



Partech Managing Director John McKelvie and Business Development Manager, John Higgins (foreground) and (background, from left) Michael Starrit, Ladislav Miklos (Project Engineer) and Daniel Turner.

Partech showcases high-tech capabilities on Joint Strike Fighter

Nowra company Partech Systems is showcasing the high-tech capacity the Shoalhaven Defence Industry Group with its participation in the multinational Joint Strike Fighter project (JSF).

Partech is an avionics (aviation electronics) company based at the Albatross Aviation Technology Park, and a key member of the cluster of defence-related industries that play a key role in the Shoalhaven economy.

Partech specialises in designing, building and servicing testing and measurement systems for highly complex electronic systems in aircraft, including developing the software to run the equipment.

The company was established in Nowra a decade ago to work on military avionics, and has been involved in a range of projects in that time for the Royal Australian Navy's helicopter fleet at HMAS Albatross and for the Royal Australian Air Force.

Partech has been involved for five years in the JSF – a joint project by the United States, NATO countries and their allies including Australia and Canada to design and build a replacement for the F16, FA/18 and Harrier jets that have been those countries' main military strike aircraft over the past quarter century.

The proposed aircraft is based on a Lockheed/Martin design, and

its development is arguably the biggest project in military aviation history. Australia is scheduled to take delivery of its first JSF aircraft around 2018.

Partech Managing Director John McKelvie said his company has been contracted to develop test programs for key electronic systems on the JSF – the interfaces between communications and navigation control and the audio/control interface.

Mr McKelvie said Partech's involvement in the JSF project was both a privilege and a reflection on the capability of Shoalhaven-based defence aviation support industries.

"It is exciting to be working on this project, and to be one of a number of companies in the Shoalhaven who participate on the international scene very successfully," he said. "We are also proud that we can offer interesting, well-paid jobs here in the Shoalhaven.

"As a small company it is important for us to develop alliances and we have built strong relationships with other companies around the world working on the JSF."

In 2007 Partech was one of the first companies to build premises at Albatross Aviation Technology Park. Industry & Investment NSW provided assistance with the establishment through the Illawarra Advantage Fund and further support to grow the business through a range of other programs and services.

"We feel that we have demonstrated a commitment to the local community," Mr McKelvie said, adding that Partech had no problem attracting qualified personnel to join its Nowra workforce of skilled engineers and technicians who are acknowledged as among the most accomplished in the avionics test sector of defence.

"Recruitment is not difficult," he said. "People find the Shoalhaven lifestyle and cost of housing attractive, and they like the idea of interesting work on leading edge technology like the JSF. We work in a very specialised field so it can be challenging finding engineers who have done this kind of work before. However we have had excellent results by recruiting graduates engineers from the University of Wollongong – young people with a stake in this area – and developing them ourselves."

Partech's projects have included "through-life" support for avionics equipment on helicopters and other military aircraft that involves developing the software and hardware to test the avionics, repairing the avionics equipment when necessary, and training RAN and RAAF technicians to use the test gear. Now the company is branching out from military avionics, with a number of civilian projects involving rail technology.

The company's Business Development Manager John Higgins said Partech had developed cable testing equipment for train manufacturer Downer EDI to test the video control systems on its new locomotives.

It has also worked with University of Wollongong researchers to develop low-cost solar-powered train detection and warning systems to operate at every level crossing in the NSW, particularly those in remote rural locations that don't currently have warning systems for motorists.

"There are up to 10,000 level crossings in NSW, and our technology would allow every one to have a low-cost safety detection and warning device," Mr Higgins 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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