NAVY TENDERS FOR INTERIM VTOL UAS CAPABILITY

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The Royal Australian Navy is looking to acquire an interim vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) unmanned aircraft system (UAS).

A request for tender (RFT) for the Navy Minor Project (NMP) 1942, released on the AusTender website on February 26 (with a closing date of April 11), seeks to procure a "proven" VTOL 'Maritime Tactical Unmanned Aircraft System – Interim Capability' (or MTUAS-IC) and associated engineering and logistic support for the Navy "to extend and enhance the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities of a parent unit or ship to increase situational awareness using a variety of sensors".

Tender documents note the "RFT is seeking the procurement of one training MTUAS and associated support system initially and subject to successful acceptance testing and operational test and evaluation (OT&E), options to acquire further systems to be operated at sea." (A system may comprise one or more air vehicles.)

An initial spares and support arrangement for three years and 1,500 operating hours is required under the tender, as is a training package.

Requirements for the MTUAS include being able to search an area of 400nm2 per hour for four hours at a range of 60nm from the parent ship and being able to carry two payload types

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concurrently, such as ESM and radar or EO/IR and radar.

The project will also allow the Navy to develop experience with and concept of operations for a maritime VTOL UAS ahead of plans to acquire an operational ‘Maritime Tactical Unmanned Aircraft’ flagged in the recent Defence White Paper’s Integrated Investment Program (IIP) document.

“To improve the situational awareness of ships on operations, we will acquire a new tactical unmanned intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance aircraft system that will complement other sensors and systems by extending the area able to be held under surveillance. These systems will be progressively introduced over the decade to FY 2025-26. They will be able to operate from a range of vessels of varying size, including the future frigates and patrol vessels,“ the IIP reads. Elsewhere the IIP also notes that the Hobart class Air Warfare Destroyers will also embark “tactical unmanned systems”.

The IIP lists the ‘Maritime Tactical Unmanned Aircraft’ as having a 2018-2030 timeframe and a $500-700 million budget.

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