



NAVY LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

January 2024  
Volume 8, Issue 01

# DOWN THE VOICEPIPE *do you hear there!*

COMING UP

NLWA Executive meeting  
Monday 8th. April 2024

Facility open each Wednesday morning  
0900-1200

HMAS PERTH (I) Memorial Foundation  
Executive Meeting Wednesday 14TH. Feb-  
ruary2024 0900

HMAS ANZAC  
150



## Navy League of Australia Western Australia Division News update



It is with great sadness that I forward the notice of the passing of the President of the NSW Division of Navy League. Otto Albert was a main stay in the NSW Division and a strong advocate in the Federal Council. During his long association with the League Otto's family and company contributed highly to the financial and publication of the League's quarterly booklet "The Navy" The WA Navy League Division express their sincere condolences to Otto's family as he prepares for his next adventure Anchors away sailor.

In the last issue I focused on the two polo shirts we have available for sale it is a good tool for publishing the league and Foundation, we in WA get stopped quite often and asked about the league. And what it represents. I don't think as members we promote ourselves as much as we could and in saying that reach out for new members.

Recently we hosted a 100 year old former WRAN who was based at HMAS LEEUWIN several years ago and incidentally one of the family members survived the sinking of HMAS PERTH (I) only to be shot by the Japanese.

Lions international have continued to support both the League and Foundation and have been involved with our Navy Cadets at their conferences.

I welcome three new members to NLWA Mr. Ray Lane, Mr. Jason Hepple and AB Sabastian Taylor RAN welcome aboard.

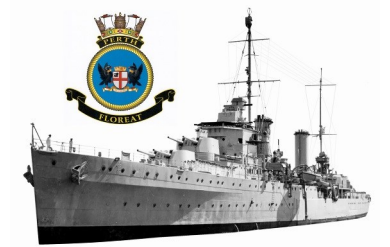
We are planning our Sundowner again this year to be held on Sunday 17th. March 2024 invitations will be sent out via email in the next few weeks. We look forward to you attending and participating in an delightful evening and getting the chance to renew and meet new acquaintances.

Navy League and HMAS PERTH (I) Polo shirts will soon be available approx. price \$45 + delivery if required final price will reflect on the amount of orders received.

*Jim*

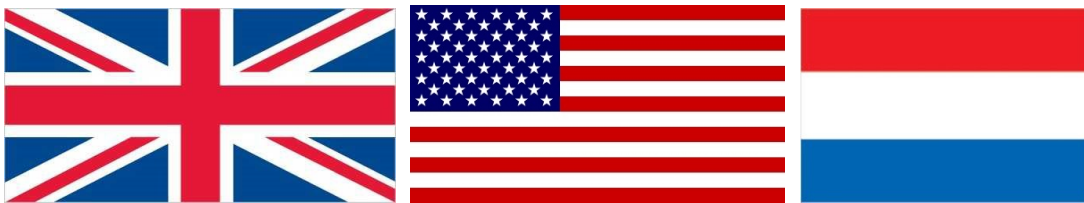
Hon Secretary NLWA





The Foundation flies the following National Flags 24/7 and flies the Naval Ensigns on special occasions. As the flags and at times the ensigns are flown 24/7 wear and tear with the elements requires the flags to be changed every six months. We are looking for individuals or associations that would like to donate or purchase new flags to replacing the flags the size we fly are 1800x900. Your support would be most welcome. Postal Address HMAS PERTH (I) Memorial Foundation Incorporated PO Box 735 Fremantle WA 6959.

#### NATIONAL FLAGS



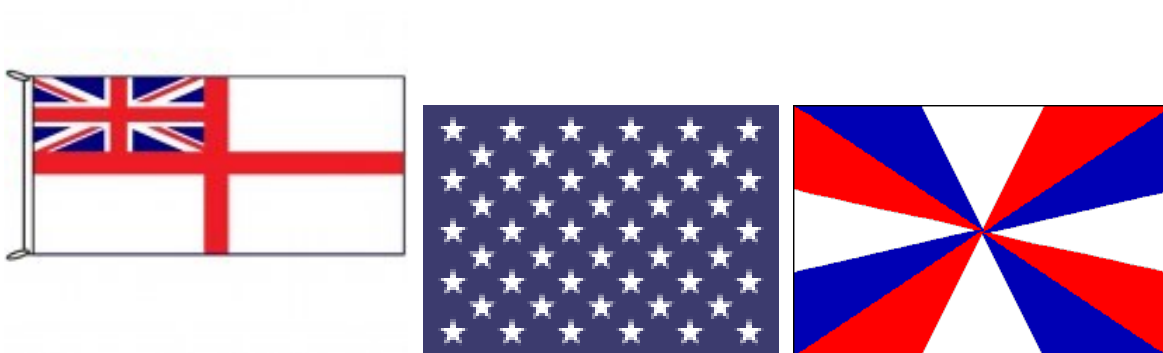
United Kingdom

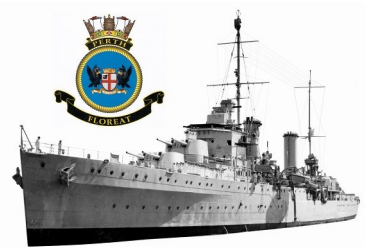
American

Dutch

#### NAVAL ENSIGNS

Royal Navy, United States of America, Netherlands, United States Marines, United States Navy





## HMAS PERTH (I) MEMORIAL UPDATE Incorporating NLWA and the HMAS PERTH (I) Memorial Foundation Incorporated



Jim O'Neill  
CMDR ANC RTD  
Project Manager

Although there will be no services held at the memorial on the 1st March 2024 remembering the lost of the ship 82years ago individuals and organisations are welcome to place wreaths and flowers at the base of the memorial wall.

The hard copy of our building permit has now been received and BAE are receiving the steel to create the steel formwork for the bow. Alterations had to be done to the images in the glass structure to be attached to the steel bow framework to enhance the final design and it is hopefully these will be received this week so that the glass manufactures can commence making the glass and inserting the images. Continued hold ups with the final engineering of all works has delayed the time frame for our anticipated opening in late June.

Hence the structure will now not be completed until towards of the year. CMDR Bob Mummery OAM RAN RTD has been working tirelessly on the proposed opening and guest lists. Draft copies of the intention have been sent out however, invitations will not be issued until a firm date for the opening can be achieved. We are not prepared to have the structure half finished for the opening.

On another matter our final grant for the construction to be completed although approved there is no money now available from the grant at this present time.

I therefore encourage all members, companies, individuals and associations to actively engage known contacts who maybe able to contribute or sponsor portions of the remaining detail of the project to be completed. As you will be aware this is a Memorial of National Significance to the ship and crew of HMAS PERTH (I).

### LEST WE FORGET MARCH 1ST, 1942

**The battle in the Sunda Strait by HMAS PERTH (I) and her gallant crew together with  
USS HOUSTON**



# General-purpose frigates as a means of beefing up Australia's maritime capabilities

By: Stephen Kuper



**With a growing recognition that Australia's naval capabilities are underprepared and "under gunned" in light of a rapidly evolving regional threat environment, does a fleet of general-purpose frigates provide the solution to beefing up Australia's naval strike power?**

As the Royal Australian Navy prepares to receive the first Arafura and Hunter Class vessels this decade, and in light of growing commentary about the growing need for greater versatility, firepower and capability, the evolving regional and global dynamics have raised the question, can a fleet of ocean-going corvettes ease the operational burden on high-end warfighting platforms and expand the range and power of the Navy?

For the first time in the nation's history, Australia's prosperity, security and way of life is intrinsically linked to the ambition, stability and direction of its Indo-Pacific neighbours. This new paradigm echoes the environment America found itself in during the mid-19th century, which was best explained by American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan in his 1890 work *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, which outlined that "whether they will or not, Americans must now begin to look outward. The growing production of the country demands it".

Australia's geographic location and the vast distances required for the Royal Australian Navy to transit in order to patrol across our northern approaches and through economically critical sea lines of communication necessitate a vessel larger and more heavily armed than the 80-metre, 1,640-tonne Arafura Class offshore patrol vessels, yet smaller and not as complex as the 146.7-metre, 7,000-tonne Hobart Class destroyers or the 149.9-metre, 8,800-tonne Hunter Class frigates.

