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Navy Drone Delivery Trial Signals Logistics Revolution

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During Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025, the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) tested a drone-based delivery system designed to streamline logistics and reduce reliance on helicopters for supply transport. The trial took place off Shoalwater Bay, Queensland, and involved the Callisto 50 logistics drone delivering a six-kilogram repair part to HMAS Choules. The delivery was completed over a distance of 6.5 kilometres in just over eight minutes.

The Callisto 50, developed by Australian company FreeSpace Operations, is capable of carrying payloads of up to 25 kilograms. It has a flight time of up to 40 minutes and a range of 15 kilometres. The system allows ships to receive critical supplies without the

need to deploy helicopters, which are more resource-intensive and may be restricted in certain operational environments.

The trial formed part of Navy Minor Project 1983, which aims to explore new methods for improving naval logistics. For this demonstration, the delivery item was reverse-engineered, modelled, and produced using the Deployable Additive Manufacture and Repair unit located in Gladstone. The drone navigated a restricted flight corridor to avoid safety zones during amphibious operations. It then used maritime remote beacons to loiter behind HMAS Choules before delivering the payload and returning to shore.

Commander Andrew Watson, who leads the project, said that uncrewed systems can reduce operating costs and function in conditions where crewed aircraft might face limitations. By using drones for certain deliveries, the Navy can allocate helicopters and other crewed assets to missions requiring their full capabilities.

The successful trial was conducted during Talisman Sabre 2025, the largest iteration of the exercise in its 20-year history. The exercise ran from July 13 to August 4 and involved approximately 43,000 participants from 19 nations. It included activities in land, sea, air, cyber, and space domains, providing opportunities to test interoperability and assess new technologies in realistic operational conditions.

The drone delivery trial aligns with the Australian Defence Force's modernization objectives outlined in the 2024 Defence Strategic Review. The review highlights the role of autonomous and uncrewed systems in improving operational efficiency and resilience, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.

Vice Admiral Justin Jones noted that Talisman Sabre 2025 serves as an important platform for demonstrating innovation and collaboration with partner nations. The Callisto 50 trial represents a step toward integrating autonomous systems into naval logistics, potentially increasing the speed and flexibility of supply operations in both peacetime and contested environments.