



RAN Stands Up First UAS Squadron



Schiebel's CAMCOPTER S-100 will now join the Insitu ScanEagle in an intense period of evaluation and experimentation. (Photo: Schiebel)

On 25 October the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) commissioned its first unmanned aircraft squadron. Founded on the Naval Unmanned Aircraft Systems Unit (NUASU), 822X Squadron (the X for experimental) will continue to explore the use of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) at sea.

The work will encompass a wide variety of issues and potential roles, ranging from how to safely and routinely launch (and recover) UAS from naval vessels to how best to use their capabilities to monitor sensitive areas, back up expeditionary forces or hunt hostile submarines at sea. Sailors who have been conducting early experimentation with UAS in the NUASU have already encountered some of the unique issues they present – and begun to find solutions.

822X Squadron will operate the two types of UAS currently in service with the RAN – the Schiebel CAMCOPTER S-100 and the Boeing/Insitu ScanEagle – of which a total of eight have so far been procured. Initial experimenting has focused on their intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) role, but the squadron will now spend a period of three to five years examining a wider range of applications and mission sets from its base at HMS Albattross in Nowra, with a view to making a selection in the 2022-2023 timeframe.

Vice-Adm. Michael Noonan, the Chief of Navy, officiated at the commissioning ceremony, highlighting the serious nature of the undertaking as far as Defence is concerned. "Autonomous systems are growing in importance and 822X Squadron will realise the full potential that these technologies present," he told the audience.