

GDS supplies everything from field hospitals to the kitchen sink

When a catastrophic earthquake destroyed much of the Sumatran city of Padang late in 2009 killing hundreds of people, a Shoalhaven company supplied the shelter systems for the Australian Army's Deployable Field Hospital that was a key part of Australia's aid response.



GDS Director Tony Allen and Business Development Manager Fran Koster at the company's South Nowra headquarters.

Field hospital shelters are but a sample of the wide range of products and services that South Nowra-based Global Defence Solutions as a partner of Weatherhaven Australia supplies to the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and commercial customers.

Whether it is Global Defence Solutions (GDS), Weatherhaven Australia (WHA) or EWST Australia (EWSTA), these three companies are owned and operated in the Shoalhaven where the State Government, through Industry & Investment NSW, has provided assistance to grow each business through a range of programs.

Global Defence Solutions (GDS) – as the name implies – supplies equipment to the ADF and associated organisations. GDS sources products from around the world, adapts them to Australian requirements at their South Nowra headquarters, and provides customer designed in-country support around Australia, all from the Shoalhaven. With over 99% of products sourced internationally from suppliers not having a manufacturing base in Australia, GDS ensures it is not competing against Australian industry.

Products include the Canadian Weatherhaven range of portable accommodation, the British-designed Host Systems mobile air traffic control towers that can be quickly deployed if a control tower is damaged, Mabey Bridge permanent and emergency bridging systems, British and US-designed electronic technologies such as electronic warfare simulators, radar and missile warning sensor test sets, mobile phone interrogation technologies and non-destructive testing technologies that evaluate the structural integrity of bridges and other critical infrastructure. All are marketed, sold and supported from the Shoalhaven.

Weatherhaven Australia, which is part of Global Defence Solutions, supplies easily-transportable field hospitals and other accommodation to support Australian defence personnel in the field – whether they are in combat zones like Afghanistan or responding to natural disasters like the Sumatran earthquake.

The WHA mobile accommodation products range from soft and hard shelter field hospitals with sophisticated air filtering and air-

conditioning systems that provide an environment sterile enough for an operating theatre use in the remote environments, to comfortable sleeping quarters, offices, kitchen and dining areas, latrines and even portable aircraft hangers. These soft and hard shelters can be linked together via a vestibule to provide a fully covered deployable hospital or camp facility.

There is also interest starting to build in the mining industry in the Australian and Pacific regions, as well as the military," said Business Development Manager Fran Koster. Weatherhaven Shelters Systems have already been supplied as accommodation camps to companies involved in building a gas pipeline through remote areas in Papua New Guinea. The camps can be packed up moved along the pipeline as the pipeline progresses.

Both GDS and EWSTA hold 'Defence Recognised Supplier' certification for the range of products they market and support and most importantly, GDS, WHA and EWSTA carry out support, repair and overhaul work in the Shoalhaven utilising local tradespeople.

"We source local products and local tradespeople – everyone from electricians to fabricators, uniform suppliers, canvas and webbing manufacture and repairers, for tasks such as electrical fit outs and stainless steel sink fabricating," said GDS Director Tony Allen.

Mr Allen believed the Shoalhaven had a number of competitive advantages over capital city locations. These included lower commercial and domestic rents, lower cost of living resulting in low staff turn over and good transport options for product movement. With 12 staff employed in the three companies, it is important to get the balance right.

"We've carried out cost-benefit analysis on the advantages of the Shoalhaven over other locations including Melbourne and Sydney with the Shoalhaven coming out on top every time," he said.

"But the other important factor in the Shoalhaven's favour is the lifestyle. People with families want to work and live in the Shoalhaven, so we never have any problem recruiting good staff," he said.

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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