

Saronic all in on approach to RAN

Beginning life as a start-up barely 3-1/2 years ago, US maritime autonomy specialist and shipbuilder Saronic says it is committed to Australia for the long haul.



NOW AT MORE than 1,300 employees and backed up by more than US\$2.75 billion (AUD\$3.96 billion) in private capital, including the most recent capital raise of US\$1.75 billion (AUD\$2.52 billion), Saronic is fast becoming one of the big boys on the block in the unmanned surface vessel (USV) sector. In December last year, the company secured a US\$392 million (AUD\$569 million) production contract from the US Navy (USN) for hundreds of its 7.3m Corsair unmanned surface vessels, the largest order of its type globally to date as far as is known.

In a sit-down interview with *DTR*, co-founder and chief commercial officer, Rob Lehman, said that Saronic's approach to the Australian defence customer will exploit the company's focus on "...redefining what maritime superiority looks like, not only for the US but for our allies as well".

"Part of that is leaning in and taking the same model that we've used with the US Navy of let us share the risk of with our

ABOVE: With a 1,000nm range and 450kg payload, Saronic says it can offer its Corsair USV to operate in Australia's northern approaches and provide enhanced maritime domain awareness.
Images: Saronic



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customers and put our private capital to work left of any contract and in some cases left of any formal requirement, understand where the capability gaps lie in that country's sea services and aggressively develop a capability that can then be procured at scale," Mr Lehman said.

"So what we've done here in Australia is leverage everything we've done with the US Navy with Corsair and take that capability that has been matured, has a hot production line and is being delivered at scale right now [to the US Navy]."

Whilst Mr Lehman declined to confirm how many Corsair USVs are to be supplied to the USN under the December 2025 contract it is understood to be in the hundreds. "I can't give the specific number but large-scale deliveries. We are taking everything we did on that contract and leveraging it here to de-risk Corsair for the Royal Australian Navy, Australian Border Force, whomever the customer may be," said Mr Lehman.

A Corsair USV has recently been undergoing testing off the coast of Sydney and surrounding areas and in a little more than 4 months has accumulated in excess of 1,000nm of sailing in Australian waters.

The rapid maturation of Corsair from concept, to prototype, to delivered product has been facilitated by a rigorous testing regimen to fast-track design optimisation and sub-systems integration. In the US currently, there are Corsair USVs operating 6 days a week in the Atlantic, the Gulf of America and in the Pacific.

Saronic is following that same model in Australia, according to Mr Lehman, a process described as establishing a sovereign organisation with an Australian workforce, and having a capability that can be demonstrated without any connection to the mothership in the US.

"Corsair is an exportable capability, we did a lot of testing on that aspect," Mr Lehman said.

In spite of poor transparency about the RAN's medium to large USV requirements in general and lack of program settings for the planned half-dozen large optionally-crewed surface vessels specifically, Saronic sees opportunity in Australia for its USV range to fill gaps in capability, with a current focus on the Corsair.

"There was no program of record for small USVs in the United States either when we started the company, nor was there when we started building Corsair. We take a new approach where if we are convicted that there is a capability gap and an operational need that our platforms can address that's our risk to take and for us to convince our investors that we know enough about the operating environment, the budgetary and programmatic environment and how it can be shaped and evolved to make a call and just relentlessly push forward. We've walked into this environment in Australia with eyes wide open and a strong commitment," Mr Lehman said.

"I think for Australia's northern approaches and maritime domain awareness, today, you could have Corsairs providing a level of awareness and an ability to not just see but hang with just about any platform on the water until such time a partner platform arrives on station to interdict. That's a capability that



ABOVE: A pair of Corsair USVs during testing in Sydney Harbour in March 2026.

could be delivered today using a variety of different contractual mechanisms," Mr Lehman suggested.

"What we're excited about having a footprint here in Australia is the ability to replicate what we did in the US which was have those conversations with the customers and understand 'what do you really need?' 'what is the capability that you are looking to field?' and then we can come to you with some options and then mash the gas pedal when it's time to produce," Mr Lehman added.

"We're trying to provide an on-ramp to a new way of acquiring technology that keeps pace with the threat environment and technology writ large. There's a few ways you can do that. One, we have extreme flexibility in business models. If there's no program of record but you want to take advantage of a contractor-owned, contractor-operated model we have the flexibility to do that. If you want to have the maintenance and support be the responsibility of the contractor and the service is buy-



ABOVE: Saronic has a hot production line for the Corsair USV, with "hundreds" on order for the US Navy.

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ABOVE: With first weld in June 2025, Saronic had the hull of the lead 54m Marauder USV in the water just 6 months later in December. Marauder hull 2 is now nearing completion and construction of hulls 3 and 4 are underway. The company’s yard in Franklin, Louisiana, is capable of building 20 Marauder USVs a year.

ing maritime domain awareness or other capabilities, we have the flexibility to do that; a program of record isn’t necessarily a prerequisite for us.

“The gold standard for us is not a big R requirement that’s already worked its way through the approval process, not even a little R requirement that has a documented need that is working its way through the process. What we’re looking for is the

capability gap that the warfighters haven’t even bubbled up to the level of a formalised requirement. That is where our team chomps at the bit because that gives us a north star to go follow, to address that capability gap. We aggressively put resources to getting a prototype into the water, we iterate alongside those customers and usually in an unfunded capacity and take their feedback and incorporate it into those prototypes and then we’re prepared to move to scale production.”

A central tenet of this approach to business for Saronic is an acceptance of the investment required ahead of program and budget certainty from the customer.

“These are all relative statements I’ll make, but prototyping is easy; building one advanced thing is not that hard. Building a dozen or two advanced things is a little bit harder but still not that hard. When you have to have a quality management system in place, supply chain management infrastructure and your own manufacturing line, it gets harder,” Mr Lehman told DTR. “All of those dollars and investments in your team, your processes, your facilities, if you wait until you have a contract awarded or imminent you are way late and you are going to cost your customer time and money. The customer’s expectations will be not met before you’ve even left the gate.”

Saronic, Mr Lehman said, will keep investing in technical maturity and capability development post-delivery for ongoing iteration and to ensure its technology is held at the cutting edge.

“If we just deliver to a customer and that’s the end of the support that we provide you’re not going to last long in this business. The technology is changing so quickly – software updates, feature development and enhancements – you have stay ahead. If you’re not continually expending your own resources to iterate you’ll fall behind.” DTR