

# FULL STEAM AHEAD



No longer under German ownership, design and marine engineering consultancy Australian Maritime Technologies is charting a new course.

BY ROBERT NUTBROWN

**B**ack in April 2016, ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) suffered two major setbacks when it not only lost out in its bid for the Future Submarine program, but also saw its MEKO A-400 RAN design omitted from the shortlist for the SEA 5000 Future Frigate program.

This double whammy, along with a failed bid for the Pacific Patrol Boats project and uncertainty over potential involvement in the Fassmer bid for the

Offshore Patrol Vessels project, left a question mark hanging over the future of the company's Australian business.

However, as of the beginning of September 2017, the ownership of what was ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems Australia has been transferred from Germany to its local management and staff.

And following the closing of the management buyout, the Australian-owned company is keen to emphasise its independence from TKMS as it seeks to access programs led by competitors of its

previous owner.

Rebranded as Australian Maritime Technologies (AMT), the company is now "proudly 100 per cent Australian owned and operated", as its website prominently declares.

The design and marine engineering consultancy is looking to get more involved with the Hobart class Air Warfare Destroyer (AWD) and Canberra class Landing Helicopter Dock (LHD) programs, and is now available to contenders for the SEA 5000 Future Frigate program.

What is now Australian Maritime Technologies was first established to provide in-country technical and project management assistance to Blohm+Voss as it pursued the Anzac frigate program. DEFENCE



“The doors are opening for us pretty quickly,” Rob Dunbar, managing director of AMT told *Australian Defence Business Review*.

The company had come into being in 1987 as Blohm+Voss Australia in order to provide in-country technical and project management assistance to Blohm+Voss as it pursued the Anzac frigate program.

With a view to positioning the company to compete for Australia’s frigate and submarine programs, it was purchased by TKMS and became known as

ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems Australia in January 2014, explains Dunbar.

Personnel were brought on board to chase these opportunities, and while Dunbar and some other existing employees had some involvement in that work, the naval engineering business continued to operate largely as it had been while the ultimately unsuccessful bids were being developed.

“There were several months of licking wounds and things like that, but once the dust settled there were some question

marks as to what to do with the business,” says Dunbar, who has been with the company since the Anzac days. “The reality was that we were an engineering organisation which was self-sustaining anyway, and we as the management knew that we were quite capable of standing on our own two feet.”

Discussions about the future began in the middle of 2017, and the negotiations concluded with an agreement being reached at the end of July.

What is now AMT was then relaunched



AMT hopes to expand its engineering consultancy work to the RAN's new Canberra class LHDs (above) and the Hobart class DDG (below) fleets. DEFENCE



in September as essentially the same company with the same staff, but under the new ownership arrangement.

"There is a lot of excitement here in the business, because what we are doing, it is pretty rare, particularly in this country, for management to come in and buy a business," says Dunbar. "It does really generate a real sense of excitement that we are doing something that is quite novel, and that we are doing it at the right time."

### Key program

AMT has been deeply involved in the upgrade of the Royal New Zealand Navy's two Anzac class frigates.

Under the Platform Systems Upgrade project, the company was contracted to design stability enhancement and compartment changes that provided the ships with a growth margin to enable future capability enhancements.

And for the Frigate Systems Upgrade (FSU) project, which covers the upgrade of surveillance, combat and self-defence

capabilities, AMT has been a key design and integration partner.

For the last year and a half, AMT has been working under a subcontract with prime system integrator Lockheed Martin Canada, undertaking the detailed design for the complete FSU ship integration.

"In the two years ahead, we will be moving into a production support phase," says Dunbar. "We will have staff working in our office here in Melbourne, but we will also have staff resident at the shipyard in Canada. So that will be starting early next year at Victoria on Vancouver Island at the Seaspan shipyard. And that is a two-year program as the implementation rolls out through the first of class and then the second of class, so that is still a key program for us."

### Future opportunities

Here in Australia, AMT has engaged in design and engineering work contributing to the sustainment of most of the Royal Australian Navy's older surface assets.

The company undertook the total structural remediation of the Armidale class patrol boat fleet, redesigning the structure to resolve cracking issues. And it has provided engineering support to the Australian Border Force for its Cape class patrol boats.

Now, the company has its sights set on programs to which its access was previously limited due to concerns over the sharing of intellectual property. Getting involved with the SEA 5000 program, for which frigate designs from BAE Systems, Fincantieri and Navantia have been shortlisted was "difficult" for AMT while it remained under German ownership, says Dunbar.

"What the Turnbull government is looking for is a home-based defence industry which is strong, highly skilled and capable, and employs Australians; we tick all of those boxes," Dunbar explained. "We are now able to apply our full capability to areas that we could not apply it to under TKMS ownership."

"So we are going to be looking at accessing the support and design engineering and sustainment work, and there will be other capability changes, for the newer platforms that are coming online, and then there are the new acquisition programs as well."

Although AMT predominantly focuses on surface ships, it is also keeping an eye on the SEA 1000 Future Submarine program.

"We are sitting here in Australia and we have got a total naval design and engineering capability, through naval architecture, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, combat systems integration and helicopter integration," says Dunbar. "We cover the full breadth of naval engineering, and I think we are pretty unique in Australia in what it is that we actually do."

AMT currently has a complement of more than 40 staff, but the company is looking to expand as it secures work on these major acquisition programs or in the sustainment of larger surface combatants.

"There is a huge volume of work out there to be done," Dunbar notes. "We have got a really solid core, so growing to meet demand is really a low-risk thing for us to do."

"And one of the great things is that we have got such a secure senior management group, because this is the shareholding group."

"The depth of experience that we have got is really quite secure, I would like to think, because these are the people that have had the confidence to invest in the business to become a part of our success." ■