



THE BOSUN'S CALL

NEWSLETTER OF THE NAVAL ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



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ONCE NAVY, ALWAYS NAVY



(L-R) Mrs Jodi Hammond, Chief of Navy Vice Admiral Mark Hammond, AO, RAN, Seaman Bryce Sullivan-Hardy and the Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia, Her Excellency Ms Sam Mostyn, AC, cut the Royal Australian Navy 125th birthday cake at the Exercise Kakadu Official Reception on HMAS Canberra in Sydney.

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2026 marks 125 years since the formation of the Commonwealth Naval Forces that later become the Royal Australian Navy.

Throughout 2026, events and activities will be conducted around Australia to mark Navy's 125th anniversary. The celebration of this historic milestone throughout the entire year is an opportunity to reflect on Navy's past, honour the contributions of Navy people and look ahead towards the future.

In 1901, the States of Australia formed the Commonwealth of Australia. The Commonwealth Naval Forces and the Commonwealth Military Force were then established on 1 March 1901.

The title Royal Australian Navy was granted on our naval force in 1911, and the First Australian Fleet units entered Sydney Harbour in October 1913, led by the battle cruise HMAS Australia I.

EXERCISE KAKADU 2026 FLEET REVIEW

The Exercise Kakadu 2026 Fleet Review took place in Sydney Harbour on March 21, 2026, featuring 31 vessels from 19 nations to mark the Royal Australian Navy's 125th anniversary. The event highlighted international maritime partnerships through a ceremonial sail-past, aerial displays, and included, for the first time, an autonomous Ocius Bluebottle vessel.

KEY DETAILS OF THE 2026 FLEET REVIEW:

DATE & LOCATION:

Saturday, 21 March 2026, in Sydney Harbour (between South Head and the Sydney Harbour Bridge).

PARTICIPANTS:

31 vessels from 19 nations participated, featuring a mix of destroyers, frigates, and smaller patrol boats.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The review celebrated 125 years of the Royal Australian Navy.

HIGHLIGHTS:

A ceremonial sail-past where ships moved toward the Sydney Harbour Bridge past HMAS Leeuwin, a RAAF aerial display, and a ceremonial gun salute.

KEY VESSELS:

The U.S. Navy was represented by the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Fitzgerald (DDG 62).

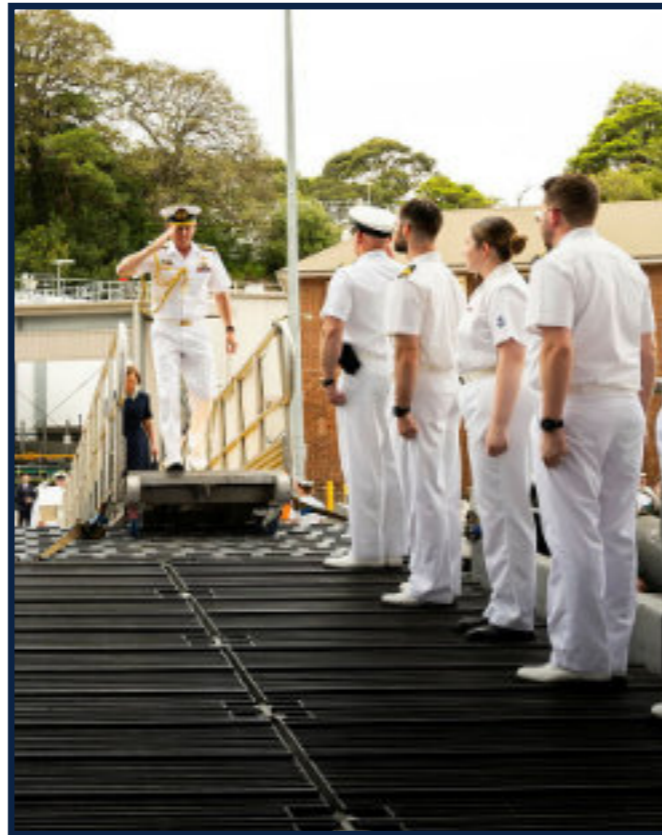
INNOVATION:

For the first time in a Royal Australian Navy Fleet Review, an autonomous, sun-and-wave-powered Ocius Bluebottle USV was featured.

