

# Vapour trail a mystery still

**THE Defence Department still does not know the source of vapour trails sighted off the Kimberleys coast soon after the recent Operation Sandgroper exercise in WA.**

A department spokesman in Canberra said yesterday that the most likely cause of the trails was an unknown civilian aircraft.

Investigations just finished had eliminated military aircraft from any country as the source, he said.

The trails were sighted and reported by the pilots of Qantas and

Singapore Airlines jumbo jets 11,000m, above the coastline.

There was speculation that a Soviet long-range spy aircraft, monitoring communications of Operation Sandgroper ships, was responsible.

The Defence Department said that the aircraft's origin had not been established, but it was unlikely to have been military.

## Not sure

In other words, the department was not sure what caused the vapour trails, the official said.

The gap in the radar cover along the North-West and Kimberley coast was highlighted by the incident.

There are no immediate plans to fill the gap between the Darwin and North-West Cape stations.

The RAAF base at Derby, due for completion in 1986, will be a "bare bones" base, with no permanent manned radar facilities.