Australia is not alone in facing this challenge of fielding a mix of major surface combatants. Both the US Navy and the British Royal Navy have in recent years commenced programs to develop and field a less-specialised, general-purpose vessel that is capable of independent long-range deployments, while also bringing a degree of high-end warfighting capability to broader task groups.

While both nations operate fleets of high-end, specialised warships, like the US Navy's Arleigh Burke Class destroyers and the Royal Navy's future City (Type 26) Class frigates, their respective corvette-to-frigate programs have yielded results, with both the US Navy and Royal Navy preparing to field the Constellation and Inspiration Class ships, respectively.

## **Britain's Arrowhead-based Inspiration Class**

In the Royal Navy's case, the Type 31 Class of general-purpose frigates, based on the Babcock Arrowhead 140, will provide the Royal Navy with a class of highly capable warship that sits in between the River Class OPVs and the City and Daring Class vessels, expanding the range and capability of the Royal Navy, without taxing the limited number of large, high-end surface combatants.

The Royal Navy plans on acquiring five vessels for itself, with an additional two for Indonesia and three for Poland, respectively, providing these smaller navies with comparatively high-end warfighting capabilities in a relatively compact package — these vessels weigh in at 5,700 tonnes, with a range of 9,000 nautical miles at 16 knots, and the pre-fitted capacity for up to 32 strike-length MK-41 VLS cells, a 57mm main gun and a core complement of 100, compared to the 177 of the existing Anzac Class frigates or 180 for the Hobart Class destroyers and Hunter Class frigates.

Additionally, the platform has wide growth margins for future mine countermeasures, undersea surveillance and manned/unmanned teaming options leveraging four large multi-mission bays for the launch and recovery of autonomous systems — this additional flexibility, combined with the increase in capability provided by additional modularity built into the design.

From a cost perspective, the UK has signed a fixed price contract with Babcock for the Type 31 frigates for £1.25 billion, or roughly AU\$440 million per frigate before certain weapons systems and other equipment. The total project cost is currently budgeted for £2 billion, allowing for £750 million in government-fitted equipment, resulting in a full unit price of £400 million, or roughly AU\$700 million per frigate.

The modular nature of the design provides a comparatively quick building time when compared to the vessels like the Hobart Class, with the UK cutting first steel on the first of the Inspiration Class in 2021 and all five of the Royal Navy's frigates contracted to be fielded by 2028.

### **America's Constellation class**

Named in honour of one of America's most storied warships, the USS *Constellation*, this new class of general-purpose frigate, based upon the Fincantieri FREMM frigate, is similar to the vessel that was presented by the Italian company for Australia's multi-billion SEA 5000 Future Frigate program — delivering a vessel with specific design parameters set by the US Navy to fulfil roles similar to that of its British counterpart.

From the earliest stages of conceptualisation, the US Navy articulated that “The FFG(X) will normally aggregate into strike groups and large surface combatant (destroyer, cruiser) led surface action groups but also possess the ability to robustly defend itself during conduct of independent operations while connected and contributing to the fleet tactical grid” — building on these two “core missions” the US Navy wants the Constellation Class to be capable of:

- Destroying surface ships over the horizon;
- Detect enemy submarines;
- Defend convoy ships;
- Employ active and passive electronic warfare systems; and

Defend against swarming small boat attacks.

The US Navy has plans to acquire an initial fleet of 20 Constellation Class vessels, which weigh in at 7,291 tonnes with a range of 6,000 nautical miles at 16 knots, incorporating SPY-6 (V)3 radar systems and Baseline 10 Aegis combat system, with a similar armament to the Inspiration Class: 32 Mk 41 VLS cells, 16 canister launched over-the-horizon weapons, and a 57mm main gun, with a significantly larger crew complement of approximately 200.

Cost wise, the first vessel cost US\$1.28 billion, with the second vessel slated to cost US\$1.05 billion, with long-term price ambitions of between US\$850–\$950 million per unit cost. Construction wise, the US cut steel for the lead vessel USS *Constellation* in 2022, with the vessel expected to be delivered by 2026.

### **Easing the burden on high-end platforms**

Platforms like the Inspiration and Constellation Class vessels aim to be cheaper, easier to build en masse vessels that can provide the US Navy and Royal Navy, respectively, with greater coverage in important areas of operation without falling back on “high-end” warfighting capabilities like the Arleigh Burke, Daring or City Class vessels — this additional tactical and strategic freedom also expands the umbrella provided by these nations.

Additionally, the growing number of “cheap” and “plentiful” platforms provides additional resilience in the event of high-intensity, peer competitor conflict scenarios, freeing up the high-end platforms to conduct strategically important operations, while enabling these cheaper platforms to provide a plug and play capability in a range of scenarios, ranging from long-range, maritime merchant marine escort operations, through to integration into larger allied task groups.

This flexibility provides interesting avenues worth consideration for strengthening Australia's maritime capabilities, while maximising interoperability with allied partners without compromising key high-end warfighting capabilities outlined in the 2020 Defence Strategic Update.

### **Lessons for Australia's future strategic planning**

Australia's position and responsibilities in the Indo-Pacific region will depend on the nation's ability to sustain itself economically, strategically and politically. Despite the nation's virtually unrivalled wealth of natural resources, agricultural and industrial potential, there is a lack of a cohesive national security strategy integrating the development of individual, yet complementary public policy strategies to support a more robust Australian role in the region.

Contemporary Australia has been far removed from the harsh realities of conflict, with many generations never enduring the reality of rationing for food, energy, medical supplies or luxury goods, and even fewer within modern Australia understanding the socio-political and economic impact such rationing would have on the now world-leading Australian standard of living.

Enhancing Australia's capacity to act as an independent power, incorporating great power-style strategic, economic, diplomatic and military capability serves as a powerful symbol of Australia's sovereignty and evolving responsibilities in supporting and enhancing the security and prosperity of Indo-Pacific Asia. As events continue to unfold throughout the region and China continues to throw its economic, political and strategic weight around, can Australia afford to remain a secondary power, or does it need to embrace a larger, more independent role in an era of increasing great power competition?

# China and India race to expand aircraft carrier fleets

Regional rivals build up naval power to broaden Indo-Pacific options



The INS Vikrant is commissioned in September 2022. The vessel is one of two aircraft carriers in the Indian Navy. © Reuters  
**YUKIO TAJIMA and SATOSHI IWAKI, Nikkei staff writers** January 9, 2024 12:39 JST

BEIJING/NEW DELHI -- China and India are scrambling to expand their naval capabilities amid their growing rivalry in the Indo-Pacific region, making moves toward each putting a third aircraft carrier into service. The latest footage of China's new Fujian aircraft carrier, aired by state broadcaster CCTV on Jan. 2, showed what appeared to be three catapult tracks on its deck. In a November article by Hong Kong newspaper Ming Pao, an expert said the Fujian had succeeded in launching a wheeled object while docked in Shanghai. Video circulated on social media of a splash in front of the Fujian, suggesting that something had fallen into the water.

Also in November, the South China Morning Post reported that the Fujian had moved around 27 meters from its usual berthing place before returning two days later -- a potential sign of an inclining test to gauge its weight, center of gravity and stability.

Based on expert analyses, the Communist Party-affiliated Global Times reported last week that the Fujian could soon enter trials at sea. Japanese security officials also believe the carrier to be undergoing final preparations for a test sailing.

Taiwan's defense ministry predicts that the Fujian will be commissioned in 2025. This means that the carrier could play a role should China launch an armed invasion of Taiwan. Launched in June 2022, the Fujian is China's largest warship, with a displacement of more than 80,000 tonnes. By comparison, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's largest vessel -- the JS Izumo -- has a displacement of 27,000 tonnes.

The Chinese carrier is named after Fujian province, where President Xi Jinping worked for years before rising to the national stage. It can carry 60 to 70 fighter jets and early-warning aircraft -- at least 50% more than the Liaoning, a refurbished Ukrainian carrier, and the Shandong, China's first homegrown carrier. Its most distinctive feature is its electromagnetic catapults. These catapults "allow aircrafts to take off while carrying more weight in missiles and fuel, which improves their range and combat capabilities and expands tactical options," said Masafumi Iida, who heads the China division at Japan's National Institute for Defense Studies.