OPERATIONAL FOCUS:

The review acts as the opening phase of Exercise Kakadu 2026, aimed at strengthening Indo-Pacific maritime security and interoperability.

Public viewing areas were situated along the Sydney Harbour foreshore.



Chief of Navy Vice Admiral Mark Hammond, AO, RAN, arrives to HMAS Canberra for the Exercise Kakadu Official Reception in Sydney, NSW.



Representatives from 19 nations attend the Royal Australian Navy Fleet Commander's Conference at the National Maritime Museum, Sydney during Exercise KAKADU 2026.



Philippine Navy ship BRP Diego Silang, Royal Malaysian Navy ship KD Lekir and Vietnam People's Navy ship VPN Quang Trung alongside Fleet Base East during the Exercise Kakadu Fleet Review 2026.



HMAS Sydney's Ship's Company cheer during the Kakadu Fleet Review on Sydney Harbour.

EXERCISE KAKADU 2026 FLEET REVIEW



Participating ships from Australia and 19 partner nations in formation off the coast of Australia for Exercise KAKADU 2026.



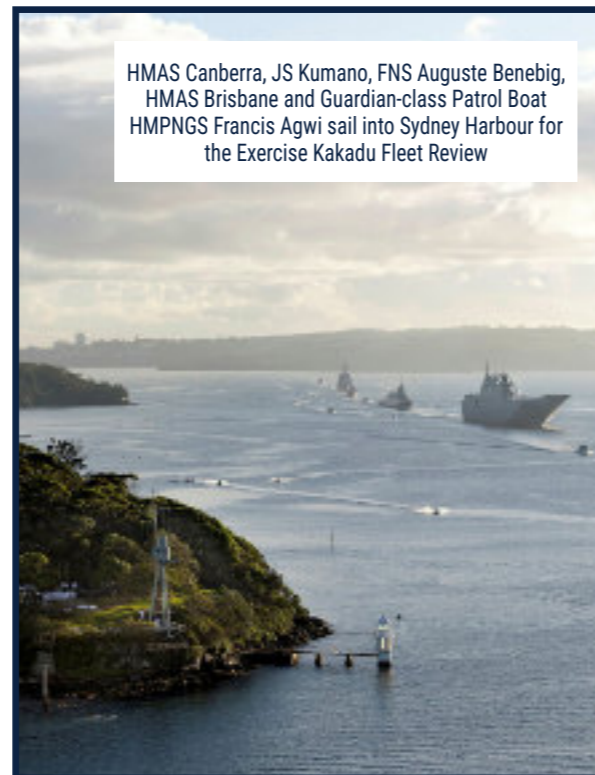
HMAS Sydney's Ship's Company cheer during the Kakadu Fleet Review on Sydney Harbour.



