

Beating off the space invaders is proving costly

By PETER TERRY

THE FEDERAL Government is spending thousands of dollars a year trying to track down non-existent invaders from outer space.

A network of RAAF officers around the country investigates and reports on every sighting of an unidentified flying object despite official acknowledgement nearly 20 years ago that flying saucers do not exist.

Since then, RAAF intelligence officers have reported annually to the Government that there is still no evidence that UFOs are visiting us.

Yet each year the defence budget includes provision for the part-time employment of at least 14 RAAF officers and one senior RAAF intelligence officer to report the same findings.

It is 20 years since the US Air Force closed down a similar program.

In 1963, the then Minister for Air, Mr Osborne, told Parliament there was no evidence that UFOs sighted over Australia represented visitors from outer space.

The bulk of the sightings could be traced to aircraft, meteorological balloons, or Venus.

Since 1963, the RAAF has been able to refine its investigations to such a degree that it can now explain 97 per cent of all sightings.

The unexplained 3 per cent is largely attributed to hoaxes.

The original UFO program was started in the 1950s in the wake of post-war fears that the Russians may have developed a secret flying saucer.

The task of keeping track of the UFOs was given to the RAAF and today's UFO program is still part of the defence system.

In the main, they handle reports made directly by the public.

RAAF officers then track it down. To help with their inquiries they are armed with a list of aircraft arrivals and departures, astronomical occurrences, and satellite flight paths.

Usually this is enough to make a positive identification. In Perth, for example, most UFO sightings are during the early morning out to sea when the first of the day's Boeing 747s arrives.