# AUKUS Pillar II tees off on UUVs

***ABOVE: Greater focus is to be placed on developing UUV payloads under the Pillar II umbrella.*** *Image: DTR*

**Canberra and Washington** have doubled down on delivering tangible capability outcomes under the AUKUS Pillar II initiative, with a sharper focus on unmanned undersea vehicles (UUV).

In a 30 May joint media statement by Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles, US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth and UK Secretary of State for Defence John Healey at the US Embassy in Singapore, support for the AUKUS partnership was re-affirmed.

The trio also provided detail around the specific type of capabilities to come under the Pillar II framework, within which it has been difficult to interpret where specifically the opportunities for industry might reside.

Under the new AUKUS Pillar II Signature Project announced, the three nations will now seek to develop cutting-edge payloads and enabling systems for UUVs entering service across the partnership.

The project will reinforce the collective deterrence efforts and superiority in the maritime domain through the accelerated delivery of advanced UUV payloads and enabling systems ('enabling systems' are described as those that "support how UUVs operate").

The effort is intended to significantly enhance AUKUS partners' ability to protect critical national seabed infrastructure; deploy leading-edge surveillance, reconnaissance and strike capabilities; conduct logistics operations; and bolster superiority in anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare, mine countermeasures, electronic warfare and contested littoral manoeuvre.

The project will also involve increased AUKUS partner interoperability through key enabling systems, such as shared standards, trilateral operational concepts and common control systems. Capabilities will be developed and proven through trilateral exercises and experimentation, the sharing of resources and research and development.

Whilst a delivery start date of 2027 is being suggested, a phased approach to delivery is being adopted that would see each AUKUS partner develop its own national UUV payloads. These payloads are to be interchangeable with and integrated by each partner nation's own UUVs. Each nation's development effort would focus on a different type of payload-delivered effect. The partner nations will also jointly develop and produce 'trilateral payloads' and enabling technologies, including next-generation payloads.

The complexity, scale and depth of co-operation required to executing this approach to payload development suggests an acquisition timeline that will extend well into the 2030s.

Kinetic UUV payload types of interest for the project are likely to include torpedoes, sea mines and potentially sub-surface launched precision strike munitions. Passive payloads may include side-scan and towed array sonars, electro-optical sensors and electronic warfare and intelligence-gathering suites. Depending on the size of the UUV, there may also be scope for investigating their use as 'motherships' for deploying other, smaller undersea drones.

***– Ian Bostock***