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## Camcopter zooms in on Australia, as Sea 129 tender process begins



Schiebel Pacific announced on 27 July that it had teamed up with Raytheon Australia for the Australian Army's Project Land 129 Phase 3 requirement for a new tactical UAV.

With its Camcopter S-100, the Austrian-headquartered company is also eyeing Project Sea 129 Phase 5, for which invitations to respond were published on 6 August.

The Schiebel-Raytheon partnership, the first time the two firms have worked together, submitted its Land 129 Phase 3 tender response in late July.

The S-100 is the only rotary-wing platform in the limited RfT competition, although the Textron Systems Aerosonde Mk 4.7 has swappable booms that give it a VTOL capability. The other two contenders are the Insitu Pacific Integrator and Leidos Australia/Aeronautics Orbiter 4.

Andrew Watson, general manager at Schiebel Pacific, spoke to Shephard about his company's offering. 'Our teaming arrangement with Raytheon was selected on their strong presence within the Australian industry defence sector. They've got over 20 years' experience in the game.'

Watson highlighted the S-100's maturity of more than 15 years of experience. Indeed, globally the S-100 has accumulated more than 100,000 flight hours.

He mentioned that the Camcopter is a multirole platform. As well as the usual ISR configuration, it can perform search and rescue and vertical replenishment missions. For the latter, it can carry an underslung load such as urgently needed plasma, water or ammunition weighing up to 50kg.

Watson expects a selection for Land 129 Phase 3 to be announced by the end of 2020 or in early 2021. He promised 'extremely high levels' of Australian industry involvement. For example, engineering support, maintenance and repair would take place in Australia. He said Schiebel was keen to transfer knowledge into Australia. In June 2019, Schiebel Pacific opened an office and workshop in Yerrilyong, New South Wales, close to the RAN's HMAS Albatross base at Nowra.

Indeed, the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) is already operating several Camcopters within 822X Squadron there under Navy Minor Project 1942. It has conducted a number of first-of-class flight trials from MV Sycamore, and recently conducted a maiden flight from the Anzac-class frigate HMAS Ballarat, ahead of deployment in 2021. The Australian Army is familiar with the S-100 too. In December 2018, Schiebel announced it had demonstrated to the army an S-100 fitted with Elta Systems' ELK-7065 compact airborne COMINT system, and then the TK-5 Firewatch multiband land mapping system from Overwatch Imaging. Other payloads carried on the S-100 are the L3 Wescam MX-10 and Leonardo PicoSAR radar.

Turning to Project Sea 129 Phase 5, in late July the Department of Defence released an industry update. It revealed that the RAN is adopting a rolling block approach over 30 years to ensure its UAVs remain up to date.

The first of three five-year blocks will commence in 2024, each of which requires discrete government approval. Future blocks after that are still to be determined.

The invitation to register for the first block (2024-28) was released on 6 August, which will lead to a down-select and subsequent restricted RfT. The selected UAV will be initially embarked aboard Arafura-class OPVs and Anzac-class frigates. Block 1 will focus on workforce growth, training system development, combat management system integration and payload development.

Block 2 (2029-2033) will expand operations to Hunter-class frigates. By the end of this block, the number of deployable 'bricks' will have grown to approximately 12 to reach final operating capability.

Block 3 (2034-38) will incorporate updates and refreshed designs to meet strategic-environment constraints of that time. This phase will require at least 12 capability bricks.

One of the most important aspects of Blocks 2 and 3 is selection of a commercial 'capability partner' to 'develop, deliver and support the maritime UAS capability over the life of the capability'. This partner will be responsible for system support and 'provide a number of fundamental inputs to capability elements for the duration of the relevant block' to ensure a mature mission and support system.

This project will centre on Naval Air Station Nowra, but minor storage facilities may be needed at Fleet Base East (Sydney), Fleet Base West (Perth), HMAS Cairns and HMAS Coonawarra (Darwin) by the time Block 2 kicks off. The Australian Defence Force admitted that a 'number of strategic and risk-based considerations resulted in Defence reconsidering its approach to the maritime UAS acquisition. This regrettably delayed the project progression and restricted Defence's ability to engage industry.'

Of course, Schiebel will be competing in Project Sea 129 Phase 5, so it will no doubt be talking up the commonality benefits if it were to be chosen by both the army and navy. For example, a common training system would offer financial gains for the government.

Watson denied that the navy programme was more important than the army one to Schiebel, saying they were of equal importance.