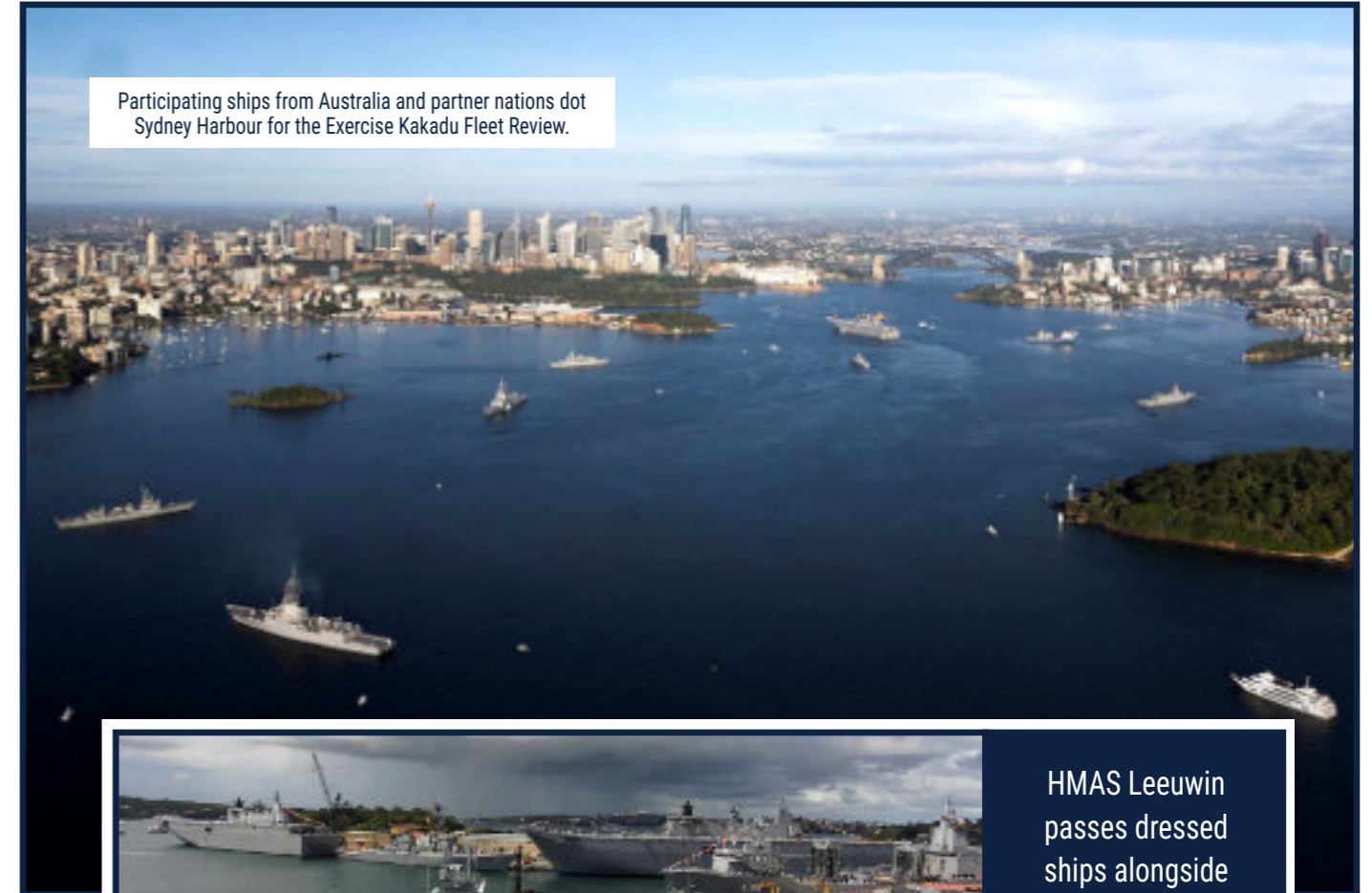
Participating ships from Australia and 19 partner nations in formation off the coast of Australia for Exercise KAKADU 2026.



HMAS Stuart conducts a sail past during the Exercise Kakadu Fleet Review on Sydney Harbour.



HMAS Canberra, JS Kumano, FNS Auguste Benebig, HMAS Brisbane and Guardian-class Patrol Boat HMPNGS Francis Agwi sail into Sydney Harbour for the Exercise Kakadu Fleet Review



Participating ships from Australia and partner nations dot Sydney Harbour for the Exercise Kakadu Fleet Review.



HMAS Leeuwin passes dressed ships alongside Fleet Base East at the commencement of the Kakadu Fleet Review in Sydney.



