



THE HON. JOEL FITZGIBBON MP Minister for Defence

Saturday, 2 May 2009

NEW CLASS OF HEAVY LANDING CRAFT FOR NAVY

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.

As a part of this plan, the Government has decided to acquire six new heavy landing craft with improved ocean-going capabilities to replace the Navy's ageing *Balikpapan* class Landing Craft Heavy (LCH) vessels.

"The Navy's current fleet of heavy landing craft has been continuously used in these roles since the early 1970s and have provided outstanding service, but they are relatively slow and vulnerable to adverse weather," Mr Fitzgibbon said.

The new class of landing craft will provide intra-theatre lift to augment the larger *Canberra* class Landing Helicopter Dock (LHD) and new Strategic Sealift amphibious vessels. The new landing craft will have improved sea-keeping characteristics and faster transit speeds than the LCHs that they will be replacing.

"Military and humanitarian operations in our region and around our nation require smaller amphibious vessels to move cargo ashore, transport troops along coastal areas, or evacuate civilians."

Vessels of this type enable small land forces to use the sea as a manoeuvre space to increase the tempo of operations and outpace an adversary, particularly in difficult terrain where onshore infrastructure is poor or vulnerable to disruption at key points. They will also be capable of contributing to humanitarian and disaster relief operations.

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.

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