AUSTRALIAN MINISTER’S ADDRESS

The Hon Jason Clare, MP., Australian Minister for Defence Materiel addressed the Australian Defence Magazine Conference at the Hyatt Hotel, Canberra, on 16th February.

Conference had the theme, A Big Year Ahead. *Inter alia* the Minister said, “In the Air Force we will take delivery of the final nine Boeing F 18 Super Hornets; and work towards Initial Operating Capability on Wedgetail, the Airborne Early Warning & Control [AEW&C] aircraft.

In the Navy work on the first Air Warfare Destroyer will keep ramping up. The first blocks will be shipped by barge from the Hunter and Melbourne to Adelaide this year, the first large delivery of Aegis equipment is due in April, and the workforce will keep growing – hitting a peak of about 1200 in early next year; Sea trials on the Anzac Class Anti-Ship Missile Defence (ASMD) system – designed and developed by CEA in Australia - will start soon; and (18th February) the first Landing Helicopter Dock (LHD) hull was due to hit the water in Spain.

Minister Smith talked about the challenges faced by RAN’s amphibious fleet. “*We decommissioned the Manoora a few weeks ago because the work required to get it back to sea would have cost more than $20 million and take until next April. Given it was due to be decommissioned at the end of next year, this didn’t represent value for money.*

“The Kanimbla also requires a lot of work and will not be available until April next year. More work is also required on the Tobruk.

He added, “*We have struck an agreement with the New Zealand Government to share key capabilities including HMNZS Canterbury as part of a joint Ready Response Force. We are also exploring the potential lease or purchase of a Bay Class Vessel from the UK Government. It is one of a number of options we have asked Defence to explore.*

“*Another part of the transition plan must be reforming the structures and culture that underpin the repair and maintenance of our amphibious fleet. That’s why Minister Smith and I announced yesterday(15th February) we have appointed an independent team – led by Paul Rizzo - to address the problems in the repair and
maintenance of our amphibious fleet and oversee the early implementation of these reforms.

“The third part of the transition plan will be training. The LHDs are bigger than our last aircraft carrier, HMAS Melbourne. And they operate differently. They have a floating dock. They can carry up to 1000 troops, 100 armoured vehicles and 12 helicopters in the hanger. They will operate like a floating airport. Preparing for this will require a lot of work.

“The Prime Minister has said this year will be a year of decision and delivery. That is true right across government, including Defence. There are big decisions to make this year on projects like...future naval helicopters.

“This is also a year where a lot of materiel will be delivered.”