Participating ships from Australia and 19 partner nations in formation off the coast of Australia for Exercise KAKADU 2026.

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ANSCHÜTZ PASSES CRITICAL DESIGN REVIEW ON ITS HUNTER CLASS SYSTEM



Anschütz has passed the Critical Design Review with its Warship Integrated Navigation and Bridge Systems for the Royal Australian Navy's Hunter Class Frigate Program. Credit: Anschütz

Anschütz has passed the Critical Design Review (CDR) with its Warship Integrated Navigation and Bridge Systems (WINBSs) for the Royal Australian Navy's Hunter Class Frigate Program.

This has marked the transition to the production and integration phase of the program. The CDR is a pivotal step in naval system development, validating that the design meets all technical and operational requirements.

It ensures that the architecture, interfaces, safety features and integration pathways are robust and ready for implementation.

Anschütz will deliver the WINBS under a contract with BAE Systems Maritime Australia, the prime contractor for the Hunter Class Frigate Program.

A key feature of Anschütz's WINBS for the Hunter class is its integration with the Aegis combat system. This integration has enabled distribution of validated navigational data across the ship, supporting tactical decision making and enhancing situational awareness.

The interface between navigation and combat systems is essential for modern naval operations, where real-time data fusion and system interoperability are critical. The WINBS comprises several core components tailored to the needs of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), including advanced naval radar systems that combine navigational and tactical capabilities.

Multifunctional consoles allow officers to access a consistent maritime picture and comprehensive navigational functions from any location on the bridge or in the operations room.

Built on a sensor-agnostic, software-defined architecture, the WINBS is designed for use within shared computing environments and network infrastructures.

It supports flexible integration of customer-specific sensors and systems, ensuring adaptability to mission requirements and fleet commonality.

In support of the Hunter Class Frigate Program, Anschütz has established Anschuetz Australia, a dedicated local subsidiary.

NEW RECRUITS TEST SEA LEGS

Navy News - 26 March 2026

Author: Lieutenant Hinako Shiraishi



Royal Australian Navy Recruit Abby Watts on board HMAS Choules off the coast of New South Wales during Exercise Kakadu. Photo: Seaman Genae Kelly

Testing their sea legs for the first time, 45 Navy recruits from HMAS Cerberus embarked on HMAS Choules for a sea ride they will never forget.

The recruits ranged in age, from the youngest at 18 to the oldest in their 50s, with career aspirations spanning from marine technician to musician.

Twenty-year-old Recruit Abby Watts, from Moorland near Taree in NSW, is training for a role as an aircrew member, where she will operate and manage sensors, weaponry and radar on Navy helicopters in the future.

"I chose aviation because not only is it interesting, but since I was little I've always looked up to pilots and aviation roles, so I knew that's what I wanted to do," Recruit Watts said.

At sea, she and the other recruits prepared their white uniforms for the first time – the rig they wore while lining the deck of Choules to cheer ship for the Governor-General during the Kakadu Fleet Review.

"We had run-throughs in our whites, but this was our first time in public, which was really cool, and I was proud to be wearing them," she said.

'Training has been challenging, but I feel like I'm thriving, and being on the ship was so exciting.'

The former disability support worker said she could not believe her luck at getting on board a Navy vessel just five weeks into recruit training.

"Training has been challenging, but I feel like I'm thriving, and being on the ship was so exciting," Recruit Watts said.

"To be honest, Choules was a lot bigger than I thought it would be. It wasn't claustrophobic at all, and I was having the best time."

Lieutenant Josh Lovell-Hawkins, a nursing officer working out of category as a divisional officer for the 45 newest faces of Navy, said the experience was invaluable.

"The opportunity for recruits to get maritime exposure early in their ab initio training is fundamental to ensuring they gain a realistic understanding of what sea time and service in the RAN looks like," he said.

