

In the junk yards of Afghanistan

Now into its second attempt to settle on a design for replacement medium/heavy vehicles, Defence capability planners are struggling with external criticism they do not understand the physics of progressively adding weight (via armour) to civilian designed vehicles, when professional militaries around the world are addressing ballooning payload demands by adding more axles to their vehicles. The 2009 Defence White Paper envisages, however, an ADF in 2030 that is not principally designed to deploy to the Middle East, or regions such as Central and South Asia or Africa.

■ Canberra Bureau Report

Phase 3 of project Land 121 aims to acquire for a currently approved project expenditure of \$2,919m some 7,000 support vehicles to completely replace current wheeled transport and logistic support vehicle fleets, trucks, modules and trailers.

A contract was signed with Mercedes-Benz Australia/Pacific in October 2008 for the supply of light/lightweight vehicles with limited protection capability, in the form of its 'G-Wagen'. Newcastle-based GH Varley is the modules subcontractor, with first vehicle deliveries due in 2011.

The second element of the project comprises the acquisition of trailers, to which Defence is currently in negotiations with Haulmark Trailers Australia. The third element of the project seeks a medium/heavy vehicle capability, which is now about one year behind schedule.

This is because the Commonwealth, in August 2008, elected to cease contract negotiations with then preferred tenderer, BAE Systems (BAES) Australia due to increased risks with its original vehicle offer, and the subsequent need to increase vehicle protection levels from STANAG 1 to STANAG 2 (ie: essentially demanding a dedicated armoured cab).

BAES Australia had substantially inherited its preferred tenderer design from US-based Stewart & Stevenson, which it latterly picked up in a merger in 2007. Giving evidence to a Joint

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence & Trade/Defence Sub-Committee hearing on 16 April, the DMOs Head of Land Systems, Colin Sharp, said the BAES vehicle "did not meet the requirements that we wanted. Subsequently, in looking at the re-tender, the ballistic protection requirements had moved on with the threat in the MEAO."

Industry representatives met 3 November 2008 over two days with the DMO, with the acquisition process being re-started. Comparative evaluation testing (CET) aims to achieve a down-select to two preferred tenderers to undertake final offer definition and refinement process.

Defence officials briefing ADBR on the Land 121 experience maintain what has transpired over the past two years represents an affirmation of Kinnaird-style reforms to military capability acquisition processes. Accordingly, the project is now in the re-submission phase, and hence, is not regarded as a new tender.

Amended conditions of tender (closing 10 March) were released on 19 December 2008 for the purposes of refreshing proposals from four companies: Mercedes-Benz Australia/Pacific, MAN Nutzfahrzeuge, BAES Australia and Thales. Mack Trucks had earlier withdrawn from the contest after companies were formally debriefed on their previous bids.

The CET phase began 19 December 2008, and will roughly run through to March 2010. Testing is being broken into

three tranches: the first started on 1 May; the second will start on 1 July; and the third on 1 September – and are being run by the Australian Defence Test & Evaluation Office (ADTEO).

Companies must submit a minimum of five vehicles each for the required trials, with three needing to be protected. The CET phase must include a Medium Weight Cab Chassis (Protected), Medium Weight Tray (Unprotected), Medium Weight Tipper (Protected), Medium Truck (Unprotected) and Heavy, Integrated Load Handling System (Protected) vehicle.

BAES Australia is offering its Family of Medium Tactical Vehicles with the Long Term Armour Strategy (LTAS) armoured cab system. The company has also teamed with Scania to offer a tough truck for the most front-end, tactical jobs, along with a much larger type truck for long haul, heavyweight activities.

Thales has partnered with Oshkosh to offer the Medium Tactical Vehicle Replacement (MTVR) chassis, along with its single cab 'Bushmaster'. Mercedes-Benz Australia/Pacific will offer its 4x4 'Unimog', 4x4 and 6x6 'Zetros', and 8x8 'Across' vehicles. MAN's offering

(comprising its HX and SX 4x4, 6x6 – 8x8 military trucks), will be a full MOTS vehicle, including a military engine.

On 24 February, a second series of Land 121 conditions of tender were released by the DMO. In this document, the former 'Key Essential Requirements Matrix' had subsequently morphed into a 'Key Requirements Matrix'. CET activity pitched the subsequent down-select as occurring by March 2010. Contract signature is due mid-2011, with first deliveries in 2013.

Key risks identified in Budget papers for the project include a chance the requirement to integrate new generation communications equipment into the light/light weight vehicles and modules prior to capability delivery may impact on cost and schedule. There is also a concern that the medium/heavy capability basis of provisioning will be affected by industry prices substantially surpassing the estimated project costing, in particular, because the armour levels now sought from all tenderers was never included in the specifications that saw BAE Systems first elevated to the position of preferred tenderer.

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WHAT YOU SEE IS NOT WHAT YOU GET: DMO Land Systems Head, Colin Sharp, told a Parliamentary Committee in April that following scope changes to project Land 121/3, "it became clear the vehicle that was tendered ... did not meet the requirements that we wanted. To do so, the costs were adjusted up significantly, which made it necessary to go back to government and say, 'this is not the solution that we want'."