

## Hydrographic, Meteorological & Oceanographic FEG Media Release

HMFEG 05/03  
07 Apr 03

### LADS – A NEW IMAGE AFTER 10 YEARS STERLING SERVICE TO NAVY

*By LCDR Mark Matthews, RAN (CO LADS Flight).*

On 22 Feb 03, LADS Flight (Laser Airborne Depth Sounder Unit) celebrated 10 years as an operational unit of Navy. Over the last 10 years LADS has completed more than 1500 operational sorties and surveyed vast areas of previously uncharted Australian waters. This has made LADS arguably the most productive hydrographic survey system in the world.



*Photo 1 Caption:*

*L to R: ABHSO Narissa Follett, ABHSO Dave Bremner, POHSM Michael Baker, LSHSO Paul Robjent, LCDR Mark Matthews (CO), LCDR Richard Ball (XO), ABHSO Paul Parker*

Based in Cairns the Flight is fully deployable and has deployed on numerous occasions to sites including Adelaide, Darwin and NAS Nowra. It also deployed to East Timor during 2000 in support of INTERFET operations there. Deployments vary in duration from a few days to several months. The Flight also forward deploys on a regular basis to towns such as Mackay and RAAF Scherger (Weipa). LADS have now surveyed a significant portion of the Great Barrier Reef. Survey Motor Launches continue to support LADS

operations as they 'fill-in-the gaps' in LADS data where the water was either too deep or too murky for the LADS system to detect the seafloor.

LADS Flight comprises a mixture of RAN personnel and civilian contractors (from Tenix – LADS Corporation). Uniformed personnel from the Australian Hydrographic Service plan the surveys, operate the airborne survey system and process the collected data that will eventually be incorporated into nautical charts. Contract personnel provide support, maintenance and the pilots and aircraft maintainers to support LADS operations.

Developed in Australia by DSTO for the RAN, the system was built in South Australia under a unique partnership with Defence industry. The LADS system uses a powerful scanning laser to measure water depth by sweeping a 200-metre wide swath whilst flying at 145 knots. The system, mounted in an ex-Ansett modified Fokker F27 Friendship, can detect the seafloor down to 50m in ideal conditions.

After ten years valiant service the LADS system is no longer perhaps 'state-of-the-art', but it remains one of the most efficient and capable hydrographic survey systems in the world. Whilst progress is continuing to be made on a replacement for the LADS system itself the ever reliable F27, callsign "Navy Survey", is expected to remain in service for many years to come.



The Flight was honoured by the Maritime Commander, RADM R.W Gates, RAN, at HMAS CAIRNS Divisions on 26 Feb 03 with the award of the Hydrographic Efficiency Shield for 2002. It was a fitting tribute for the LADS Flight to receive this award for the second time at the completion of ten years service. Whilst the award is in recognition of the efforts for 2002 it is also recognises the efforts of all who have served in LADS since 1993 and who have put into place the procedures and professional ethos that has been the hallmark of LADS since it's inception.

The beginning of 2003 was relatively quiet for LADS with the aircraft in extended maintenance. The aircraft returned to Cairns airport on 17 Mar 03 sporting a new 'Brand Navy' look. The new livery was part of a complete re-paint with the 'mature girl' looking young again. The Flight is now ready for another busy and productive year.

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**Issued under the authority of The Hydrographer of Australia.**