



MEDIA RELEASE



AIDN-WA POISED FOR INDUSTRY GROWTH

After some four years of building momentum as an industry association, AIDN-WA continues to attract a vibrant crowd. Its End of Financial Year gathering, held recently at the WA Club in St George's Tce, was abuzz with a cross section of the defence industry community, and there was good reason for the excitement.

Heading the bill was WA's first ever Minister for Defence Issues, the Hon Paul Papalia, fresh from an election victory and having already established an agency called Defence West, which offers a new approach to growing WA's defence industry. Its objectives are clear and compelling: to “champion the interests of Western Australian defence industry and to secure a greater share of Australia’s Defence contracts”.

Having long heard these goals expressed by Mr Papalia, members had reason to be gratified to find that swift action has been taken toward pursuing them. Not only is there now a Government minister and structure focussed on their interests, but the Minister has already visited key politicians and other players interstate to hammer home the WA viewpoint.

That is, in short, that we find it unacceptable that of almost \$90 billion allocated by the Federal Government for Defence platform construction, \$86 billion has been awarded to South Australia, leaving WA a tiny proportion of the work. Even though WA can aim to obtain a significant slice of the considerable “through-life” maintenance and upgrade work that will ensue, this could be decades away, and the allocation of the construction budget seems blatantly disproportionate.

Minister Papalia outlined some of the things his agency would be doing to rectify the imbalance, such as: seeking a reallocation to WA of some of the naval construction work, appointing a WA Defence advocate; seeking the contract for the future mine-hunters; staging an Indian Ocean Expo in WA on the off year to the Pacific event; and appointing an Industry advisory board.

Despite the unfortunate political position taken by the Federal Government, WA defence industry still seems to be entering an unprecedented growth curve, with there being ways to take advantage of the big order order book and to access long term sustainment work - all in an environment where the WA Government is giving strong and visible leadership and support to its local defence industry. In such circumstances AIDN-WA, the Industry's peak body, expects to thrive and is positioning itself accordingly.

Outgoing President Serge DeSilva, who has done much to revive AIDN-WA's presence over the last 3 to 4 years, spoke of achievements to date, commended members to his successor, Paul Roberts, and indicated he would continue both on AIDN-WA's senior advisory panel and especially to support Mr Roberts as he takes up the challenges of leadership.

Paul Roberts, introduced himself to the gathering, pointing out that his employer, L3 Oceania, is at various times both an SME and a prime contractor, making it a useful platform for him to see and understand the issues affecting the local Industry. He went on to announce two award programs AIDN-WA will be running this year.

One of these is entirely new; it will be a Collaboration Award, intended to recognise the importance of WA companies collaborating to win and service Defence contracts. The other is a revitalisation of a longer running award to recognise young people with the potential to make a significant contribution to the defence industry. This competition occurs both at the local and national levels, and WA will resume its participation with an established record of success at the national level.

The unspoken message in the room was clear – there could be no better time to get on board with AIDN-WA as it poised to support local industry in what may well be one of its most significant growth times.