

Ukraine fury as Australia offloads military gear on ‘military eBay’



By [Matthew Knott](#), The Sydney Morning Herald, September 18, 2024

Decommissioned Australian military equipment keenly sought by Ukraine to help its fight against invading Russian forces is being sold for recreational use on eBay-style auction websites, angering the Ukrainian diaspora and sparking calls for an overhaul of Defence Force disposal policies.

The federal government has rebuffed repeated entreaties to send hundreds of Chinese-made surveillance drones to Ukraine that were grounded because of security concerns but work perfectly and have played a crucial role in saving Ukrainian soldiers' lives.



Ex-military vehicles being sold on Facebook. *Credit:Facebook*

The Ukrainian-Australian community was bitterly disappointed earlier this year when the government opted to dismantle and bury its grounded fleet of MRH-90 Taipan helicopters rather than take up a formal request to donate them to the Ukrainian army.

The Pickles Auctions firm has monthly online auctions of decommissioned military equipment, with the next sell-off slated for early October.

In recent months, the firm’s Facebook page has invited “off-road enthusiasts” to bid on decommissioned army long-range patrol vehicles, troop carriers and Land Rovers, saying “there’s a vehicle to suit every adventure”.



An ex-military vehicle being sold on Facebook. *Credit:Facebook*

One of the long-range patrol vehicles – used by Special Air Services soldiers in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars – reportedly sold for \$113,000 last year.

Colin Werner, the general manager of Australian Frontline Machinery, the sole contractor for the resale of ADF equipment, said in an interview this year that ex-army Land Rovers bought at auction were usually used as campers or for off-road driving, while larger vehicles were typically used for commercial purposes.

Kateryna Argyrou, co-chair of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations, said it was “short-sighted and baffling” to see retired Australian Defence Force (ADF) cargo trucks, troop carriers and inflatable boats for sale online when they could be put to use on the battlefield.

“Our community is in touch with frontline troops every day, who tell us these ex-ADF platforms are exactly what they need,” Argyrou said.

“Ukrainian soldiers are outnumbered, exhausted and working with whatever they are given, so it’s upsetting this equipment hasn’t been considered for Ukraine ... The government says its policy goal is to empower Ukraine to win on its own terms, but Defence has simply carried on with business as usual by auctioning equipment off to the highest bidder.”



Kateryna Argyrou, co-chair of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations, said the Ukrainian diaspora was upset that retired military gear was not being sent to the battlefield. *Credit: Alex Ellinghausen*

Retired army major-general Mick Ryan said it was “ludicrous and frankly mean-spirited” that ex-military equipment was being sold to motoring enthusiasts rather than offered to Ukraine.

Former army chief Peter Leahy, however, questioned how useful many of the older vehicles up for auction would be to Ukraine because they lacked sufficient armour.

A report released by the Senate’s foreign affairs and defence committee this week called for the government to adopt “a default position that Defence materiel being retired or otherwise disposed of will be gifted to Ukraine unless there is a compelling case against this for an individual asset”.

Liberal senator Claire Chandler, who chaired the inquiry, said: “Ultimately, if the Ukrainians believe retiring equipment can be used effectively by their forces, we should be providing it to them rather than disposing of it.”



Long-range patrol vehicles used by Australian soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, pictured on the right, are being auctioned online rather than provided to Ukraine.

The committee also called for the Australian embassy in Kyiv to be reopened and the appointment of a co-ordinator-general to oversee Australia's support to Ukraine across all agencies.

A Defence spokeswoman said: "Gifting to Ukraine is a prominent consideration in the disposal of surplus Defence assets and equipment. Australia is working closely with the government of Ukraine to ensure we are providing practical assistance that is making a difference."

Ukraine is trying to hold back a Russian counter-offensive in the Kursk region, after Ukrainian troops made a surprise incursion into Russian territory last month.

Argyrou, of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations, said she was baffled the government had not agreed to offer any discontinued Chinese-made surveillance drones to Ukraine despite the technology playing a pivotal role in the conflict.

A single DJI drone the Ukrainian-Australian community bought and sent to the front had saved an entire unit by alerting Ukrainian soldiers that they were about to be attacked by a nearby Russian unit, she said.

Defence last year said it had grounded its fleet of about 450 DJI drone devices after concerns were raised about the company's links to the Chinese military and state surveillance, a move quickly followed by other government agencies.

In its submission to the Senate inquiry, the federation said: "Software and hardware patches for these drones have been developed in Ukraine which makes them safe to

use and the [federation] reached out to the Australian government with a request to consider transferring the DJI drones to Ukraine where they would save lives.

“Despite our repeated pleas to send these drones to Ukraine, it was decided to dispose of them instead.”

Ukraine’s ambassador to Australia, Vasyl Myroshnychenko, said: “If the government was willing to provide these drones to Ukraine, we would be happy to receive them.”