The Fujian, China's third aircraft carrier, is equipped with electromagnetic catapults. (CCTV)

The Liaoning and Shandong, by contrast, are equipped with ski-jump ramps, which provide some assistance but still require that aircraft take off under their own power. Smaller decks limit the size of the aircraft they can accommodate.

The U.S. currently has the world's only armed forces with operational electromagnetic catapults. Some see nuclear power as the only way to meet the steep energy requirements of these catapults, though the Fujian is steam-powered. "Even the U.S. military went through a lot of trial and error for its first vessel with electromagnetic catapults," Iida said. "It will take time before the Fujian can smoothly launch planes."

China's military wants more of its vessels to be equipped with these catapults, stoking speculation that it could turn to nuclear power, starting with its fourth aircraft carrier. The U.S.-based Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments predicted in 2022 that the People's Liberation Army "may have sufficient resources to boast five aircraft carriers" by 2031.

The increased Chinese military presence in the Indo-Pacific is pushing India to build a blue-water navy as well. India now operates two aircraft carriers: the Russian-made INS Vikramaditya and the INS Vikrant -- India's first home-grown carrier, with a displacement of around 43,000 tonnes, which entered into service in 2022. Indian naval chief Adm. Hari Kumar said in October that there were plans to commission another Vikrant-class carrier. China has established a presence in ports along the Indian Ocean, including in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, under its so-called String of Pearls strategy. India has responded with a push to bolster its naval capabilities so that it can operate even in faraway waters, near the Maldives and the Seychelles.

India's basic naval strategy is to station a carrier in the Bay of Bengal to its east and another in the Arabian Sea to its west. Any Chinese carrier approaching India would likely do so from the east. An Indian carrier in the waters would be able to mount some sort of response in coordination with the tri-service command center in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

But because India only has two carriers, its defensive capabilities are stretched thin whenever one of them undergoes maintenance. India is focused on commissioning a third carrier to make up for this weakness. India and the U.S. formed a working group on carrier-related technology in 2015. If necessary, India could advance domestic production of related components with American cooperation.

# Transition to nuclear-powered submarines will be safe and efficient, experts say

12 FEBRUARY 2024

By: Liam Garman



Experts from global shipbuilder and sustainment provider Babcock have told reporters that the development of a domestic nuclear powered submarine industry can be achieved efficiently and safely, as Australia readies for the acquisition of Virginia Class and SSN-AUKUS capabilities.

During a speech at the company's nuclear sustainment site in Devonport, British defence contractor Babcock told reporters that its heritage and expertise in nuclear sustainment and decommissioning will ensure the safe and effective transition to a nuclear submarine future for the Royal Australian Navy.

Defence Connect visited the Devonport dockyard and Rosyth shipyard in the UK, where the company supports the Royal Navy with nuclear sustainment, safety, decommissioning and disposal.

Babcock chief corporate affairs officer John Howie said that stringent government regulation and company expertise in nuclear sustainment and decommissioning have received buy-in from environmental groups.

"During the initial consultation process the MOD (Ministry of Defence) ran, even Greenpeace said, 'Look, we don't just understand why you don't just get on with this, we know it's safe,'" Howie told reporters.

Howie also said that the development of the company's new 10 Dock site at Devonport was an example of how the company has used decades of experience to navigate the complexities of working in the nuclear environment.

The comments come as Australia continues to identify the best way forward for the development of a domestic nuclear-powered submarine industry. Under the current proposal, Australia will acquire three Virginia Class SSNs, with the option to acquire an additional two units before transitioning to the SSN-AUKUS.

Australia and the United Kingdom are expected to commence construction of the SSN-AUKUS by the end of the 2020s.

Incorporating technical capabilities from all three member nations, the United Kingdom is projected to accept the first SSN-AUKUS in the 2030s, with Australia scheduled to accept their first ship in the 2040s.

In developing local nuclear-powered capabilities, Australia will leverage expertise from the United Kingdom and the United States which have never experienced a radiological incident while operating over 500 naval nuclear reactors over 60 years.

Speaking on a recent Defence Connect podcast, Babcock Australasia chief executive officer Andrew Cridland explained that Babcock was uniquely poised to assist the Commonwealth in developing a domestic nuclear industry.

"When it comes to nuclear-powered submarines, Babcock has over 50 years of pedigree in the UK. So we've got a really deep knowledge about the infrastructure, the skills, the safety and the regulatory environment, all of the things that are needed to support nuclear submarines," Cridland told Defence Connect.

"In fact, Babcock marine defence work includes everything from sustaining 100 per cent of the Royal Navy's nuclear-powered submarine fleet to also owning and operating the UK's only licensed facility for refitting, refuelling and defuelling nuclear submarines."

With operational expertise across Australia, the US, and the UK, Cridland observed that Babcock is positioned to support the delivery of the joint-AUKUS capability.

"The other thing that perhaps is less well known is that Babcock already plays a role in the US submarine program with some of the work that we do out of the UK, which means that Babcock is already involved in both conventional and nuclear submarines across the three AUKUS nations."

The comments come as Babcock Australasia, US-shipbuilder HII, and Bechtel signed a memorandum of understanding to support the development of a nuclear-powered submarine industry in Australia, from the construction of infrastructure through to end-of-life.

Babcock oversees the entire Royal Navy nuclear submarine sustainment program while HII, alongside their teaming partner Electric Boat, have built and delivered over 20 Virginia Class submarines. Bechtel oversees the design and delivery of sensitive defence and nuclear infrastructure.

The MOU covers nuclear infrastructure design and build, submarine defuelling and decommissioning, as well as nuclear waste and material management.

Howie pitched the consortium as a world leader in nuclear sustainment.

"It goes back-to-back to why Babcock teamed up with HII and Bechtel, because between us, we are world leaders in nuclear infrastructure.

"There isn't actually that many people in the world who have the experience at all in nuclear submarine maintenance.

"In most countries, it is done by national governments.

"We probably, between us, and our partners, we know more about nuclear infrastructure than almost anyone else."

Babcock's Devonport site is co-located with HM Naval Base Devonport to form the largest naval support site in Western Europe. The base is the home port for all ships in the Royal Navy (RN) amphibious fleet, half of the RN frigate fleet, and a number of RN submarines and survey vessels.

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## **Australian Navy sailors conduct SSN training in Guam**

**8 February 2024**

A group of 37 Royal Australian Navy officers and sailors have departed for Guam to embed on board USS *Emory S. Land*, the United States submarine tender.

In December last year, Australia, the United States and United Kingdom announced that Australian sailors would commence duty in Guam from early 2024 as part of preparations for the commencement of Submarine Rotational-Force West where, from as early as 2027, one UK Astute-class submarine and up to four US Virginia-class submarines will have a rotational presence at HMAS *Stirling* in Western Australia. The skills, knowledge and experience gained in Guam alongside our United States Navy partners will afford our people the opportunity to undertake some of the most complex maintenance on a United States SSN," said Vice Admiral Mark Hammond, Chief of Navy.

"This is an exciting step forward in developing our workforce skillsets so that the Royal Australian Navy is ready to support, maintain and operate Australia's future nuclear-powered submarine capability." The Navy personnel will spend up to five months on board USS *Emory S. Land*, integrating with US sailors and learning how the US conducts nuclear-powered submarine (SSN) maintenance.

It will also enable the Royal Australian Navy to support the first planned maintenance activity of a US SSN during a visit to HMAS *Stirling* in the second half of this year. The opportunity for our Navy personnel to learn from our AUKUS partners demonstrates meaningful progress along Australia's pathway to acquiring nuclear-powered submarines," said Richard Marles, Deputy Prime Minister. The maintenance of a United States nuclear-powered submarine at HMAS *Stirling* in the second half of the year will be an important milestone in the development of skills within Australia's submarine and industry workforces."

