



AIRBUS TO MEET A380 SALES TARGET THIS YEAR

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Airbus expects to **meet** its **target** to sell 25 **A380** superjumbo planes this year but it is not in talks with any potential new customer from the region.

Its chief executive Fabrice Brégier added there was “no urgency” to build a more fuel-efficient version of the world’s biggest passenger aircraft because of the low oil price.

“I think generally we have a target to sell 25, we will meet it. We still have a month and half,” Mr Brégier told The National at the Dubai Airshow. “We are at advanced discussions with potential new customers. I hope that some will materialise.”

The Dubai Airshow is regarded as a key opportunity for the European plane maker to attract new customers for the double-decker aircraft and ensure its long-term production. Airbus is currently in talks with 15 potential customers, but Mr Brégier does not expect new A380 orders during the event.

Last year, the company hinted at the possibility of discontinuing the A380 programme amid a drought of new orders,

Airbus expects to break even on the plane for 2015, 2016 and 2017, but beyond 2020 the aircraft's future is uncertain.

Currently, the Gulf's three biggest airlines – Emirates, Etihad and Qatar Airways – operate the superjumbo aircraft, which works well for airlines serving major long-haul hubs.

Emirates has made the A380 the backbone of its fleet, with about 65 in operation, and more than 70 on order.

Other Gulf carriers including Qatar and Etihad have collectively bought 20 A380s.

Emirates has been pushing for improved fuel efficiency for the plane.

The Emirates president Tim Clark has said he is ready to buy as many as 200 more A380s if a more fuel-efficient model is introduced.

Fuel is the largest component of an airline's cost. It accounts for about 28 per cent of Emirates' operating cost, according to the company's latest financial results published last week.

"We have talks with Emirates, but there is not hurry to take a decision," said Mr Brégier. "We have to take a decision that will make business sense for them and for us. You have to have business case.

"I think we need to catch more customers and there's no urgency to move to the neo [the more efficient version of the aircraft]," he said. "The advantage of a neo version is diminishing when [fuel] prices are going lower."

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