

We've let Ukraine down, says Tony Abbott



Former prime minister Tony Abbott. Picture: WireImage

By [JOE KELLY](#), The Australian, JANUARY 22, 2024

Tony Abbott has expressed disenchantment towards the federal government's level of support for Ukraine following [Labor's decision to decline a request by Kyiv](#) for Australia's retired fleet of MRH-90 Taipan helicopters.

The former Liberal prime minister said he was disappointed by the Taipan decision as Ukrainian ambassador to Australia, Vasyl Myroshnychenko, said the government's [rejection of the request](#) was an "opportunity lost" for Kyiv in its struggle against Russia.

[Mr Myroshnychenko](#) also reinforced the appeal from [Ukraine](#) for an urgent humanitarian shipment of Australian thermal coal, given the risk of blackouts in the [war-torn nation](#) from targeted strikes on energy infrastructure.

Speaking on Sky News, he warned that Russia was intensifying its attacks on Ukraine's power generation and electricity distribution networks through the winter period and said any shipment of Australian thermal coal would serve as a "lifeline".

"We still haven't received an official reply to that request," he said. "I believe that would be the right thing to do."

But when asked if the government would send coal to Ukraine, Anthony Albanese did not directly respond and instead argued that Australia was already a "very significant" contributor to the Ukrainian war effort.

"We give appropriate consideration to all requests, we do that in a way that is diplomatic and gives proper consideration to it," the Prime Minister told Sky News. "We have been very clear, with measures of economic support, with the training just last week, a range of Australian soldiers headed

to the United Kingdom to do further training of the Ukrainians in order to assist the war effort they're engaged in.

"We will continue to engage in a mature, considered way with Ukraine. And we stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes."

Mr Abbott told The Australian: "I am disappointed the government didn't give more thought to donating the choppers to Ukraine.

"I'm disappointed we haven't done more generally for Ukraine – we could have given more bushmasters and should have given some Hawkeis. The Ukrainians are fighting for everyone's freedom not just their own. So we should be giving them all the help we reasonably can."

Pressed again on the Taipan decision, Mr Albanese said the government did not send them to Ukraine "because we take proper advice from the Australian Defence Force".

Mr Myroshnychenko said Ukraine was "deeply grateful" to Australia for its help in the fight against Russia. But he was not aware of Ukraine being approached by Australia when the government conducted a global search in the second half of 2023 for any potential buyers of the MRH-90s.

"Let's just make sure it doesn't happen in the future in terms of if there's any surplus equipment, we'll be happy to take it," Mr Myroshnychenko said.

The Taipans were [permanently grounded last year](#) after an MRH-90 helicopter plunged into the ocean off the Whitsunday Islands on July 28, killing four Australians during the Talisman Sabre joint military exercises with the US.

The investigation into the cause of the crash continues, but Defence Industry Minister Pat Conroy last week said none of the aircraft remained in a flying condition.

He also said it was "not feasible" to return them to an operational state