## UK carrier suffers propeller problem, sidelined for NATO exercise

By The Associated Press

Tuesday, Feb 6



The British aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, suffered a problem and could not get underway Sunday to lead a NATO exercise, officials said. (Andrew Matthews/PA via AP)

LONDON — A British aircraft carrier that had been set to lead the largest NATO exercises since the Cold War did not set sail Sunday after a problem with its propeller was discovered during final checks, the British Royal Navy said.

The [HMS Queen Elizabeth](#) will not join the exercises off Norway's Arctic coast and will be replaced by the HMS Prince of Wales. The change of plans is almost a reverse scenario of what happened in August 2022 when the Prince of Wales broke down with a propeller problem on its way to carry out training exercises with the United States and Canada off North America. The carrier had to be towed back to port from the Isle of Wight and the HMS Queen Elizabeth took its place in the exercises.

With the HMS Queen Elizabeth sidelined, the navy may not be able to deploy an aircraft to the Red Sea — as armed forces minister James Heappey has suggested — where [hostilities have been heating up with Iran-backed Houthi rebels](#) targeting cargo ships in the waters connecting Asia with Europe and the U.S.

[The U.K. joined the U.S.](#) Saturday in striking 36 [Houthi](#) targets in [Yemen](#) in a [second wave of assaults](#) meant to further disable Iran-backed groups that have relentlessly attacked American and international interests. The propeller problem is the second setback for the Royal Navy in less than three weeks, following [a collision by two warships](#) in a harbor in Bahrain, causing damage to the vessels but no injuries.

Military officials said they were investigating the cause of the collision in which the HMS Chiddingfold appeared to reverse into the HMS Bangor as it was docked. The two minehunters were based in the Middle East to help protect merchant vessels.

The HMS Prince of Wales will now lead Exercise Steadfast Defender with a carrier strike of eight ships, four British, along with U.S., Spanish and Danish vessels.

## VESSEL REVIEW | CHARLEY 2 – NEW CATAMARAN YACHT SUPPORT VESSEL BUILT IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

By **Baird Maritime**



*Photo: Echo Yachts*

Henderson, Western Australia-based Echo Yachts has completed construction of a new yacht support vessel. Named *Charley 2*, the vessel has an aluminium hull and superstructure, an aluminium/teak deck, an LOA of 56 metres, a beam of 14.8 metres, a draught of 3.4 metres, and a gross tonnage of 1,041. An enhanced onboard layout provides spacious interior accommodations, outdoor entertainment areas, and significant capacity for carrying recreational and utility equipment such as scuba gear, personal watercraft, rigid inflatable boats, landing craft, and a sonar-equipped tender for dive site and shipwreck surveys. Echo Yachts said the decision to build *Charley 2* with a full-custom designed aluminium hull has resulted in optimised hydrodynamic efficiency. The design also allowed the installation of engines with lower output relative to the vessel's overall dimensions.

In *Charley 2*'s case, the propulsion system consists of two Caterpillar C32 ACERT diesel engines that each produce 1,193 kW at 2,300 rpm to drive fixed-pitch propellers via ZF 3350 gearboxes and carbon fibre resilient couplings.



*Photo: Echo Yachts*

Sea trials showed that the propulsion arrangement can deliver a speed of 18 knots, a reduction of only two knots from the top speed of Echo Yachts' slightly smaller catamaran tender *Charley*. The minimal drop in maximum speed is notable due to the fact that *Charley 2*'s engines each have a 40 per cent lower total rated output compared to the engines fitted on its 2017-built predecessor. The propulsion can also enable the vessel to sail up to 3,800 nautical miles at a cruising speed of 12 knots.

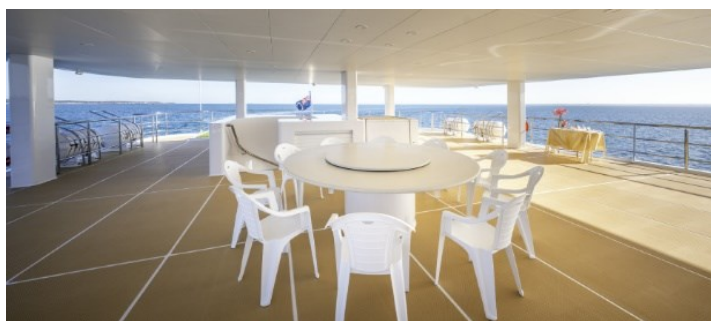
The package supplied by Caterpillar also includes custom-built local operating panels for main engines with three Caterpillar C4.4 generators, each rated 99 ekW at 1,500 rpm. The use of efficient electrical and air conditioning systems has allowed a 34 per cent reduction in generator capacity from 150 ekW. Around 15kW of solar panels are also fitted to cover around one-third of the vessel's electrical power requirements during daytime.

The deck equipment such as capstans and anchor winches as well as the bow thrusters are all electrically-driven to reduce noise during operation.



*Photo: Echo Yachts*

The onboard accommodations include 18 guest berths, another 19 berths for the crew, a pantry, a ship's office, a large captain's cabin, a double-guest stateroom, and two external storerooms. The yacht is also equipped with a large touch-and-go pad suitable for a three-tonne helicopter, a dive store, a decompression chamber, walk-in cold and freezer rooms, and a toilet for pets.



*Photo: Echo Yachts*

Other key features include two three-tonne knuckle boom cranes, a hydraulic side boarding ladder at the upperdeck for access to high-sided wharfs, a launch/retrieval platform lift for use with a 12-metre tender, and tanks for storing the petrol used by the onboard tenders. The tender platform design also ensures improved tender operations and full walk-around access for ease of cleaning and maintenance.

*Charley 2* is registered under the Cook Islands flag and is homeported in Singapore.



*Photo: Echo Yachts*

# Thales to improve Royal Navy's ship availability and resilience under £1.8B deal

## EQUIPMENT & TECHNOLOGY

by Fatima Bahtić

The UK Ministry of Defence has awarded a new £1.8 Billion, 15-year contract with Thales to improve Royal Navy's ship availability and resilience.



Thales

As explained, the new contract is in response to the increasing need for Royal Navy platforms to be on active duty for longer periods because of increasing global instability.

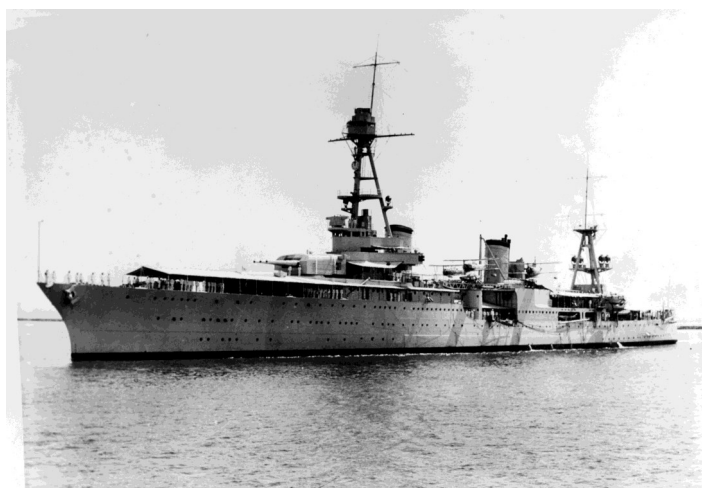
The contract, Maritime Sensor Enhancement Team (MSET), will sharpen the focus on equipment availability, predicting problems – through AI innovations and data management – rather than reacting when they emerge. During the life of the MSET contract, the Royal Navy will undergo a significant transition including the introduction of the new Type 26, Type 31 and Dreadnought platforms, as well as autonomous systems.

MSET, a scalable service model, will provide greater stability and breadth in the level of support delivered to the Royal Navy during this complex transition period. By investing in new dockland facilities, AI, data analysis tools, and skills, this will deliver greater resilience for the RN platforms.

Over the life of the contract, it will deliver an average reduction in Turn Around Times of 100 days per repair, spares lead times will be reduced by an average of 44 days and reliability improved by 10%. Data Driven Decision making will enable MSET to see beyond the current support horizons and with the increased investment in emerging technologies, including AI, virtual reality and Big Data, create a more proactive and predictive maintenance regime. Investments will include improving facilities at HMNB Devonport, Faslane, Portsmouth and Bahrain to deliver an advanced test and repair capability, allowing specialist technical and engineering skills at the waterfront to provide direct support to the RN.

