

Shoalhaven's aviation vision now a high-tech success story

When Shoalhaven City Council set out to establish an aviation technology park adjacent to HMAS Albatross Naval Airbase two decades ago, its success was anything but guaranteed.

Shoalhaven City Council Economic Development Manager Greg Pullen with an Air Affairs Learjet in the background. Mr Pullen has been a driving force behind the Albatross Aviation Technology Park.

But with four of the world's biggest global defence aviation corporations and a number of dynamic Australian companies now calling Albatross Aviation Technology Park (AATP) home, Council's vision has well and truly been realised.

Global defence giants Lockheed Martin - Sikorsky, BAE Systems, Raytheon and Boeing have significant facilities at AATP, while Australian companies such as home-grown Shoalhaven success story Air Affairs complement the international presence.



Shoalhaven City Council Economic Development Manager Greg Pullen and NSW Department of Industry's South Coast Business Development Manager Megan Cleary, who work closely together to promote the Albatross Aviation Technology Park.

Shoalhaven Economic Development Manager Greg Pullen, who has led the project from its start as

a visionary concept in 1996-97, said the Royal Australian Navy had approached Council in 1996 to consider developing an aerospace technology facility adjacent to HMAS Albatross where the company contracted to service the Navy's new Seasprite helicopter squadron could establish off-base premises.

"Council took a big picture, strategic view that defence support industries could be important for the Shoalhaven's future, with the potential to generate highly skilled, high-paying jobs," Mr Pullen said. "We wanted to show (the Australian Defence Force) that we were serious, because if they didn't do it here (at HMAS Albatross) they could have done at other bases around Australia.

"The Nowra Aboriginal Land Council sold Council 40 hectares of land adjacent to HMAS Albatross, which would provide us with direct access to the taxiway at the base, and could be developed in stages. Council built infrastructure such as roads, drainage, a taxiway linking the park to the main taxiway and gates to the base."

Mr Pullen said the NSW Government has helped Council develop the site, then and more recently, by providing \$3



Shoalhaven City Council Economic Development Manager Greg Pullen at the entrance to Albatross Aviation Technology Park.

million to install utilities such as mains electricity and water and sewage to establish the technology park, and continues to support and promote it through the NSW Department of Industry's Shoalhaven office.

Problems with the Seasprite helicopter platform meant the Australian Government subsequently did not commission the helicopters, but over the years Shoalhaven Council and long-serving federal MP Joanna Gash lobbied successive Australian Governments and their Defence Ministers to maintain HMAS Albatross as a major military rotary wing aviation centre.

"The Australian Government has invested over \$500 million in HMAS

Albatross over the past 20 years to support upgrades in facilities and services," Mr Pullen said. "It is now one of Australia's super-bases, with more than 2000 Navy and contractor personnel based there and at HMAS Creswell (at nearby Jervis Bay)."

HMAS Albatross is a major helicopter training base for Navy and Army helicopter crews, and the home of the Navy's new Seahawk Romeo helicopter squadron. Manufacturer Lockheed Martin - Sikorsky is gearing up support the squadron with Sikorsky Helitech service and parts storage facilities employing 160 people at AATP.

And as the base has grown, so has the Albatross Aviation Technology Park. By mid-2016 more than 300 people worked there, with that number expected to exceed 400 in the near future as a new stage is opened and at least two new companies join the residents.

"Tier 2 and Tier 3 (Defence) suppliers are attracted by the potential synergies of locating here close to similar companies," Mr Pullen said. "The Albatross Aviation Technology Park is now a very significant part of the local economy."

The Shoalhaven Defence Industry Group promotes defence industry capability to attract business, investment and jobs to the region. This case study showcases one of the high tech defence companies already contributing to the Shoalhaven economy.



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