A Royal Australian Air Force AP-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft returned to Darwin on the evening of 4th February following its mission in support of Papua New Guinean search and rescue efforts after the sinking of the ferry MV Rabaul Queen.

Australia’s Defence Department tasked the aircraft in response to a request from the Australian Maritime Search Authority to support the search and rescue efforts on 2nd February.

Senator David Feeney, Parliamentary Secretary for Defence, said that the Australian Defence Force would always be ready to assist Australia’s regional neighbours in times of emergency.

He said, “Papua New Guinea is one of our closest friends in our region and I am very pleased that the RAAF was able to respond so promptly to this situation. The Australian government greatly regrets the loss of life following the sinking of the MV Rabaul Queen and will offer any assistance we can to Papua New Guinea.”

Chief of Joint Operations, Lieutenant-General Ash Power, praised the Orion crews for their efforts.

“An AP-3C Orion and crew has been assisting with the search and rescue efforts conducting visual searches of the area where the MV Rabaul Queen Ferry sank. This task highlights the capacity of our Defence Force to react quickly to requests for assistance and to work in co-operation with, and in support of, other agencies on potential life-saving missions,” General Power said.

The AP-3C Orion crew located two survivors clinging to debris and directed vessels involved in the search to them.

MV Rabaul Queen Ferry was reported to have sunk approximately nine nautical miles off Finschhafen, while on a voyage from Kimbe to Lae, in Papua New Guinea. There are believed to have been 350 people on board, approximately 50 have been rescued.

At the time of reporting search and rescue activity was due to continue into 7th February with civilian aircraft.