*“Thales is delighted to strengthen our century long partnership with the Royal Navy, and support its vital role in defending the UK and keeping the worlds critical sea lanes open,” Alex Cresswell, Chairman and CEO of Thales in the UK stated.*

*“This £1.8 Billion contract with Thales will help keep more Royal Navy ships at sea for longer, by harnessing the latest developments in artificial intelligence, data analysis and improved dockland facilities. Data Driven decision making enables MSET to go beyond the current support horizons and make a substantial improvement in the availability and resilience of the Royal Navy whilst preparing for AUKUS, the landmark security and defence partnership between Australia, US and UK.”*



**USS HOUSTON**

## Workforce crisis threatens to put two more Anzac frigates out of service



Anzac-class frigate HMAS Anzac, left, which has been taken out of the water indefinitely, passes HMAS Ballarat off Western Australia. Picture: Defence

By **BEN PACKHAM**

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE CORRESPONDENT  
THE AUSTRALIAN JANUARY 15, 2024

Defence is looking at mothballing up to [two more of the navy's frontline Anzac-class frigates](#) as crippling crew shortages undermine the nation's military capabilities.

Senior leadership has ordered navy fleet command to provide advice on the impact of pulling a further one or two Anzac frigates out of the water indefinitely. The move follows Defence's decision in November, [revealed by The Australian](#), to put first-of-class frigate HMAS Anzac on hard stands at Western Australia's Henderson shipyard.

It's understood shortages of navy-qualified marine and electrical engineers are acute, with the vessels unable to go to sea without sufficient personnel in the key roles.

The nation's most potent warships – the Hobart-class air warfare destroyers – are also suffering crewing issues due to a shortage of combat system operators. The [dire workforce shortages](#) are likely to have added to [the government's reluctance to send a vessel](#) to join a dangerous US-led operation in the Red Sea to protect international shipping from Iranian-backed Houthis.



An RAF Typhoon fighter jet takes off from British base RAF Akrotiri in Cypress as part of US-led airstrikes against Yemen's Houthi rebels on January 11, 2024. Picture: British Ministry of Defence

Multiple sources said a position paper had been ordered to examine the capability implications of putting the additional Anzacs into a state of "extended readiness".

Having three of the navy's eight Anzacs out of the water would free up crew members for the remaining five vessels, but could affect the service's ability to meet government tasking.

In a related issue, Defence is also considering delaying life-extending upgrades for the Anzac fleet, the first of which was due to commence this year.

Defence did not dispute preparations were being made to take more Anzacs out of active service, saying the navy's crewing difficulties last year had carried over into 2024.

A Defence spokeswoman said the navy was meeting its operational requirements in the Indo-Pacific. But she warned future workforce growth was "critical" to ensure the ADF could deter military threats and respond with lethal force if necessary.

"As identified in the government's response to the Defence Strategic Review, growth and retention of a highly skilled Defence workforce is an immediate priority," the spokeswoman said.

She said the planned Anzac upgrades were still scheduled to commence this year, but maintenance works are subject to change due to operational requirements and other factors.



Anzac-class ship HMAS Parramatta returns to her home port at Garden Island, Sydney, last year following a three month deployment through East Asia. Picture: Defence

The spokeswoman said the nation's three air warfare destroyers were "available and ready to meet government tasking". It's understood Australia has had ongoing difficulties in getting personnel into Lockheed Martin's Aegis combat system course in the US. But sources said Defence would do everything it could to keep all of the AWDs at a high state of readiness.

Anthony Albanese denied on Monday that the government was "punching below our weight" in failing to provide a warship to the US-led mission in the Red Sea, saying Australia was making a sufficient contribution by pledging six shore-based personnel to the operation's command centre.

"We always play our role, and it is appropriate that we have people there in Bahrain," the Prime Minister said. "We had people (there) before the Houthi attack. Since then, we've increased the number of personnel that are involved in that operation." Mr Albanese's comments came amid reports [a US fighter jet shot down a cruise missile](#) fired by Houthi militants toward a US destroyer in the Southern Red Sea.

The attack followed a series of [US and British airstrikes](#) on Houthi targets in Yemen that drew threats of a "strong" response from the Iranian-backed militia. Opposition defence spokesman Andrew Hastie said Australia was "sitting on the sidelines" while the US and Britain were doing the "heavy lifting" protecting international shipping, and the Australian people had a right to know why the government was "shelving warships at a time when they are needed most".

"The Albanese government is utterly clueless when it comes to delivering on the critical demand for crew and capability for our navy," he said. "It's no wonder they can't send a warship to help our allies defend peace and prosperity in the Red Sea. This government is all at sea, while our warships are being left high and dry."

**RED LEAD**





An image from a video showing Houthi fighters' attack on the Galaxy Leader Cargo in the Red Sea on November 20, 2023. Photo: Getty Images via the Houthi Movement

The navy's worsening personnel crisis comes as the government prepares to announce the results of [a major service fleet review](#), which is set to slash the troubled Hunter-class frigate program amid concerns it no longer meets the nation's needs. Defence is also preoccupied with the fledgling AUKUS submarine program, which will require a massive increase in naval personnel and an unprecedented 30-year industrial uplift.

Former Defence Department deputy secretary Peter Jennings said the government, from the Prime Minister down, needed to reverse the personnel drain if it was to have any hope of rebuilding the nation's defence capabilities.

"It's been clear for a while that actually Defence's single biggest problem is recruiting and retaining people," Mr Jennings said. "I think a major part of the problem here is that it looks as though the government is not giving attention or priority to defence. "It's allowing key capabilities to wind up and if you're a service person, why ... hang around for that process of managed decline? It needs ... really high-level attention to try and create a sense of urgency and priority around this, instead of what we normally get which is, frankly, just lip service."

The Australian Defence Force uniformed workforce numbers came in [more than 3400 under target](#) at the end of the 2022-23 financial year, despite a bipartisan commitment to expand the ADF. The combined army, navy and air force workforce was 5.5 per cent smaller than Defence's 62,000 target, as Australians shunned ADF recruiting efforts for other opportunities in the nation's overheated jobs market.

## Revive plans for Henderson dry dock or get out of the way

PETER HUDSON

Cast your mind back to March 2022. The Coalition government announced the construction of the Henderson dry dock, pledging \$4.3 billion to the maritime defence and construction industry, opposite the strategically critical HMAS Stirling.

It was a vote of confidence in WA's shipbuilding capabilities, a boost to secure jobs, and leading-edge skills training, highlighting the critical role that WA, Henderson and Rockingham in particular, plays in defending Australia.

After the last election, it appeared that the State and Federal governments were still committed to the project,

however in the two years since, the silence on the Henderson dry dock (not to mention numerous other infrastructure projects) has been deafening.

Of course, not all debate on defence projects takes place in the public square.

The project loomed with uncertainty when the Federal Government questioned if the dry-dock plans would be scrapped if they were not recommended by the defence strategic review. Quite the contrary — the authors went as far as to "strongly recommend active and urgent Commonwealth and State government intervention in the Henderson shipyard".

The defence strategic review was handed to the Prime Minister in full year ago. Since

then, neither the Federal nor State governments have made a move to get on with building the dry dock that they said they would, at least not that they have told the Australian people.

Consider the AUKUS agreement, closely intertwined with the Henderson shipyard and neighbouring hubs. By 2027, Rockingham and surrounding areas will host more than 2000 US and UK sailors and their families, not to mention a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines.

That's a lot of work that needs to be done to prepare for a generation-defining sovereign program. Unfortunately, even if the Government got under way with building the dry dock tomorrow, it wouldn't be ready in time for the first rotation of

our allies, but that only emphasises the importance of getting on with the job as soon as possible.

The State and Federal governments need to show some leadership on this issue and work with local authorities to deliver the defence and commercial infrastructure that AUKUS demands, including the Henderson dry dock. Yet the Government appears strangely vacant from defence projects in WA, consumed by the political issues of the day, rather than pursuing a vision of excellence for WA and the defence of our country.

