United Service

DEFENCE NEWS

Royal Australian Navy

For the Royal Australian Navy, 2013 has been one of the busiest periods on recent record, with considerable border protection activity, and operations against international piracy and narcotics trading in the Middle East and the Indian Ocean. In parallel, preparation has continued for the introduction into service of new landmark capabilities and to further mature the Defence Seaworthiness Management System.

International Fleet Review: The Royal Australian Navy was formed in 1913 and on 4 October the new Australian Squadron of seven state-of-the-art ships, led by its flagship, the battle cruiser HMAS *Australia*, sailed into Sydney Harbour for the first time. To mark the centenary of this historic event, ships of the current Australian Fleet entered Sydney Harbour on 4 October 2013 and on 5 October they, together with visiting ships from some 17 other navies and 16 tall ships, were reviewed in the Harbour by the Governor-General accompanied by HRH Prince Harry. It was a magnificent naval ceremonial occasion. Other associated events included a night-time fireworks and light display, a combined naval march through Sydney, visits by the public to visiting warships, an ecumenical and interfaith service at St Mary's Cathedral, a reception by the Commander Australian Fleet aboard HMAS *Success*, a sea power conference and an international maritime conference and exposition.

Operation Slipper includes Australia's maritime contribution to international security and counter-piracy operations in the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO). HMA Ships *Anzac, Toowoomba, Newcastle* and currently *Melbourne* have been deployed to the MEAO this year in support of the combined maritime forces, patrolling over 2 million square miles from the Red Sea to the Gulf of Oman. *Melbourne*, the 56th continuous rotation of an Australian frigate to the MEAO since 1990, took over from *Newcastle* in October. Until April, Commodore Charles McHardie RAN commanded the Bahrain-based Combined Task Force 150 (which involves 27 nations) directing security operations across some of the world's busiest shipping lanes. In late March, CTF 150 seized over 500kg of smuggled heroin, with an estimated street value of $AU100 million, so denying a source of terrorist funding.

Operation Resolute: Navy's commitment to the whole-of-government effort in border protection comprises the Armidale-class patrol boat fleet, hydrographic survey ships, coastal mine hunters, a frigate (on rotation) and headquarters personnel. Throughout a period of sustained media scrutiny, crews consistently have risen to the challenge of operations in a physically and mentally demanding environment.

High-end warfare exercises: Navy is re-invigorating its high-end and complex group warfare capability. HMAS *Dechaineux* was deployed to the South China Sea in April to participate in Exercise Bersama Shield, the longest-standing multilateral exercise in South East Asia. Exercise Talisman Sabre also presented excellent opportunities for Navy to evaluate its evolving joint task group doctrine and tactics with Army and Air Force, and combined engagement with the United States (US). The guided-missile frigate HMAS *Sydney* was embedded into the US 7th Fleet *George Washington* Carrier Strike Group, improving interoperability and benchmarking Australian naval performance against the US Navy. HMAS *Choules* was also present at Talisman Sabre, after completing her sea assurance testing ahead of schedule. Exercise Triton Centenary, in September and October, was another significant multi-national exercise that brought partners together prior to and after the International Fleet Review.

Seaworthiness management: The imminent arrival of NUSHIP *Canberra*, the first of two Adelaide-class landing-helicopter-dock amphibious assault ships (LHD), is a key focus of the maturing Defence Seaworthiness System designed to ensure maritime platforms are operated in a safe and regulated manner. The crew of *Canberra* have spent 2013 preparing for the acceptance into service of the LHD, including domestic and international training courses and the development of amphibious command and operations planning knowledge. The introduction of the formal Defence Seaworthiness Management System represents a collaborative, rigorous approach to assurance across Navy, resulting in more robust and risk-aware maintenance and audit processes. This has already delivered resource and compliance benefits, and the framework will continue to mature as the final recommendations of the Rizzo Review are implemented. Of note, during 2013 Navy has operated three submarines at sea, a sign of the improvements achieved thus far in the submarine sustainment and support arena.

Navy's capabilities also have been expanded through the introduction into service of the MRH-90 maritime support helicopters, following service release in May. The Fleet Air Arm has also deployed key personnel to the United States for initial MH-60R (Seahawk Romeos combat helicopter) trade and flight training. The future 725 Squadron has spent 2013 operating Australian-owned MH-60R helicopters from Naval Air Station–Jacksonville in Florida, before returning to Australia in 2015 to continue aircrew training in Nowra. The air-warfare destroyer project also made considerable advances in 2013, with the 22m-high Aegis mast for the first Hobart-class air-warfare destroyer (DDG) delivered to the AWD Alliance Facility in Adelaide.

International engagement: A final focus of 2013 has been the development and execution of a diverse international engagement strategy to support the International Fleet Review in Sydney in October. Earlier in the year, HMAS *Tobruk* deployed to Papua New Guinea for Exercise Pacific Partnership, an important regional engagement and cooperation activity. The ESPS *Cantabria*, a Spanish Armada replenishment oiler, was assigned to operate with the Navy from February to November. Another forty foreign warships also exercised and operated with the Navy in complex, multinational exercises, leading to the combined fleet entry into Port Jackson. Through such engagements, Navy continues to advance Australia's reputation regionally and globally.

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