

SA company wins F-35 fighter deal

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AXIOM Precision Manufacturing has continued its push into the burgeoning defence sector, winning more work on the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program.

Under a new contract with BAE Systems, the South Australian company will deliver the aircraft's "leading-edge spar" which, at just under 3m, is the longest and one of the most complex titanium components of the F-35's vertical tail. The machining work was previously done in the UK.

Axiom has undertaken work on the F-35 program since 2015, with the latest contract win bringing the annual value of its work to more than \$3 million.

Axiom general manager Craig Maynard said the deal would also create three additional jobs following a \$1.2 million investment in state-of-the-art milling equipment.

"Securing defence industry contracts has provided the longterm, high-value work that has allowed us to transition from the car industry by developing bespoke Australian manufacturing capabilities," Mr Maynard said.

Axiom has expanded its workforce to 75 employees since refocusing its business from automotive component manufacturing to the defence and aerospace sectors.

Earlier this year, it moved to an expanded facility at Wingfield – its primary advanced manufacturing base – with a second facility at Edwardstown, where it does plastic injection moulding of components for medical and other devices.



TOP GUNS: Craig Maynard, Axiom's general manager, with BAE Systems JSF Vertical Tails project manager Shane Capogreco.

Picture: KELLY BARNES

As well as defence, Axiom makes parts and prototypes for the electronics industry, health, mining, rail and space, in a range of metals and plastics.

"Defence and aerospace is certainly growing for us," Mr Maynard said.

"We've had the good fortune to be awarded work on the Silvershield project for a third year. We normally employ 10 to 12 casuals for that – a six-month project – and most years we keep half of them on an ongoing full-time basis.

"When we were at the peak of automotive, back in 2015, we were probably 60 per cent automotive and we were 44 employees, and we've almost doubled in size since then."

Axiom, which is owned by Jim and Samantha Grose, now generates close to 90 per cent of its work in the defence and aerospace industries.

The company last week signed an MOU with ASX-listed welding technology company K-TIG and high-performance steel manufacturer Bisalloy Steels to develop specialist welding capabilities for the Australian defence sector.

Their target is to maximise Australian participation in the Land 400 program, which will result in 678 armoured vehicles acquired for defence at a cost of up to \$15 billion.

On the F-35 program, production of vertical tail parts at BAE's Edinburgh Parks will continue for another decade, with Axiom involved over the past five years.

BAE F-35 project manager Shane Capogreco said Axiom had invested significantly in new facilities and technologies to improve its capabilities as a supplier to the defence industry.

“By providing new opportunities for our supply chain, it puts us in a much better position to bid for and secure more highvalue advanced manufacturing and further increase Australia’s work share on the Joint Strike Fighter program,” he said.

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