Atsugi in FY16. The MoD's FY13 budget request released on 7 September included JPY800 million (USD 10.2 million) to prolong the service life of two P-3Cs and JPY44.5 billion to acquire two P-1 aircraft. It also requested JPY1 billion to conduct research on the P-1's periscope detection radar system.



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The JMSDF is planning to refurbish and upgrade some of its P-3C MPAs.(JMSDF)

The JMSDF, which has about 80 P-3C aircraft in service and plans to retire the fleet over the next 20 years, has also decided to upgrade some P-3Cs with active acoustic surveillance equipment during FY13, which makes bistatic and multistatic tactics possible against advanced submarines.

The JMSDF plans to acquire about 70 P-1s. Kawasaki was selected to develop and build the P-X (now P-1) and C-X (now C-2) medium transport aircraft in 2001 with a focus on commonality of structure and parts with an eye on cost reduction. A two-year design phase began in 2003, with prototype/preproduction development from 2005 and a maiden flight in September 2007.

While the first two production aircraft were due for delivery to the JMSDF by the end of March 2012, this was pushed back after structural problems were discovered on airframes used for ground testing in August 2011. Flight testing is still underway and the JMSDF plans to complete engineering and operational testing by March 2013.

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