The Henderson Government is senselessly limiting its options and potentially costing taxpayers millions of dollars through its opposition to the use of single engine aircraft by the Territory’s aero-medical service.

Shadow Health Minister, Matt Conlan, said the Government’s rejection of the use of single-engine aircraft by aero-med has its origins in the recommendations of the Cornish report – but there are significant arguments in favour of certain models of single engine being used in favour of twin engine turbine aircraft.

“”The Government’s tender framework for the new aero-medical contract states that any applicant that operates single engine aircraft will be categorised as non-conforming, leaving them at a distinct disadvantage,” Mr Conlan said.

“This essentially rules out aircraft such as the single engine turbine, the Pilatus PC-12.

“Last week my colleague, Member for Katherine Willem Westra van Holthe, and I along with Independent MLA Gerry Wood, met with representatives from Pilatus who put forward a strong case for the PC-12 to at least be considered for the aero-med contract.

“The PC-12 is larger than the Government’s preferred model, the twin engine King Air, and is capable of landing on shorter, more challenging airstrips.

“There could also be significant savings to the taxpayer of up to $1.2 million a year through the deployment of this cheaper and more efficient aircraft type.

“The Government claims that ‘due to the prevalence of lightening and storm activity in the Top End, twin engine aircraft are considered the preferred option for the Top End aero medical service’

“I would like to know exactly why it is a twin engine is preferred over a single when it comes to lightning.

“What advantage does a twin engine aircraft have over a single engine aircraft in the event of a lightning strike?

“This is an absolute nonsensical position and an insult to anyone who has the slightest understanding of aviation.

“It also flies in the face of logic when the PC-12 is already being used by the police air-wing in Darwin.

“The NTPFES website states:

In 2000, the NT Police Air Section in Darwin took delivery of a
Pilatus PC-12, a state-of-the-art pressurised, turbine powered aircraft offering far greater speed, load carrying capability and safety. The aircraft was customised for SAR and police requirements, and has been an outstanding success.

Another PC-12 was purchased in 2004, and is based in Alice Springs and a third PC-12 is currently being utilised in Darwin.

"As well, the Royal Flying Doctor Service has a fleet of PC-12.

"All this adds up to the Government’s exclusion of the PC-12 being either hypocrisy, sloppy policy or both.

"If the PC-12 aircraft is not an appropriate option for our aero-med services, then the Government needs to outline the real reasons it’s been overlooked instead of offering up some 5th-floor whiz kid’s mumbo jumbo.

"Health Minister Kon Vatskalis claims he was an officer in the RAAF. Surely as a result he has a basic grip on the aviation industry or is at least able to seek counsel from some of his former RAAF colleagues, and then articulate a plausible reason why his Government prefers twin over single engine.

"I have spoken with Gerry Wood about this significant failure within the aero-med tender process and together we will raise the matter in the forthcoming sittings of Parliament."

Further comment: Matt Conlan 0408 805 338