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Royal Australian Navy Update

For the Royal Australian Navy's (RAN) fleet, the first six months of 2012 was business as usual. HMAS *Tobruk* returned to sea in January after maintenance, which included improvements to her propulsion system, then resumed border protection duties. She conducted the first flight trials with the new MRH 90 helicopter.

In February, while conducting maritime security operations in the North Arabian Sea, HMAS *Parramatta* boarded a vessel and seized 240 kilograms of illegal narcotics. She then joined the USS *Abraham Lincoln* carrier battle group. She was relieved by HMAS *Melbourne* in March and returned to Australia.

February also saw HMA Ships *Huon* and *Choules* practise rapid resupply at sea; and HMA Ships *Ballarat*, *Huon* and *Yarra*, Squirrel helicopters and clearance divers hone their high-end war-fighting capability with ships from the New Zealand Navy.

In March, off Townsville, HMAS *Choules* practised amphibious and flying operations; then, with the New Zealand amphibious ship, HMNZS *Canterbury*, 3rd Brigade personnel and Australian Defence Force (ADF) planning staff, trained for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief incidents in our region.

April saw the focus shift to illegal fishing in the waters between Australia and Indonesia, during a joint ADF and Indonesian Armed Forces operation, which included aircraft, ships (including HMAS *Pirie*) and headquarters staff from both nations. HMA Ships *Ararat* and *Larrakia* exercised with two Indonesian patrol boats off Darwin. Concurrently, HMAS *Ballarat* completed a successful border-protection patrol through the north-west gas fields, and participated in Exercise Bersama Shield with HMAS *Collins*. *Collins* performed outstandingly, remaining undetected and achieving the simulated destruction of the enemy task group.

In May, HMA Ships *Ararat*, *Larrakia*, *Diamantina*, *Gascoyne*, *Balikpapan*, *Shepparton*, and *Benalla*, and Squirrel helicopters, conducted amphibious training with landing craft and Unimog trucks operated by Army's 36th Water Transport Troop. HMAS *Perth* visited the Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt in Victoria, Canada. HMAS Darwin's crew helped Samoa celebrate its 50th anniversary of independence.

In June, the Bell 429 helicopter commenced service. In the South China Sea, HMAS *Ballarat* took part in Exercise Pacific Bond with Japanese and American ships. HMAS *Choules* developed a defect in its propulsion system and will be out-of-service for around six months. The fleet replenishment ships, *Sirius* and *Success*, began extended maintenance. HMA Ships *Larrakia*, *Wollongong*, *Maitland* and *Leeuwin* rescued survivors from sunken refugee boats near Christmas Island. Navy's newest ship, Australian Defence Vessel *Ocean Shield*, arrived in Australia.

June saw the start, in Hawaii, of Exercise Rimpac 2012, the world's largest maritime exercise. Australia led the maritime component – 41 surface ships, one aircraft carrier and six submarines, including HMA Ships *Darwin*, *Perth* and *Farncomb*.

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