Mass Soft-Kill Decoy System to Equip Ran Surface Combatants

By Richard Scott

Royal Australian Navy (RAN) surface combatants are to be equipped with the Rheinmetall Multi Ammunition Softkill System (MASS) under a €125 million contract placed with Rheinmetall Defence Australia.

MASS will initially be fitted to the RAN's Hobart class air warfare destroyers and ANZAC class frigates, with vessels each receiving three launchers. Contract options for additional vessel installations could potentially bring the overall value up to more than €600 million.

Developed by Rheinmetall Waffe Munition (Fronau, Germany), the MASS system uses trainable 32-barrel launchers firing 81-mm Omni-Trap spin-stabilized multispectral decoy munitions. Omni-Trap contains a mix of payloads in the radio frequency (RF), infrared (IR), laser, electro-optical and ultraviolet portions of the electromagnetic spectrum: it is understood that the RAN will procure the latest rocket-powered extended range Omni-Trap ER Mk 2 version which increases range out to 400 meters.

MASS systems ordered for the RAN will be assembled at Rheinmetall Defence Australia's MILVEHCOE center of excellence for military vehicles in Redbank, Queensland. Rheinmetall Defence Australia will produce the systems under license, and also take responsibility for installation and commissioning.

The award represents Rheinmetall's largest single contract for the MASS system, with the RAN becoming the 16th MASS user. First systems are to be delivered by the end of 2023, with full operational capability to be achieved by 2027.

The RAN currently uses fixed Mk 137 decoy launchers to fire 130-mm RF chaff and IR countermeasures. Both the Hobart class destroyers and Anzac class frigates are also equipped with the Mk 234 Nulka hovering rocket RF active seduction decoy.