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Australia has selected Schiebel's Camcopter S-100 rotary-wing UAS to meet the first phase of a Royal Australian Navy (RAN) requirement for maritime unmanned aircraft systems (MUAS).

Five contenders were announced in March 2021 for 'Block One' of the Sea129 Phase 5 MUAS programme, but there was no tender process, as Canberra decided to speed up the procurement by initiating a single source acquisition, said Schiebel Pacific in a 4 April statement, adding that this will enable the RAN to "accelerate the capability acquisition they need."

"The offered Maritime Uncrewed Aircraft System (MUAS) builds on the capability that has been provided by the proven Camcopter S-100 air vehicle currently in service with the RAN and is expected to create about 100 new Australian jobs," noted the company. The design, development, manufacture, integration, and support of the system will all be undertaken in Australia.

The S-100, which will now undergo an evaluation process, had been proposed by Schiebel Pacific and Raytheon Australia. Local media reports indicate up to 40 aircraft may be procured, to operate from several classes of vessel, including the future Arafura-class OPVs and Hunter-class frigates. According to the Australian DoD, 'Block One' is the first phase of a 30-year continuous development programme, with five-year rolling block upgrades that will incorporate new technology upgrades.

In RAN service, the Camcopter S-100 is operated by 822X Squadron, whose main mission is to conduct experimentation and evaluation activities with contemporary UAS. The S-100 UAS consists of one or more vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) UAVs and a ground control station with the associated antennae and interconnections necessary for remote C2.

According to Schiebel, each UAV has an endurance of up to six hours and a range of 200km, both with a maximum take-off weight of 200kg and a typical 50kg payload. Made of titanium and carbon fibre, each UAV is designed to carry multiple payloads simultaneously. Using 'fly-by-wire' technology controlled by redundant flight computers, the S-100 can conduct missions automatically in complex electromagnetic environments, noted the company.