

**DEFENCE READY** *WAs Defence footprint*

# ENGINEERING KEY STRENGTH

WA's fabrication sector is world-class, with five local companies blazing the trail

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**W**idely considered to be one of WA's areas of greatest comparative advantage, the Defence engineering and fabrication sector has developed an international reputation for providing quality components to Defence manufacturers.

WA companies currently contribute to projects across all three services, having developed significant experience through civilian oil and gas, mining, civil engineering, marine and aerospace contracts.

An overview of five local SMEs provides a good study of the sector's potential to attract some of the upcoming tranche of Defence contracts.

Hofmann Engineering, established in 1969, stands out as one of the more versatile of the firms.

The company provides components to a wide array of projects; including the Bushmaster PMV, M113 Armoured Personnel Carrier, Anzac Class frigate, Collins Class submarine, C-130H Hercules, F/A-18 Hornet, E-7A Wedgetail and AP-3C Orion. It has also succeeded in expanding its operations beyond Perth, with facilities in Melbourne, Bendigo, Newcastle and South America; and offices in India and the US.

Other companies are more specialised, with many focusing on naval work.

Relative newcomer Civmec has been strongly focussed in this area, launching an audacious attempt to become a major shipbuilding contractor in time to bid for work emerging from the 2016 Defence White Paper.

Despite the fact that it has not previously been involved in Defence work, the firm opened a Defence Business Unit in late 2015, acquiring the Tomago shipyard and brand of ailing NSW shipbuilder, Forgas. It has also moved to liaise directly with the three bidders for the Future Submarine Competitive Evaluation Process, going as far as fabricating a submarine hull section to demonstrate their capabilities to build to the exacting standards of what the submarine sector would demand.

Expansion of its Henderson-based facilities has been flagged in the event of a major contract win.

Also located in Henderson is Orontide, which provides fabrication, welding and mechanical work for a variety of naval vessels.

This includes repair, upgrade and maintenance work for the ANZAC Class frigates; the manufacture of components and industrial services for the Collins Class submarines; engineering assistance on Border Force vessel ABFC Ocean Shield; and a 12 month overhaul of supply ship HMAS Success. Orontide also provides support to JFD for the annual Black Carillon submarine rescue exercises held off the WA coast, fabricating and installing specialised equipment on to submarine rescue vessels.

Another company in the naval space is VEEM Engi-



**Team effort:** Local engineering firm Hofmann Engineering is active in military work. The company is headed by directors (from bottom left) Stephan Kirsch, Erich J. Hofmann, Erich F. Hofmann, Leighton White and John Hofmann.

neering. Domestically, the company provides valves and other hull components for the Collins Class submarine and gyroscopes for patrol boats.

VEEM has also found export success, providing fin stabiliser assemblies to Austal USA's Littoral Combat Ship and Joint High Speed Vessel projects for the US Navy.

This work requires a number of unique assets, including Australia's largest NES 747 bronze foundry.

Watmarine Engineering Services provides maintenance services and component supply in pumps, pipes, valves and welding for the RAN's surface fleet. As well as liaising directly with the Department of Defence, the company also acts as a sub-contractor for Primes Naval Ship Management and BAE Systems.

WA companies have also succeeded in carving a niche in the aerospace sector. Western Australian Specialty Alloys (WASA) Pty Ltd has become an approved provider of metal alloys for a number of international aerospace primes, including Rolls-Royce, General Electric, Turbomeca and Boeing. Its most prominent contract thus far has been the provision of nickel alloy to US aircraft engine manufacturer Pratt and Whitney, as part of the F-35 programme.

While only a select outline, these firms are representative of the broad capabilities and long experience of the State's defence engineering and fabrication sector.

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**Precision:** A bevel gear at Hofmann Engineering.