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## HMAS Sydney's Stokers Power Ship's Operations

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The 44-member Marine Engineering Department, known as “stokers,” aboard HMAS Sydney ensures the Royal Australian Navy destroyer’s systems run smoothly, driving its critical operations.

The Marine Engineering Department of HMAS Sydney, a Hobart-class air warfare destroyer in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), comprises 44 skilled technicians affectionately called “stokers,” a nod to the historical role of tending coal-fired boilers, as detailed in a Department of Defence report on August 4, 2025. These personnel are the backbone of the ship’s functionality, managing vital systems such as propulsion, power generation, water production, air conditioning, and damage control. Their expertise was critical during Sydney’s four-and-a-half-month Regional Presence Deployment (RPD)

across the Indo-Pacific, which concluded on August 1, 2025, after covering 28,264 nautical miles.

Chief Petty Officer Marine Technician Simon Harris, a senior stoker, emphasized that the department's role is to keep the ship operational 24/7, ensuring it can execute missions like Exercise Talisman Sabre and Operation Argos, which enforces United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions, according to Mirage News. The team operates advanced systems like gas turbines and diesel engines, maintaining reliability under demanding conditions. During the deployment, stokers conducted routine maintenance and responded to simulated emergencies, showcasing their adaptability in high-pressure scenarios. Their work supported Sydney's integration with multinational forces, including a United Kingdom-led Carrier Strike Group (CSG), as noted by GlobalSecurity.org.

The department's efforts extend beyond technical duties, fostering crew morale through events like a seafood buffet and swim exercise in the Whitsundays, as reported by the Department of Defence. However, critics of the Albanese government's naval funding argue that resource constraints could challenge the maintenance of such complex vessels, with the \$45 billion AUKUS submarine program diverting focus from surface fleet readiness. Despite this, the stokers' dedication ensures HMAS Sydney remains a potent asset, capable of projecting Australian influence in the Indo-Pacific.

As Sydney enters a maintenance period in dry dock, the Marine Engineering Department's role underscores the RAN's operational strength. Their ability to keep the ship's systems running flawlessly, from propulsion to life support, highlights the critical yet often unsung contribution of these technicians to national defence and regional security.