For Recruit Watts, the journey continued back at recruit school, and she said she was looking forward to graduating and starting her career.

Choules joined vessels from 18 other nations for the Kakadu Fleet Review in Sydney Harbour, highlighting strong regional maritime cooperation and the deep partnerships fostered through Exercise Kakadu.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

HMCS SPITFIRE
APRIL 1855
Naval Historical
Society of Australia



HMCS Spitfire was not the first warship built in Australia, but she was the first built for Australia's defence.

SINCE THE FORMATION of the Royal Australian Navy in 1911 hundreds of Australian built ships have served under the White Ensign, ships ranging in size and types from small Channel Patrol boats through to destroyers, cruisers and the 10,500 ton destroyer tender *Stalwart*. The Australian shipbuilding industry's finest hour occurred during the Second World War, when, as well as providing support for Australian and Allied navies, the dockyards built destroyers, frigates, corvettes and other minor types. This tradition of Australian naval construction had its beginning, like most of Australia's history, on the shores of Port Jackson with the launching of the *Spitfire*.

The wooden gunboat *Spitfire* was ordered by the NSW Government to help protect Sydney against Russian warships based at Vladivostok. Designed and built by the Sydney shipbuilder John Cuthbert, she was a sturdy little vessel which was to render valuable service to two Colonial governments and numerous private owners.

After the appropriate ceremonies, the *Spitfire* was finally launched by Mrs. Cuthbert at 10.30 am on the 3rd April 1855. The sight of the *Spitfire* gracefully gliding into the waters of Port Jackson filled the assembled crowd with a sense of pride and achievement, for this was the first warship built in Australia for a Colonial government.

Constructed entirely of ironbark and blackwood with copper fastenings, the *Spitfire* was a graceful yet solid little ship. Her hull was sheathed with 22 oz copper, which was to prove invaluable in her latter career in Australia's tropical north. Accommodation onboard consisted of a four berth cabin aft as well as some temporary berths in the ship's hold. The hold (which had an overall depth of 7ft 3in) also served as the magazine and storeroom.

The main armament, consisting of a smooth-bore muzzle loading 32 pounder, was mounted on a traversing carriage located between the fore and main masts. To cater for the weight of the gun and carriage the deck was strengthened by the addition of diagonal braces and metal knees. So that the gun's crew could obtain a clear field of fire, the bulwarks were capable of being rapidly lowered.

Rigged as a ketch, the *Spitfire* was originally fitted with a running bowsprit, but this was later altered to a fixed bowsprit.

Very little is known about the service of the ship in New South Wales, where she remained in service for only four years. Most of this time would have been spent as a training ship, and exercising with the Sydney Forts.

Spitfire was transferred to the Queensland Government in 1859, where her new masters immediately put the ship to work as the pilot cutter on Moreton Bay. She was also to serve as a transport for government officials and visiting dignitaries.

During the latter part of 1860 the Governor of Queensland, Sir G. Ferguson Bowen, despatched an expedition to try and locate the mouth of the Burdekin River, the party sailing aboard *Spitfire* in August for Rockhampton, where they were to transfer to another vessel. On arriving at Rockhampton this vessel was found to be unfit for sea, so the expedition continued in the *Spitfire*. Those taking part in this exercise were: Captain Joseph W. Smith – in overall command, Mr. G.E. Dalrymple – Commissioner for Crown Land, Mr. R.P. Stone – Surveyor, Mr. Fitzallen – Botanist Mr. Bausfield – Master of the *Spitfire*, plus seven seamen and two aboriginals.

Spitfire arrived off Port Denison 11th September 1860, and members of the expedition began to explore the port and surrounding areas. After failing to locate the mouth of the river they sailed for Halifax Bay. Shortly after landing in Halifax Bay the shore party was approached by a group of aboriginals, who began to crowd the exploration party and making gestures that were interpreted as being hostile. The white men opened fire and returned to the ship where they were informed that two canoes of aboriginals had tried to board the ship. History later revealed that the natives were trying to lead the expedition to Mr. James Morrill, a white castaway living with them.

