Snail's pace: the 12-year acquisition of a LARC-V successor

Despite the LARC-V approaching 60 years of age, delivering its replacement is proving anything but speedy. *Ian Bostock* reports

ONE OF THE key projects charged with enabling the Australian Army's transformation into a force that holds littoral manoeuvre as a core function will take more than a decade to deliver the promised capability.

Intended to find a successor to the 1960s-era Lighter Amphibious Resupply Cargo 5-ton (LARC-V) amphibious vehicle and originally slated to deliver the first new platforms this year, Phase 1B of Land 8710 was already running 2 years late in 2025, with the delivery date then pushed out to 2028. Now, however, the Army will not receive the 15 new Amphibious Vehicle – Logistics (AVL) before 2033.

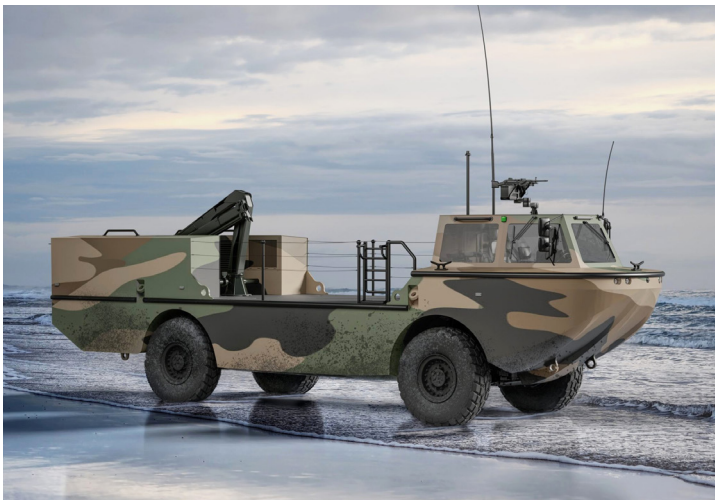
Broken down, the schedule figures are alarming, with no less than 4-1/2 years taken to achieve contract signature with preferred tenderer Birdon, and 41 months between lodgement of tender responses in September 2022 and contract signature in January this year. Birdon then announced it had signed a AUD$125 million contract with the Commonwealth to design and build one prototype and 15 AVLs.

Defence told *DTR* that the first production vehicles will now be delivered in 2030, in batches of two. The final two vehicles are earmarked for delivery in 2033, which will mark 12 years since release to industry of the Land 8710 Phase 1B invitation to register (ITR) interest.

Defence declined to confirm at what stage in the AVL design process Birdon was or when construction of the AVL prototype was to begin. All vehicles will be built at Birden's facility in Port Macquarie on the New South Wales mid-north coast.

DTR understands that the AVL prototype phase will allow Defence to work with industry and provide inputs to ensure the vehicles are fit for purpose before committing to production. The prototype phase will also include a test and evaluation period.

To be an 'evolutionary' rather than revolutionary design as per the tender requirement and therefore of similar size and performance to the legacy LARC-V, the AVL will be an

