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Naval re-equipment: a challenge for the Royal Australian Navy and Australia

The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) is in the throes of a major re-equipment programme which, far from being simply the replacement of older ships and aircraft with newer versions, will significantly change our navy's roles and capabilities and enhance the effectiveness of the entire Australian Defence Force (ADF). The challenges are enormous: the equipment must be built and brought into service; it must be manned with trained personnel; it must then be employed efficiently; and, finally, it must be maintained and updated effectively. The responsibility for meeting these challenges goes well beyond the RAN.

The central elements of the programme are the acquisition of two Canberra-class amphibious assault ships (LHD) of 27,800 tonnes, the hull of the first of which will arrive in Australia in August this year. For those who can recall her, these ships will be significantly bigger than HMAS *Melbourne*. Capable of supporting and sustaining 1100 troops for 45 days, and able to carry 150 vehicles, including tanks, the LHDs will also carry MRH90 multirole and Tiger armed reconnaissance helicopters. On entry into service, they will represent an enormous leap in the amphibious combat, peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance options available to the Australian Government.

Key Events

Commander Australian Fleet, Rear Admiral Steve Gilmore AM CSC RAN, handed over command of the Fleet to Rear Admiral Tim Barrett AM CSC RAN on 21 December.

The Australian Maritime Warfare Centre at Fleet Base East, Sydney, was opened in late September.

In July, Navy marked 100 years since the Royal title was granted, with the Chief of Navy opening a naval exhibition at Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne. In October, the Royal Australian Mint released six commemorative coins to mark the anniversary.

Headquarters Australian Fleet