On Sunday, 23rd September, after morning prayers, the party located a large river delta, which was later identified as the mouth of the Burdekin River. After exploring the river delta the expedition returned to Port Denison and examined the suitability of the area for a settlement. The township of Bowen was later established on the site surveyed by the expedition.

After the successful completion of the expedition, during which the little ship travelled a total of 767 miles, the *Spitfire* returned to Brisbane where she resumed her more mundane tasks.

With the discovery of gold in the Palmer River, North Queensland, the *Spitfire* was transferred to Cooktown, where she became the first pilot boat. The *Spitfire* was to remain in Cooktown until she was sold out of service in 1885.

Probably the most unpleasant task undertaken by *Spitfire* during her period in Cooktown was the recovery of the remains of a Mrs. Watson, her child and a Chinese servant. Mrs. Watson worked at the beche-de-mer station on Lizard Island, north of Cairns. As the beche-de-mer had been finished out around the



HMCS (Her Majesty's Colonial Ship) Spitfire was the first naval vessel completed by an Australian colonial government.

island, the two men who operated the station left to search for a new location. Soon after the two left a group of aboriginals landed on Lizard Island. The aboriginals ambushed and speared both Chinese servants who worked on the island, killing one of them. Mrs. Watson fled the island, taking her child and the wounded Chinese with her. When the authorities arrived at the island they found it deserted and assumed that Mrs. Watson and the others had been killed.

The mystery of what happened to Mrs. Watson was solved on 19th January 1882 when the master of the schooner *Kate Kearney* sighted a small boat in mangrove swamps along the coast. Onboard the boat were the remains of Mrs. Watson, her child and the Chinese; they had died of thirst after escaping. The *Spitfire* was despatched to recover the bodies and return them to Cooktown for burial.

Spitfire was finally sold out of service around 1885, when she was purchased by Captain Alex Mathewson, who converted her to a beche-de-mer fishing vessel. She was sold once more in 1892, when she was taken over by Messrs. Dan Moynahan and S.B. Andreassen. These gentlemen also used her in the beche-de-mer trade. Whilst in the employ of Moynahan and Andreassen the *Spitfire* was badly damaged during a cyclone off Hinchinbrook Island in 1896, and had to be sailed back to Cairns under jury rig.

During her civilian employment the *Spitfire* was almost completely rebuilt, with a new stern, new bows, new masts being added.

Spitfire's career finally came to an end in December 1899 when she was sunk off the Piper Island Light during a cyclone. Though gone, the memory of this hard working little ship lives on in the names of many bays, reefs and other navigation marks along the Queensland coast.

Details of Spitfire

Type – Ketch rigged wooden gunboat

Designer – John Cuthbert

Builder – John Cuthbert

Built at – Millers Point, Sydney

Launched by – Mrs. Cuthbert

Launched – 3rd April 1855

Tonnage – 60 tons

Length (oa) – 62 feet

Length (keel) – 51 feet

Beam – 16 feet

Draught – 5 feet 6 inches

Armament – One long SB 32 pounder on traversing carriage.



19 March 2026

From 20 March, some veterans and veteran family members will receive an increase in their DVA pension and compensation payments.

The first full payment at the new rate will be the payday 16 April 2026. You don't need to do anything to receive the increase; it will be applied automatically. Payments made on payday 2 April will cover the period 17 March to 30 March 2026, and will include entitlements calculated at both the old and new rates. This increase helps make sure your payments keep up with the cost of living.

The majority of pension and compensation payments are indexed in March and September each year. Indexation is determined by either the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index (PBLCI) or Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE). For 20 March 2026, the indexation is driven by CPI.

From 20 March 2026, deeming rates will also change in line with arrangements applying to payments made by other Commonwealth Departments. Deeming rates are used to calculate deemed income from your financial investments (e.g. shares, bank accounts), regardless of actual returns.

