



THE HON. JOEL FITZGIBBON MP Minister for Defence

Saturday, 2 May 2009

PLANNING UNDERWAY FOR NEW OFFSHORE COMBATANT VESSELS

The 2009 Defence White Paper sets out a new capability direction with a significant focus on enhancing our maritime capabilities for the 21st century, the Minister for Defence, the Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon MP announced today.

The Government has directed Defence to commence studies into increasing the versatility and effectiveness of the Navy's Patrol Boat, Mine Counter Measures, Hydrographic and Oceanographic functions through the design of a new multi-role class of ship.

As part of these studies the Navy will look at rationalising the four different classes of ship that currently perform these three different roles through the acquisition of around 20 new multi-role Offshore Combatant Vessels.

The common ship type will be able to use modular specialised systems which can be tailored for specific tasks. For example there will be an uninhabited underwater systems module that can be fitted for mine counter-measures or hydrographic tasks when required.

"This is a new and exciting modular-role concept that has the potential to revolutionise how Navy meets these three important tasks and at the same time increases the combat power of Navy," Mr Fitzgibbon said.

The ships will be designed for multi-purpose tasking, with an anticipated displacement of up to 2,000 tonnes.

The studies will look at various ship designs to deliver a multirole ship class with a common hull, propulsion and support systems, a flight deck, and will be fitted with self-defence weapon systems as well as basic networking capabilities.

They will also have the ability to embark a helicopter or uninhabited aerial vehicle to allow a surge in surveillance and response capabilities without the need for additional ships to be deployed. It is anticipated that the project will generate a range of longer term savings in operating and training costs by rationalising four classes of vessels into one.

A Defence Force for the 21st Century

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“This increased capability will decrease the reliance on major surface combatants for low and medium threat environments, while providing the Navy with greater flexibility to adapt the tasking of these new vessels to meet changing operational priorities,” Mr Fitzgibbon said.

A sophisticated sensor and weapons systems module will be available to allow the ships to conduct a wide range of offshore and littoral warfighting tasks, border protection tasks, and missions in support of security and stability in the nearer region.

The 2009 Defence White Paper represents the most comprehensive statement on Defence ever produced. It affirms the Government’s commitment to the defence of Australia, the protection of our sovereign interests and the security and stability of our region.

Media contact:

Christian Taubenschlag (Joel Fitzgibbon): 02 6277 7800 or 0438 595 567
Defence Media Liaison: 02 6265 3343 or 0408 498 664

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