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DEFENCE NEWS

Royal Australian Navy

In the second half of 2013, the Navy continued to contribute to international security and counter-piracy operations in the Middle East Area of Operations. HMA Ships *Newcastle* and then *Melbourne* were deployed to the region, patrolling over two million square miles from the Red Sea to the Gulf of Oman. *Melbourne* successfully interdicted suspected pirates off the coast of Somalia, arresting nine men and later destroying their skiffs and equipment.

The RAN also assumed command of Combined Task Force 150, the Bahrain-based task force involving 29 nations aimed at promoting security and stability in the Middle East. Commodore Daryl Bates assumed command in December and is directing counter-terrorism operations in the Middle East and Northern Indian Ocean region.

Support to government-directed border protection operations continued around the clock. The Armidale-class patrol boat fleet, hydrographic survey ships, coastal mine hunters, two frigates and headquarters personnel consistently supported whole-of-government requirements, including the transition to the new government's Operation Sovereign Borders. North-west shelf patrols and exercises were also conducted to protect Australian infrastructure; and HMAS *Choules* provided maritime support to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection operation on Manus Island.

During 2013 the RAN operated three submarines at sea, a sign of the improvements achieved thus far in the submarine sustainment and support arena.

Following typhoon Haiyan, HMAS *Tobruk* supported humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations in the Philippines. *Tobruk* deployed with an embarked MRH90 helicopter, marking the first operational deployment of this aircraft. HMA Ships *Labuan*, *Tarakan*, *Diamantina* and clearance divers also undertook explosive ordnance demolitions in the Solomon Islands, locating and disposing of over 10,000 explosive items.

In October, Navy diplomacy took centre stage in Australia with the International Fleet Review (IFR) commemorating the centenary of the arrival of the RAN fleet into Sydney Harbour. Thirty-seven warships, 16 tall ships, more than 60 aircraft, 10 military bands and around 8000 sailors took part in the week-long celebrations, which showcased naval capability and collaboration.

The IFR was bookended by the first Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus, Maritime Security Expert Working Group Field Training Exercise, which included 11 ships and 13 countries and significant multinational exercises. The Sea Power conference was brought forward to coincide with the IFR, with discussions held around the theme of 'Naval Diplomacy and Maritime Power Projection'.

Eight ships along with an MRH90 took part in Exercise Talisman Sabre, the largest combined air, land and sea military training exercise regularly undertaken by the ADF in conjunction with forces from the United

States. The exercise presented excellent opportunities for the RAN to test and evaluate its evolving joint task group doctrine and tactics with Army and Air Force.

HMAS *Sirius* provided replenishment capability during Exercise Bersama Lima, a multi-national military activity held annually as part of the Five Power Defence Arrangements in the South China Sea. HMAS *Ballarat* deployed to Malaysia for a bilateral exercise; and a submarine escape and rescue exercise was held in the East Australian Exercise Area for the first time, bringing together HMAS *Farncomb*, ACV *Ocean Shield* and the James Fisher Rescue Service LR5 Submersible.

The RAN conducted the world's first firing of a "war shot" MU90 lightweight torpedo from HMAS *Stuart*. The final operational acceptance trial for the phased-array radar and combat management system upgrades to the ANZAC-class frigate anti-ship missile defence system were achieved, with a number of Evolved Sea Sparrow missiles fired successfully from HMAS *Perth*.

ESPS *Cantabria* completed an outstandingly successful nine-month deployment to Australia, providing Australia with underway replenishment capability and an opportunity for personnel to familiarise themselves with some of the systems that will shortly arrive in the new destroyers and amphibious ships. In turn, the Spanish Armada was able to test the extended deployment capability of the platform.

The Fleet's focus for 2014 will continue to be ensuring platform availability to meet government-directed operations; and the arrival of NUSHIP *Canberra* will be a major milestone in the development of Navy's future force. 2014 will also be a year of reflection, as Navy commemorates the centenary of submarines and the loss of *AE1* and *AE2*, as well as the 50th anniversary of the sinking of HMAS *Voyager*.

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