This deemed income counts toward the income test while the actual returns are not counted. The income test, along with the assets test, determines your entitlement to Service Pension, Income Support Supplement and Veteran Payment. A new deeming rate of 1.25% (currently 0.75%) will apply to financial assets under \$64,200 for singles and \$106,200 combined, for couples. Any remaining balance over these amounts will be deemed at a rate of 3.25% (currently 2.75%). To know more about deeming rates please visit [Operation of Deeming I CLIK](#)

New pension and compensation rates from 20 March 2026

<i>SERVICE PENSION (total amount)</i>	<i>Old rate (fortnightly)</i>	<i>New rate (fortnightly)</i>	<i>Increase (fortnightly)</i>
Single person	\$1,178.70	\$1,200.90	\$22.20
Couples (each)	\$888.50	\$905.20	\$16.70
Single person – transitional	\$959.70	\$977.70	\$18.00
Couples (each) – transitional	\$774.30	\$788.80	\$14.50
WAR WIDOWS (total amount)			
War widow(er)'s pension	\$1,200.80	\$1,223.40	\$22.60
Income support supplement (ceiling rate)	\$357.00	\$363.80	\$6.80
DISABILITY COMPENSATION PAYMENT (total amount)			
T&PI (Special rate)	\$1,860.90	\$1,895.90	\$35.00
Intermediate rate	\$1,233.70	\$1,256.90	\$23.20
EDA	\$1,004.20	\$1,023.10	\$18.90
100 per cent (inc ES)	\$646.00	\$658.20	\$12.20
10 per cent (inc ES)	\$71.53	\$72.75	\$1.22
VETERAN PAYMENT			
Single person	\$1,280.10	\$1,304.50	\$24.40
Couples (each)	\$998.40	\$1,017.40	\$19.00
MRCA*			
Wholly dependent partner payment	\$1,200.80	\$1,223.40	\$22.60
Special Rate Disability pension (SRDP)	\$1,860.90	\$1,895.90	\$35.00

These are the maximum rates of payment and include any Energy Supplement payable.

***Note that the MRCA payments in the bottom two rows are the fortnightly amounts, not the weekly amounts.**

For more information on the new pension and compensation rates visit DVA's website call 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372).



The Bradleys Head Naval Memorial in Sydney has been officially declared a Military Memorial of National Significance.

This declaration reflects the ongoing national significance of the historic Memorials, which commemorate every Australian who has proudly served in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) over the past 125 years, as well as all ships lost in service.

The Bradleys Head Naval Memorials precinct is considered by the RAN to be the premier naval monument in Australia and is the only naval memorial to which ceremonial honours must be rendered by all passing naval ships, both Australian and foreign, when entering Sydney Harbour.

Located within the Sydney Harbour National Park, the Memorial precinct includes the HMAS Sydney (I) Mast, the RAN Memorial and the RAN Memorial Walk.

HMAS Sydney (I) was the first Australian ship to engage the enemy at sea during the First World War. On 9 November 1914, German light cruiser SMS Emden attacked a communications station in the Cocos Islands, which sent out a distress signal before being captured. Sydney was sent to investigate and was engaged by Emden. Over the next hour, the two warships exchanged deadly salvos, until the Emden was crippled and forced to

run aground. Sydney then pursued, captured and sank the Emden's collier, Buresk. Four Australians were killed during the engagement, as well as 134 German sailors.

When HMAS Sydney (I) was decommissioned in 1928, her mast was removed and erected at Bradleys Head in 1934 to commemorate the Sydney-Emden action.

During the Second World War, on 19 November 1941, HMAS Sydney (II) was involved in a mutually destructive engagement with the German cruiser HSK Kormoran off the West Australian coast. Kormoran, flying under false colours, ambushed the Sydney at close range. None of the Sydney's complement of 645 men survived. This remains the largest loss of life in the Australian Navy's history. To remember the sailors of Sydney (II), a plaque was added to the memorial mast on Bradleys Head.

