

RAAF KC-30 COMPLETES F-35 REFUELLING TRIALS

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A **RAAF KC-30A** tanker transport has returned from the US after the successful completion of **refuelling trials** with the **F-35** Joint Strike Fighter.

Operating from Edwards Air Force Base, California the KC-30 made a total of 479 ‘dry’ and 24 ‘wet’ contacts with a US Air Force F-35A, transferring more than 95 tonnes of fuel using its 18-metre-long Advanced Refuelling Boom System (ARBS).

In all the aircraft flew 12 sorties between September 23 and October 26.

The KC-30A was crewed by personnel from 33 Squadron, while a flight test team from the Aircraft Research and Development Unit, supported by flight test instrumentation engineers from the Aerospace Systems Engineering Squadron, was integrated within the USAF Test Centre to work on a dynamic test program, Defence stated.

“These trials are another important step in building KC-30A capability and the results will inform the training practices of current and future RAAF personnel on both aircraft types,” KC-30A Transition and Receiver Clearance Manager Wing Commander Grant Kelly said.

“Air-to-air refuelling will be an important ‘force multiplier’ for the F-35A fleet, considerably boosting their range and endurance, or allowing them to carry bigger payloads.”

Under current plans Australia is acquiring 72 F-35As to replace the RAAF’s F/A-18A/B ‘classic’

Hornet fleet.

Future KC-30 boom refueling trials are planned with the C-17 Globemaster transport and the P-8A Poseidon maritime surveillance aircraft (which has been selected to partially replace the RAAF's AP-3C Orions).

The KC-30's ARBS boom had a troubled early life – during flight testing a KC-30 bound for the RAAF lost its boom in [an incident while refuelling a Portuguese F-16](#) in January 2011.

But in March the then Defence Materiel Organisation (DMO) announced that the KC-30 acquisition project – AIR 5402 – had been removed from its Projects of Concern list, after an extensive development and testing program resolved issues with the ARBS.

33SQN operates five KC-30As from RAAF Base Amberley. Two more KC-30As, to be converted from ex Qantas A330-200 airliners, are due to join the RAAF KC-30A fleet in 2018.