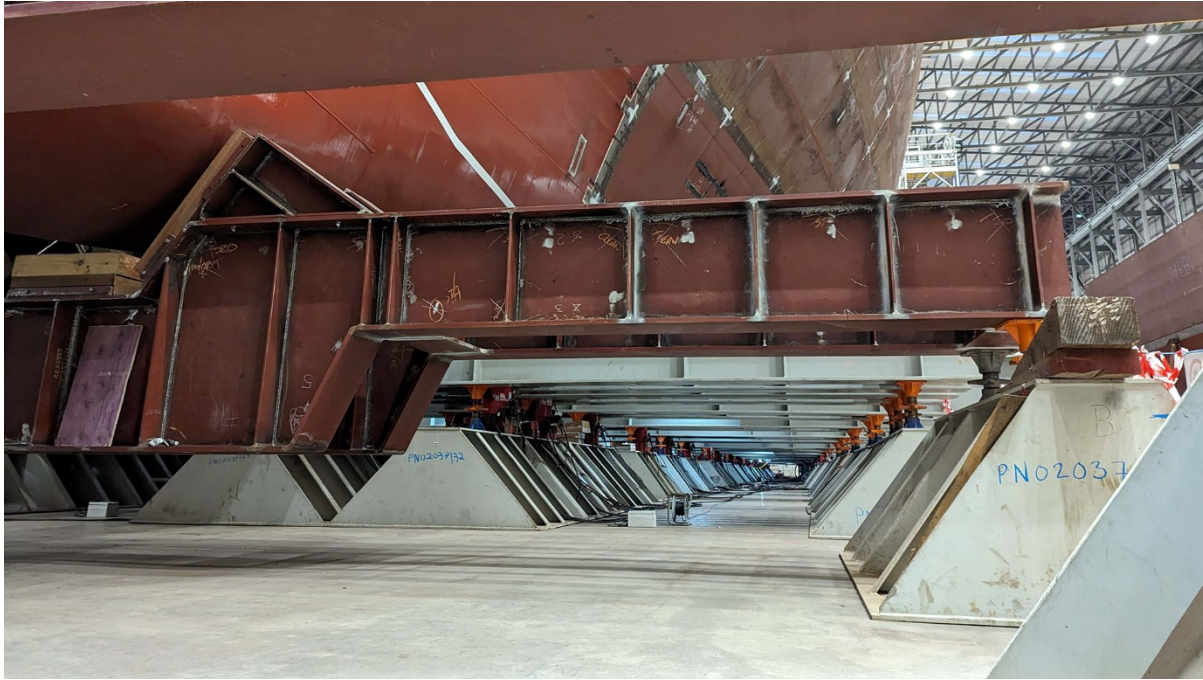
Maybe the Labor leaders are so consumed elsewhere they haven't the time to make a \$4b investment in WA industry to push the project — that's why

they have ministers, right? Defence Industry Minister Paul Papalia says that he has been a supporter of the dry-dock plans for many years, so where is the business proposal? It is concerning that as recently as late last year, he called the project a "hollow announcement".

In politics that generally means a project is dead in the water. For all our sakes, I would call on the Government to revive the Henderson dry dock; and if the preparation hasn't been done, do the right thing and move aside to make way for someone that is both competent and ambitious for WA and defence industry.

Peter Hudson is a Rockingham councillor.

## Royal Navy considers weighty matters as next-gen frigate HMS Venturer gets on the scales



Jacks lift up the hull of HMS Venturer (Picture: Royal Navy)

The Royal Navy's new frigate, HMS Venturer, has achieved a significant milestone in her construction process - the weigh-in.

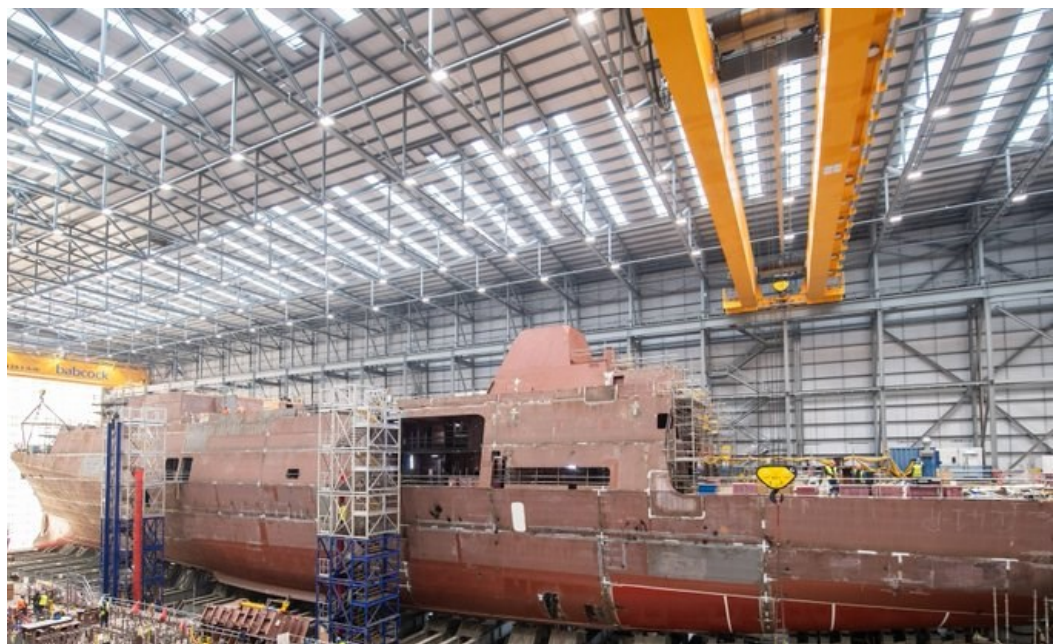
Venturer is the first of five Type 31 Inspiration-class frigates and has undergone some precise weighing to validate the weight estimates that were made during her design phase.

Although much of her equipment has yet to be installed, the entire ship was lifted and measured three times to ensure the accuracy of the calculations.

Prior to the lifting of the ship, naval architects estimated the weight of the Venturer by considering various factors such as the materials used in her construction, equipment, engineering systems, consumables, fuel and the crew. HMS Venturer, who is longer than 11 London buses, was lifted using 84 power hydraulic jacks while load cells provided precise weight calculations.

This meticulous process ensures that the ship's weight estimations align with her actual construction. While the weighing process is labour-intensive, it is essential to enable validation checks at this point of the build. Currently, construction of Venturer is underway at Babcock's assembly hall in Rosyth, where she is being built alongside HMS Active, the second ship in the Type 31 programme.

Once completed, Venturer will pave the way for the construction of HMS Active and the third frigate, HMS Formidable. There will be five Type 31s built. The Inspiration-class will replace five general-duties Type 23 frigates.



# What is in a name? Tier 2 surface combatants and the future of the RAN

By: Stephen Kuper



**Conjecture aside, there is an increasing expectation that the upcoming surface fleet review will formalise the need for a fleet of “smaller, more numerous” Tier 2 surface combatants, but the assertion that these vessels are smaller doesn’t hold true, especially globally.**

I feel very much like a broken record, but that is to be expected given the wait we have had for the findings of the Albanese government’s independent review into the surface fleet which came as a key finding of the Defence Strategic Review.

As an island nation, utterly, or some might say, hopelessly dependent on the ocean for our economic, political, and strategic security, the findings and the government’s response will shape the future of the Royal Australian Navy in a major way for decades to come.

This has only become more important since the COVID-era and the subsequent impact of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and ongoing conflict in the Middle East and Red Sea, which have seen global maritime lines of communication and supply chains come under direct assault.

Highlighting this, the Defence Strategic Review reinforced the importance of the nation’s maritime security, stating: “Australia’s Navy must be optimised for operating Australia’s immediate region and for the security of our sea lines of communication and maritime trade.”

In order to deliver this, the DSR has emphasised a three-pronged approach, renewing and reinforcing the nation’s commitment to the AUKUS trilateral agreement and the nation’s pathway to delivering the SSN-AUKUS, nuclear-powered submarines, and, what is described as, “an enhanced lethality surface combatant fleet, that complements a conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine fleet, is now essential given our changed strategic circumstances”.