Commemorative services to honour and remember the lost sailors of the two Sydneys, as well as all Navy personnel who have lost their lives in peace and war, are held at the Bradleys Head Naval Memorials to this day.

The Bradleys Head Naval Memorials join eight other Military Memorials of National Significance across Australia.



DVA Contact Numbers

Provider invoicing & billing enquiries: 1300 550 017

Provider enquiries: 1800 550 457

Transport bookings: 1800 550 455

Veterans' Affairs Pharmaceutical Advisory Centre (VAPAC): 1800 552 580

Hearing or speech impairment assistance

If you are deaf, or have a hearing impairment or speech impairment, contact us through the [National Relay Service](#) (NRS):

Talk To You (TTY) users phone 1800 555 677 then ask for 1800 838 372

Speak and Listen users phone 1800 555 727 then ask for 1800 838 372

Internet relay users connect to the NRS then ask for 1800 838 372

Information on health services may be obtained from DVA. The contact numbers for health care pro-viders requiring further information or prior financial authorisation for all States and Territories are listed below:

TELEPHONE: 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372)

INTERNATIONAL CALLERS: +61 2 6289 1133

POSTAL ADDRESS FOR ALL STATES AND TERRITORIES:

Department of Veterans' Affairs

Health Approvals & Home Care Section

GPO Box 9998

BRISBANE QLD 4001

DVA WEBSITE: <http://www.dva.gov.au/providers/allied-healthprofessionals>

DVA EMAIL: For prior financial authorisation: health.approval@dva.gov.au

The appropriate prior approval request form can be found at: <https://www.dva.gov.au/providers/servicesrequiring-prior-approval>

CLAIMS FOR PAYMENT

For information about claims for payment visit: www.dva.gov.au/providers/how-claim

CLAIM ENQUIRIES: 1300 550 017 (Option 2 Allied Health)

Claims will take a variety of times to complete based on whether or not the claim is prioritised for allocation to a decision maker and the complexity of the claim itself. For example, if the service of the individual crosses two or more Acts or contains a lot of health conditions and injuries or both. This results in some claims being decided faster than the average time, while some claims take longer.

For any condition, to make the claiming process smoother, follow these 3 steps:

- Step 1: Get your medical practitioner to con-firm your diagnosis.
- Step 2: Supply the documents you need to;
- Step 3: Check if you are already eligible for free health care and treatment.

CLAIMS PROGRESS

As at 31 October 2025, DVA had 89,597 claims on hand, comprised of 22,820 unallocated claims and 66,777 claims being processed.

In the financial year to date (FYTD) (1 July 2025 to 31 October 2025):

DVA received 39,032 claims

DVA made 36,099 determinations

For all claims on hand including older claims being processed the average TTTP for MRCA IL was 333 days, up from 304 days in the previous FYTD. The median TTTP was 271 days.

There have already been some significant improvements in processing timeframes for new IL claims received and determined within the last 12 months.

For claims received within the last 12 months, the average TTTP for MRCA IL was 110 days. The median TTTP was 96 days.

OPEN ARMS

Veterans & Families Counselling

Open Arms provides mental health and wellbeing support to anyone who has served at least one day of continuous fulltime service in the ADF and their immediate families.

1800 011 046



Free and anonymous counselling line for all current and ex-serving ADF personnel, veterans and their families. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

1800 142 072

DEFENCE FAMILY HELPLINE

Available 24/7 or online at www.defence.gov.au/members-families/defence-helpline.asp. Staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists.

1800 628 036

DEFENCE ALL HOURS SUPPORT LINE

24/7 confidential telephone service for Australian Defence Force (ADF) members and their families to facilitate access to ADF or civilian mental health services.

1800 628 036