HMAS MELBOURNE’S FINAL ANTI-PIRACY ACT

On her final day assigned to operations in the Middle East, Royal Australian Navy frigate HMAS Melbourne continued her important work of securing vital sea lanes of communication.

Hours before handing over the maritime security task in the Middle East Area of Operations to HMAS Stuart, HMAS Melbourne was called upon to assist a merchant vessel in distress. On 18th January MV Tide reported that she was being harassed by a pirate mothership and two skiffs. The merchant vessel requested immediate assistance. HMAS Melbourne responded and altered her course to steam to the aid of MV Tide, simultaneously sending her Sea Hawk helicopter ahead to investigate the situation.

Fortunately, MV Tide was able to conduct evasive manoeuvres and escape the pirates within about an hour of her initial distress call. The merchant vessel’s actions successfully negated the pirate attack, allowing HMAS Melbourne and her helicopter to return to patrolling duties without further incident for her last few hours serving in support of Operation SLIPPER.

HMAS Melbourne has successfully completed a six-month operational deployment to the Middle East marked by involvement in maritime security and counter-piracy operations, and international engagement with countries such as Yemen, Jordan and Pakistan.

Frigate Melbourne was the first of the recently upgraded Adelaide Class warships to undertake an operational deployment and was relieved by HMAS Stuart in a hand-over ceremony on 19th January 2011. Melbourne had 238 men and women embarked for the deployment.

Commanding Officer HMAS Melbourne Commander Michael Harris said the ship’s company had performed exceptionally well during the deployment and were employed in a range of tasks that included maritime security and counter-piracy as part of combined maritime force operations. Melbourne’s support in disrupting an earlier pirate attack on the MV CPO China received widespread recognition and praise.

Commander Australian Forces in the Middle East, Major-General Angus Campbell said the ship’s company and Commander of HMAS Melbourne should take pride in directly contributing to security in the Middle East and the safe passage of
maritime trade in the Indian Ocean. He commented, “You have very positively enhanced Australia’s reputation in the region. As HMAS Melbourne heads home for a well-earned rest, know that you have directly contributed to the mission in the Middle East and have made a positive impression on its people. Thank you for your efforts.”

*Melbourne* was the 24th rotation of Royal Australian Navy fleet units to the region since operations commenced in the Middle East in 2001. HMAS *Stuart* will be conducting her fourth rotation to the Gulf since operations began. The ship has a complement of approximately 190 men and women.