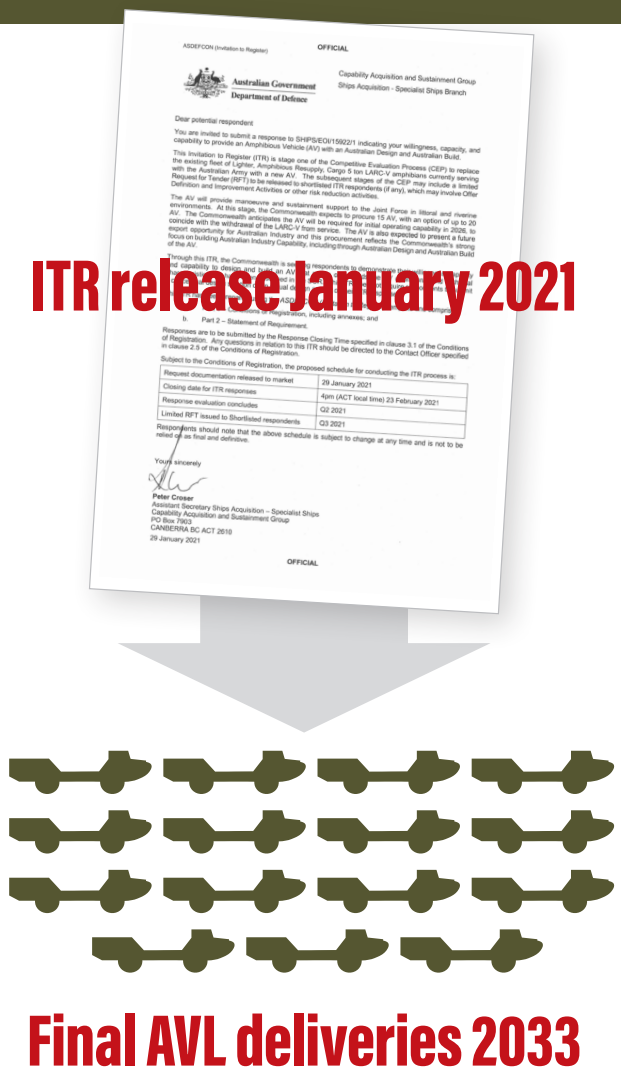


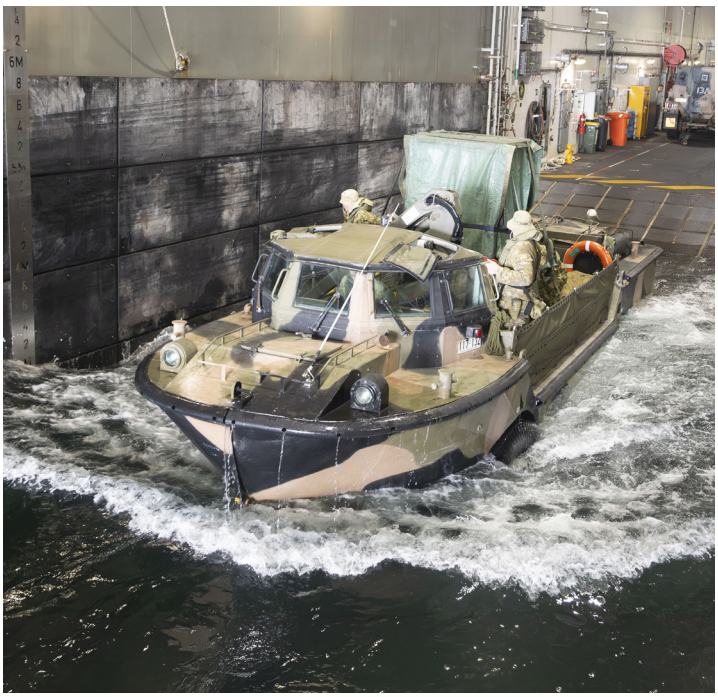
ABOVE: Computer-generated rendering of the AVL design from Port Macquarie's Birdon. *Image: Birdon*

The final two vehicles are earmarked for delivery in 2033

Land 8710 Phase 1B Project Timeline

ITR released to industry	29 January 2021
Initial Operational Capability	2026 (original)
ITR respondents short-listed	May 2021
Limited RFT released	December 2021
RFT responses lodged	September 2022
Preferred tenderer selected	Q4 2023-Q1 2024
Initial Operational Capability	2028 (revised)
Contract signature with preferred tenderer	January 2026
AVL prototype design finalised	Unknown
AVL prototype construction start	Unknown
Prototype delivery to CoA	2028-2029 (estimate)
First AVL deliveries	2030
Initial Operational Capability	2031 (latest estimate)
Final AVL deliveries	2033
ITR release to final AVL deliveries	12 years (2021-2033)





LEFT: By the time the last of the 15 production AVLs are delivered in 2033, the LARC-V will have been in Australian Army service for close on 70 years. *Image: Aust DoD*

important part of the Army's littoral manoeuvre capability and provide over-the-shore mobility to manoeuvre and sustain the integrated force in littoral and riverine environments inaccessible to landing craft or vehicles. This will require the AVL to be able to transit through the surf zone and make a beach landing whilst laden and move over back-of-beach terrain.

The secondary mission of the AVL will be to support the deployment of the Amphibious Beach Team, a set of tasks that takes in reconnaissance, provision of security, towing, a limited recovery capability and sufficient endurance to undertake the required activities in austere environments.

Like the LARC-V, the AVL can be expected to be heavily involved in ADF humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations where the affected population is in close proximity to the sea or riverine environments. DTR