Search for sales as radar upgrade proves a knockout

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LAST year, HMAS Perth sailed to Hawaii and did what no other Australian navy ship or, arguably, the majority of warships in the world today can do. And, what’s more, she did it repeatedly.

Perth is the first of the navy’s eight Anzac frigates to undergo an extensive upgrade to her warfighting systems, under the Anti-Ship Missile Defence (ASMD) program. During trials in US waters, she was repeatedly “attacked” by US Navy drones.

The trials proved Perth’s integrated systems, comprising the Saab 9LV Mk 3E Combat Management System, CEA Technologies’ CEAFAR active phased array radar and CEAMOUNT active phased array target illuminator, coupled with Raytheon’s RIM-162 Evolved Sea Sparrow Missile, could defeat multiple incoming threats.

In fact, out of 11 launches, Perth’s ESSMs scored 10 direct hits.

The capability was conceived in Australia and an industry team comprising BAE Systems Australia, Saab Australia and CEA Technologies, together with the ASMD Project Office within the Defence Materiel Organisation, have integrated the various systems.

The scope of the ASMD upgrade had significant risk attached to it, but it is now recognised as a world-beating capability, which it is hoped will open the door for export opportunity.

Merv Davis, chief executive of CEA Technologies, explains that the scalable nature of CEAFAR is attracting interest from other defence project offices, such as the RAN’s Future Frigate (SEA 5000) program, as well as from other governments and navies.

“What is behind all the excitement around the radar is how scalable it is and how readily the architecture evolves with technology increases associated with more power and more processing power, and the fact that you can build a larger or smaller array by adding and subtracting tiles.

“It’s a family of radars, all scalable and configurable, that delivers, as demonstrated last year, world-leading performance,” he says.

Davis says that CEAFAR has enjoyed limited export success, to an undisclosed customer, but is excited about more in the near-term, programs in Canada, Spain and the US providing potential opportunities. But he says his main objective is providing and supporting capability to the ADF, with SEA 5000 as the major goal.

“We do have a committed domestic customer and they have contracted us to build and demonstrate the next generation of systems,” he says.

“The systems onboard Anzac are excellent and very capable, but technology evolves quickly so we have to keep moving forward to be world leaders in this regard.”