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What the Navy's Future Focus Means for WA

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Stakeholders in Western Australia's Defence Sector were offered a rare opportunity to engage directly with the ADF top brass on Tuesday, 4 August, when AIDN-WA in an exclusive breakfast function played host to the Chief of Navy, Vice-Admiral Tim Barrett. Held at the City of Cockburn, which sponsored the event, alongside Fremantle-based small business development hub Business Foundations, the function was attended by 54 guests from Industry, Defence and Academia.

The opening address by Mr Daniel Arndt, Director of Planning and Development at the City of Cockburn, prefaced the long relationship between the area and Defence, with the presence in the City of many Defence SMEs. He noted the various means the Council had attempted to attract Defence, such as building infrastructure, lobbying the State Government on behalf of industry, and encouraging industry training through integration of the TAFE college with the Australian Marine Complex. "The council is keen to encourage Defence Industry to continue to invest in the AMC, and for Council to play a lead role in supporting that investment," he said.

Vice Admiral Tim Barrett took a more informal tone, in his keynote address: "Strategy for the Future Navy". Noting that the Navy is experiencing an unprecedented expansion in the number of platforms it operates, including the Canberra-class LHD's, Air Warfare Destroyers, the MH-90 Romeo helicopter and the Future Submarine, the Chief outlined some of the strategies he is implementing to adjust the organisation by the time he concludes his tenure in 2018. This "whole of Navy evolution," as he described it, is to have an emphasis on the next few critical years, rather than following the excessively long-term planning that traditionally characterised Defence thinking. He emphasised that the primary tasks of the Navy were reliance on the critical factors of deterrence, lethality, strategic effectiveness, availability, and seaworthiness, which would also define what it requires from industry. Observing these trends within Navy should help to give industry an idea of where the Navy is headed, and thus where they should position their operations, the Chief noted.

The Admiral then focused on the question of availability of platforms and maintaining their seaworthiness, especially regarding the new additions to the fleet. In doing this, he drew on his aviation background, relating how aviation managers approach critical maintenance to maximise airworthiness and profitability,



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suggesting a similar approach be applied to the Navy. He opined that he saw himself as “the CEO of a large corporation of about \$4.2 billion a year”, and that applying a corporate model to maintenance could result in improved days-at-sea in terms of availability, as well as a maintenance schedule that could accommodate a higher tempo of operations in much the same manner as a civil airline would maintain a constantly-moving fleet of aircraft. The Admiral concluded by explaining the existing gulf between industry and naval expectations, calling for more dialogue. “Whilst it seems occasionally like we are on different planets, the reality is we both need each other, and we should actually be talking.”

The next presentation that followed was Mr Neil Hodges of UVS, titled: "Providing Service to the RAN". Mr Hodges started by giving an overview of the company, which produces Autonomous Underwater Vehicles, oceanographic and hydrographic equipment for the RAN, recently celebrated 15 years in operation, having started as "two guys in a garage". He then expounded how Defence contracts had impacted on the growth of his company, with the opening up of branches around the country to be "closer to the customer", and to provide "operational support, repair and maintenance, and an urgent response should it be required." With this there were efficiency gains in operating on both the east and west coast, as "skills don't need to be replicated, staff can be moved to different locations as needed, and are willing to travel to remote locations as becomes operationally necessary". He concluded that whilst "large contractors will continue to be of prime importance to the Navy", there will be, and should always, be room for local innovation and production.

The final speaker was Mr Philip Wheatley, CEO of Winchester Global, which produces engine oil and fuel filtration equipment marine sector. Mr Wheatley explained that his research team has developed a new class of oil filter, which is capable of markedly increasing the intervals required between oil changes and improving filtration effectiveness by up to 70%. His product is gaining acceptance in the marine field, with many local civilian boats operating his first generation of filters, as well as the Naval training vessel, *Discovery III*. He concluded by demonstrating the wide variety of engines running his filters, from mobile lighting towers to 3000-horsepower ships, stating that "from my perspective, scale doesn't matter".

Summing up the event's success key sponsor Daniel Arndt of the City of Cockburn, affirmed: "The City were delighted to host Vice Admiral Tim Barrett, Chief of Navy at the recent 'Future of the Navy & Defence Industry in WA' breakfast function. The City welcomed the opportunity to promote closer ties between industry groups and the Defence Department and looks forward to working with AIDN-WA in the future on similar events". While Mr Phil Kemp, CEO of Business Foundations, who also sponsored the event, commented, “Business Foundations was very pleased to work with AIDN-WA to bring the local defence industry and the Chief of Navy together at a recent event in Cockburn in Western Australia.” He added, “The Admiral challenged our local defence suppliers to be innovative and develop new ways to assist the Navy to maximise seaworthiness of the Australian Navy fleet. Small to medium-sized businesses that have



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unique capabilities to assist the Navy in its goals should consider entering the defence supply chain. This is something our organisation can also assist businesses with”.

The high profile nature of the event was an ideal prelude in the lead up to the 2015 Sir John Forrest Oration that followed in August.

Photographs of the event can be viewed by clicking on the following link:

<http://groupspaces.com/AIDN-WA-test/photos/album/65373>

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