

Australia looks at Dutch PzH 2000 howitzers

Australia is in discussions with the Netherlands on the possible acquisition of 18 PzH 2000 155 mm self-propelled (SP) howitzers that are surplus to Dutch army requirements.

The howitzers on offer are part of a Dutch order for 57 and have yet to be built. Any sale would be on a government-to-government basis.

Under Project Land 17, Australia is seeking to replace or to enhance its inventory of 105 mm towed Hamel guns and 155 mm M198 towed howitzers.

The Samsung K9 Thunder is also understood to be a contender for the 155 mm SP requirement, but discussions with Dutch officials are thought to be at an advanced stage.

A senior Dutch army officer has been briefing Australian counterparts at the Australian International Airshow and a PzH 2000 has been shipped from the Netherlands for display at the show after which it will be taken to Canberra and then for trials at the School of Artillery at Puckapunyal army camp in Victoria.

The surplus Dutch howitzers were initially offered to Greece, but no agreement could be reached.

Although the PzH 2000 was already known to be a contender for Land 17 via its manufacturer, Krauss-Maffei Wegmann, its capabilities have become more widely known and respected through its support of Australian troops in Afghanistan by the Dutch 14th Artillery Battalion.

The estimated cost of Land 17 is around AUD450 million-AUD600 million, although this must be shared between SP and towed guns. The in-service date is 2010-11.

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