At the core of this strategic realignment is an emphasis on an enhanced surface fleet, broken into two distinct tiers that are capable of “enhancing Navy’s capability in long-range strike (maritime and land), air defence, and anti-submarine warfare requires the acquisition of a contemporary optimal mix of Tier 1 and Tier 2 surface combatants, consistent with a strategy of a larger number of small surface vessels”.

Defence Minister Richard Marles pre-empted this shift at the launch of the [Defence Strategic Review](#) in April 2023, saying, “the Defence Strategic Review has observed that navies around the world are moving in the direction, to put it kind of crudely, of having a larger number of smaller vessels. Now, with those two ideas in mind, we are thinking about the long-term structure of our surface fleet”.

But how true is the assertion made by the Defence Minister, particularly in relation to the suitability of a corvette-sized Tier 2 surface combatant when compared to the decisions of other global navies.

## **True, but only up to a point**

By some metrics, the assertions made by the Defence Minister are reinforced by contributors to the Defence Strategic Review, like the US Studies Centre’s Professor Peter Dean, about the increasing prevalence of smaller vessels among navies like in the US, the UK, Japan, and South Korea.

Indeed, Professor Dean, in a recent interview with Ben Packham for [The Australian](#), stressed the need for the Royal Australian Navy to move away from large, expensive and “exquisite platforms” like the maligned Hunter Class frigate program, saying, “So the question has become: what can they do at the Tier 2 level?”

“The key there is, does it have missiles on it? Is it cheaper? Is it easy to produce? Can you get more of them? Because, of course, it’s about quantity as well as quality. You need something that’s big enough to operate in that area that can protect itself and project some force. However, bigger is not always better, as we are seeing in contemporary conflicts,” he explained.

This has resulted in a number of proposals from a host of shipbuilders including [Luerssen](#), [Navantia](#), [Babcock](#), [TKMS](#), and [Gibbs & Cox](#), each with their own unique pitch to enhance the lethality of the Royal Australian Navy's surface combatant fleet.

The overwhelming number of proposals presenting "frigate"-sized vessels is in stark contrast to the corvette-sized vessel push; popular in the media.

But what about our international compatriots? How do their "Tier 2" vessels shape up?

### **Allied trends suggest something else...**

As Minister Marles suggested and I eluded to, the growing number of "Tier 2" vessels in allied navies flies in the face of the proposals put forward by the pro-corvette crowd (no, not the Corvette Stingray fans).

In the case of the United States Navy, the new Constellation Class, an evolution of the Fincantieri FREMM frigate built for the Italian, French, Egyptian, Indonesian, and Moroccan navies, respectively, is broadly comparable in size, firepower and sensor suite to the Hobart Class destroyers.

Weighing in at 7,291 tonnes at full load, a range in excess of 6,000 nautical miles, 32 Mk41 VLS, a 57mm main gun, a Rolling Airframe Missile system for self-defence and up to 16 Naval Strike Missile cannisters, with a crew complement of 200 and incorporating the Aegis combat system, the Constellation Class is an independently capable surface combatant in its own right, designed to excel in task group operations as well.

The Royal Navy's Type 31 or Inspiration Class frigates, designed by Babcock, is based on the highly capable and successful [Arrowhead 140](#), albeit somewhat smaller, with a weight of 5,600 tonnes, a crew compliment of 107, and a total range of 7,500 nautical miles.

The Inspiration Class is also similarly armed to its American counterpart, sporting a 57mm main gun, 32 Mk41 VLS, and two 40mm Bofors for close-in defensive action.

In Japan's case, the new Mogami Class frigates is similar in weight to the Royal Navy's Type 31 frigate, weighing in at 5,500 tonnes at full-load but has a somewhat lighter armament, even though it is equipped with a traditional five-inch main gun. The missile complement includes eight anti-ship missile cannisters, a SeaRAM close-in weapons system and 16 Mk41 VLS cells supporting a smaller crew compliment of 90 personnel.

Finally, South Korea rounds out the comparable solution options, which are significantly smaller (closer in size to our existing Anzac Class frigates), weighing in at 4,300 tonnes at full load, a traditional five-inch main gun, a single close-in weapons system, eight land attack cruise missiles and 16 of the Korean-VLS systems.

While this isn't a case of follow the leader, Australia's unique operating requirements, coupled with the devolving tactical and strategic circumstances require more than what even a bespoke corvette solution can provide.

Equally, government is going to have to accept that defending the nation isn't a cheap exercise and looking for a cost-cutting measure will only leave us with more costly conundrums down the track, so get it right the first time (well, we will treat this like the first time).

### **Final thoughts**

The rapidly deteriorating geopolitical and strategic environment that is transforming the global and regional security paradigm requires a realistic analysis, assessment and acceptance by Australia's policymakers.

Equally, both the Australian government and the Australian public have to accept and understand that we will need to dramatically increase spending in our national defence and do so over the long term, rather than short-term sugar hits or sleight of hand that push money out over the forward estimates and allow inflation to account for "increases" in spending, despite there being little-to-no new money in real terms.

Ultimately, this comes back to the government's shift away from a "Balanced Force" towards a "Focused Force" as championed in the Defence Strategic Review and the foundational problem that is our lack of clearly defined role and objectives for our own defence capabilities.

This reality equally fails to account for the planned increase in ADF personnel by 2040 and places ultimate hope in a series of as yet to be developed autonomous systems, cyber or tactical weapons like HIMARs and others that are being shoehorned into fulfilling "strategic" roles to provide both "impactful projection" and deterrence against "any potential adversary".

Importantly, no one has said that defending the nation in this era of renewed and increasingly capable great power competition will be cheap or easy and we have to accept that uncomfortable reality, because the alternative outcome is infinitely worse.

# If we're going to have an honest conversation with the Australian people, we can't avoid the 'C-word'

By: Stephen Kuper



**With much of the Australian public still far removed from the realities now facing the nation, any honest conversation with the people is going to require honesty and bluntness, particularly when it comes to China.**

Australians often pride themselves on being pretty cluey, in touch with the world and the ebbs and flows of contemporary events.

Equally, they also pride themselves on having a voracious desire to understand the challenges that face themselves, their families, their wallets, and of course, the nation.

It is important to say that while the focus isn't always on the most consequential matters of the day, this is something Australians can rightfully be proud of.

Yet as the broader world and the Indo-Pacific closer to home continue to devolve into a highly contested, multipolar world, no longer dominated by our "great and powerful friend" and strategic benefactor, the United States, the Australian public seems to be absent from the conversation.

Equally important to this broader national conversation is the central economic, political, and security challenge of our time or the "C-word", that being China, and Australia's increasingly tense relationship with the rising superpower.

Deputy director of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's defence team, Dr Alex Bristow, writing for *The Australian Financial Review*, in a piece titled, [Australia can't talk defence by not mentioning China](#), highlighted this.

Bristow began the important conversation by stating, "on defence affairs, raising public understanding of threats, and building the social licence for increased defence spending ... one essential word was missing from her argument: China".

## **We need to be upfront and honest**

The implications of any potential hostilities either kinetic or in the "grey zone" has increasingly become the flavour of the month, particularly for the world's increasingly assertive autocratic powers, would prove to be utterly devastating for the [Australian people and economy](#).

This is even more the case as the Australian economy (despite repeated efforts) continues to double down on its [overwhelming dependence](#) on Chinese demand for raw materials, agricultural produce and services.

The human costs are also increasingly factored into the policy-making decisions and more broadly by the Australian people, yet there still appears to be some disconnect, particularly as we frequently see references to a particular episode of *The Hollow Men*.

Bristow explained, "China is the state that poses the greatest danger to Australia and the stability of our region. We will not generate or sustain public consent for increased defence spending and the whole-of-nation effort required in the years ahead until our national security establishment stops publicly treating China as taboo."

This is where the Australian military and our elected policymakers need to increasingly step to the forefront and have an open, honest and frank conversation with the Australian public.

Unpacking this further, Bristow stated, "The public must tap the military's experience to build our understanding of Chinese sharp power, especially as it seems grimly inevitable that Beijing's recklessness will lead to a deadly incident sooner or later, plunging us into a crisis for which the nation is sorely unprepared..."

