

CRUCIAL ROLES IN DEFENCE AT HOME AND OVERSEAS

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A South Australian business has partnered with the UK Ministry of Defence to deliver the next generation of submarine batteries, while another is making radar systems in high demand in the US.

Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are playing crucial roles in defence sectors in Australia and overseas, including PMB Defence – a privately-owned company specialising in the design, manufacture, support, maintenance and optimisation of submarine battery systems.

Over the past five years, the company has grown from almost 60 employees to 200 by expanding into the export battery market.

The firm brought intellectual property and equipment from Europe back to Adelaide to populate its production facility. Since then it has won more work for a traditional lead acid battery.

It now supplies lead-acid based back-up batteries for the existing 11-boat UK nuclear submarine fleet.

It is also several years into the development of a nickel-zinc based replacement for the UK's attack submarine batteries, which would double the available energy.

“We’re trying to grow our footprint with friendly nations and helping them with their submarine battery system,” chief executive Steve Faulkner said. “We’re heavily entrenched in the UK nuclear submarine program, so we’re providing their existing backup battery systems for their nuclear boats.

“And we’re the only new technology option that they’re funding development for, for the next generation of submarines.”

Another SME, Silentium Defence, is also in high demand overseas – with co-founder and chief experience officer Simon Palumbo set to take up a new posting in Virginia, on the US east coast.

His move is in response to increased demand for Silentium's Maverick M8 passive radar systems across defence, commercial and government markets.

The passive radar, which goes from backpack to operational in less than seven minutes, provides persistent, covert surveillance and cannot be detected in the way a traditional technology can be.

"It is clear we have a unique technology that addresses a specific capability gap in the current operating picture," he said. "Our low-size, weight and power passive radar system is highly mobile and can see everything in the airspace, even non-emitting objects like silent, autonomous systems and dark drones."

Listed tech firm AML3D Limited, which has developed a metal 3D printer to manufacture large-scale parts for different industries, has recently announced it will establish a manufacturing hub in Ohio, in American Mid-West.

Since its 2023 launch, the company's "scale up" strategies have delivered \$12.2m in US defence subcontracts that are being supported from its Adelaide base.

Managing director Sean Ebert said the new manufacturing hub was a key part of the growth strategy and would create additional capacity to meet surging demand.

"Our Adelaide facilities have been critical in supporting our expansion into the US market," he said.

"But as our US hub comes online in the early part of FY25 it will help to free up capacity at our Adelaide facility to continue to pursue the Australian, Asian Pacific and European defence markets.

"We will in effect look to leverage our US playbook."