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## Francois Urges Clarity on Boeing's E-7 Wedgetail Delivery Amid Growing Concern

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Shadow Defence Minister Mark Francois has sharply criticized Boeing and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) over delays in the Royal Air Force's (RAF's) E-7 Wedgetail program, a next-generation Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) aircraft. Speaking during a Westminster Hall debate, Francois warned that the United Kingdom (UK) currently lacks

critical “eyes in the sky” and demanded a clear and accountable delivery timeline.

Francois argued that the UK is facing increasing global threats, and the absence of a functioning airborne warning system is a glaring vulnerability. With potential conflict scenarios on the horizon, particularly regarding Russia, he noted that fixed radar installations would be among the first targets in any serious confrontation. Without Wedgetail aircraft operational, the UK is flying blind at a time when aerial surveillance is vital.

He acknowledged the hard work of the Meriden-based staff converting Boeing 737 commercial aircraft into Wedgetail platforms but placed blame squarely on Boeing’s leadership. Francois emphasized that his criticism was directed not at British workers but at Boeing’s senior management, accusing them of undermining confidence in a program the UK urgently depends upon.

The MoD has ordered three E-7 Wedgetail aircraft to replace the retired E-3D Sentry fleet. However, repeated delays and lack of transparency from both Boeing and government officials have prompted frustration among defense stakeholders. Francois urged ministers to specify a firm date for when the aircraft will be certified and ready for frontline service.

He highlighted that since the retirement of the E-3D fleet, the RAF has been without a dedicated AEW&C capability. While the UK currently relies on mobile ground-based radar systems, these lack the coverage, responsiveness, and survivability offered by an airborne platform. For a modern air force, such a gap is widely considered untenable.

Parliamentarians from across the political spectrum have raised concerns about the growing risk. Many agree that prolonged delays to the Wedgetail program are unacceptable, especially in light of global instability and heightened defense readiness demands.

In summary, Francois's call for accountability underscores urgent concerns about the UK's diminished airborne surveillance capability. Boeing and the Ministry of Defence now face mounting pressure to deliver on promises and close a dangerous gap in national security infrastructure before it becomes a crisis.