

Ukraine's plea for Hawkei vehicles 'unsupportable at this time', government letter says



By [Matthew Knott](#), June 16, 2023

The Albanese government says it is unable to send Hawkei protected mobility vehicles to Ukraine in the near future despite increasingly desperate pleas from Kyiv, citing braking issues and a lack of spare parts.

Ukraine has been [requesting a fleet of Australian-made Hawkeis since September](#) and the country's Ministry of Defence has taken to social media in recent months to declare the vehicle its [new "military crush"](#).



The Hawkei protected mobility vehicles have been designed and manufactured at Thales' Bendigo site in Victoria.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese is set to announce a new package of support for Ukraine during or just before his visit to the NATO summit in Lithuania in July, but Ukraine's top request for assistance looks unlikely to feature in the announcement.

In a letter sent to a member of the public earlier this month on behalf of Defence Minister Richard Marles, a senior Department of Defence official said: "We are aware of calls to provide [the] Hawkei to Ukraine.

“The Hawkei is a developmental vehicle that is only now being introduced into service across the ADF [Australian Defence Force].

“The combination of an unresolved braking issue and a limited supply of parts means that the gifting of the Hawkei is unsupportable at this time.

“The government is considering options for further support to Ukraine, which it will announce in due course.”

Members of the Ukrainian-Australian community have been running a #freetheHawkei campaign including rallies across the country and a large billboard near Canberra airport that greets federal politicians arriving in the capital.

Army Major General Andrew Bottrell told Senate estimates earlier this month that “it’s been my advice to Defence that we could not sustain this vehicle overseas, and we certainly could not sustain it if we were also trying to roll it out to the Australian Defence Force”.

The Hawkei, manufactured by defence contractor Thales at its Bendigo plant, has been plagued with braking problems during the development process.

The Ukrainian government has insisted it is unbothered by the braking issue, as it believes the vehicles will still perform well in off-road environments and at relatively low speeds.

“I know there are some technical issues, but we believe these Hawkeis can be road tested in war conditions,” Stefan Romaniw, the co-chair of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations, said.

“Ukraine would be prepared to do that.”

Australia has provided \$510 million in military assistance to Ukraine, but the only aid announced this year was a \$33 million donation of unarmed drones in February.

Romaniw urged the government to deliver its next assistance package swiftly, saying it was crucial for Ukraine to make ground against Russia during its European spring and summer military campaign.

“We see this war in real-time: there is fighting going on now, people are being killed now,” he said.

“This new package needs to be substantial to make sure Australia gets back to being the top non-NATO contributor because we’ve slipped a bit.”

Other options for the upcoming military package include additional supplies of ammunition, Bushmaster four-wheel drive vehicles and M113 armoured personnel carriers.

The [federal opposition last week said it was embarrassing](#) that Ukrainian officials had been forced to resort to [social media posts](#) to plead for more Australian military assistance.

Opposition foreign affairs spokesman Simon Birmingham and defence spokesman Andrew Hastie said they “share the growing concerns of many in the Australian-Ukrainian community and, it would seem, the government of Ukraine that Australia is no longer pulling our weight commensurate with the efforts of our partners”.