“This is necessary to preserve the ADF for its primary duties of deterrence and preparedness for war, but the trust and compact between the military and the nation must not be inadvertent casualties of these changes,” Bristow added.

However, in order to maximise the efficacy of any conversation with the Australian people, we need to avoid falling into the trap of using overly verbose, “bureaucratic” language that causes the “average punter” to disengage and tune out.

Bristow explained this, stating, “A good starting place for Defence to be candid about the threat posed by China is the forthcoming national defence strategy (NDS). The published version of the Defence Strategic Review (DSR) that laid the groundwork for the NDS made shrewd observations about China’s growing military capabilities and coercive playbook. But it followed the tendency in our public debate to use abstractions like our deteriorating strategic circumstances. Such abstractions cloud public understanding of the fact it is Beijing’s actions that are threatening our security and destabilising our region, not amorphous concepts like great power rivalry...”

“Plain language on China would also help apportion the scarce resources of Defence and other parts of the national security ecosystem across a range of threats. The DSR calls for an ADF focused on “the nation’s most significant military risks”. But without clarity about which capabilities are required to counter China, there is a risk that the ADF will lose the scale and flexibility to fulfil other essential roles, as shown recently when ships were not available for collective maritime security operations in the Red Sea,” Bristow added.

Equally, it is becoming clear that the Australian people don’t only expect a conversation solely characterised by “doom and gloom”, rather the Australian people, while wanting a realistic conversation, equally want a clear path forward that secures their interests and provides a long-term, optimistic vision for the nation’s future.

### Final thoughts

Australians are going to be asked to accept a number of uncomfortable realities in coming years. First and foremost, we will have to accept that while the world is increasingly becoming “multipolar”, the Indo-Pacific, in particular, is rapidly becoming the most hotly contested region in the world.

Second, both the Australian public and our policymakers will have to accept that without a period of considered effort, investment and reform, or as I like to colloquially refer to it, our Rocky montage moment, current and future generations of Australians will be increasingly impoverished, living in a nation pushed around by the region’s now rising powers.

Recognising this array of challenges and opportunities, both the Australian public and its policymakers need to look beyond the myopic lens of short-termism that has traditionally dominated our diplomatic, strategic, and economic policy making since Federation.

Ultimately, we need to see Australia begin to play the long game to fully capitalise on the opportunities transforming the Indo-Pacific.

The most important questions now become, when will we see a more detailed analysis and response to the challenges and opportunities facing Australia and when will we see both a narrative and strategy that better helps industry and the Australian public understand the challenges faced and opportunities we have presented before us?

As events continue to unfold throughout the region and China continues to throw its economic, political, and strategic weight around, can Australia afford to remain a secondary power, or does it need to embrace a larger, more independent role in an era of increasing great power competition?



## ‘Cut me some slack’

‘Cut me some slack’ is an expression that has been used for many years, and was an instruction given when a ship was docking.

Tying a ship to a pier was always a difficult task and required two teams of men equipped with mooring ropes.

To ‘cut me some slack’ meant to loosen the rope. As one rope was pulled to haul the ship closer, the other line was released or given slack, which would continue until the ship was properly aligned and docked.

Nowadays, it means to make allowances for a person’s behaviour, or to be less strict with someone.



# Defence negotiating updated Hunter contract offer, Senate committee told

By: Robert Dougherty



An artist's impression of the BAE Systems SEA 5000 Future Frigate, Global Combat Ship - Australia. Photo: BAE Systems

**The Department of Defence is negotiating a newly updated contract offer from [BAE Systems Australia](#) for the production of the first three Hunter Class frigates.**

Defence was grilled on a possible cost blowout of the Hunter Class frigates during a Senate foreign affairs, defence and trade legislation committee meeting on 14 February.

Defence outlined that the department came across a significant increase in the cost estimate for the frigate program in early 2023 (over the initial costing of \$44.3 billion).

During the Senate estimates meeting, the Department detailed that an offer had been received from BAE in June 2023 and new updated offer for the first batch of three ships had been received on 1 February this year.

The exact amount detailed in the new offer was withheld by Defence during the meeting, however, staff said the cost is expected to increase further. Defence said the department is analysing the new offer, which is understood to be impacted by cost pressures including time, inflation, the COVID-19 pandemic and supply issues.

Defence has an estimate for sustainment of the Hunter Class based on parent ships (Type 26 and Anzac Class sustainment costs) and ADF experience.

Senator David Shoebridge questioned Defence regarding whether the Hunter Class frigate costings would be consistent with 15 Type 26 Future Frigate vessels ordered for Canada worth \$83 billion (AU\$95 billion).

"When is the final operational capability? At the moment, you have no contracts to build ships ... no target date for operational service," Senator Shoebridge said.

Under the current program, the Australian Defence Force would receive nine anti-submarine optimised frigates (based on modified UK Type 26 Global Combat Ship designs) built at Osbourne, South Australia. The modifications include incorporating Australian CEA phased-array radar, Aegis combat management system, and integration of a Seahawk Romeo Maritime Combat Helicopter.

In addition, BAE Systems Australia has announced a newly designed Hunter frigate at the Indo Pacific 2023 International Maritime Exposition late last year. That model featured an additional 64 MK41 vertical launch cells and eight more Naval Strike Missiles (96 total VLS and 16 NSMs).

An update on the Hunter Class Frigate program is expected to be provided under the yet-to-be-released "surface fleet review" independent analysis provided to government last year led by United States Navy Vice Admiral (Ret'd) William Hilarides, assisted by former secretary of the Department of Finance Rosemary Huxtable, and former Commander Australian Fleet, Vice Admiral Stuart Mayer.

## Babcock: Float-off of UK's first Type 31 frigate expected in first half of 2024

by Fatima Bahtić



Babcock

*"HMS Venturer is progressing through construction and assembly with the complete hull now in place and the superstructure taking shape. Main engines, gear boxes and diesel generators are installed with supporting systems being fitted around them. The next major milestone will be float-off, expected in the first half of 2024," the company stated.*

The announcement came as part of the company's half-year financial results. In April 2022, in the brand-new assembly hall in Rosyth dockyard in Scotland, Babcock laid the keel of HMS Venturer. The company signed a contract for the construction of five ships. The keel for the second vessel in this class, HMS Active, was laid in January 2023.

The Type 31s are one of two classes of frigate under construction for the Royal Navy. They will conduct duties around the globe where the presence of a major Royal Navy warship is required – such as curbing drugs trafficking in the Caribbean or Middle East, working with NATO in the Mediterranean, and providing humanitarian relief and assistance.

Each ship is larger than the current Type 23s they replace but slightly shorter and lighter than HMS Glasgow and the seven other planned Type 26 frigates also being built for the fleet in Govan, just 35 miles away. The 26s will focus on anti-submarine warfare – like eight Type 23s fitted with towed arrays – leaving the 31s to carry out patrols wherever they are needed, from conducting counter-terrorism/drug smuggling patrols in the Indian Ocean to helping out in the aftermath of a disaster.

The UK company plans to deliver all five Type 31 frigates by 2028.

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- Be at least 12 years and 6 months old and under the age of 19 years.
- Produce a statement from your family or any medical practitioner as to your ability to participate in Cadet activities.

So if you're ready to get fully trained in adventure, get into the Australian Navy Cadets and get out there!

In 88 Units across Australia, sponsored by the Royal Australian Navy, over 2,500 staff and cadets learn about sailing and seamanship, develop leadership skills and learn how to communicate effectively. The ANC is a voluntary youth organisation which trains young adults to become better citizens for the community. This training involves nautical and maritime activities within a military environment.

They develop confidence, pride and self-discipline whilst having an ocean of fun and making loads of new friends along the way.

Check out our website at [www.cadetnet.gov.au/anc](http://www.cadetnet.gov.au/anc), find a Navy Cadet Unit near you and set sail on the voyage of a lifetime.

### **For information on how to join the ANC, email**

**[ANCrecruiting@cadetnet.gov.au](mailto:ANCrecruiting@cadetnet.gov.au)**

**THE  
NAVY**

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Hon Secretary CMDR Jim O'Neill ANC RTD

PO Box 735 Fremantle WA 6959

Bandjoneill.1@bigpond.com

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And CMDR Jim O'Neill ANC RTD>