

# PROTECTOR FLEET IS NOW COMPLETE

BY KEITH INGRAM



Commodore Ross Smith (left), and Cox'n Ricky Tawhara

HMNZS Wellington

The arrival of *HMNZS Wellington*, the last of the Royal New Zealand Navy's Project Protector vessels, arrived in Auckland's Devonport Naval Base on June 11 at 1100 under the watchful eye of her new captain, Lieutenant Commander Simon Griffiths, of Dunedin.

*HMNZS Wellington* is the seventh and last ship in the Project Protector fleet, and with her delivery the Navy will be operating a fleet of 12 modern and highly capable ships.

"*Wellington* and her sister ship *Otago* at 85m in length are large, modern patrol craft that deliver the Navy significant new capability to undertake New Zealand exclusive economic zone patrols, as well as surveillance and military operations around New Zealand, the Southern Ocean and the Pacific," said the Chief of Navy, Rear Admiral Tony Parr.

The ships can go further offshore, stay at sea for longer and conduct more challenging operations than the inshore patrol vessels. They will enable the RNZN to conduct more challenging operations using their helicopter capability, sea-boats and embarked forces to carry out patrols and surveillance operations within their operating range.

"With the completion of Project Protector, the Navy can deliver the full range of operations from combat and security missions to peacekeeping, border patrols and humanitarian and disaster relief," said Admiral Parr.

On board for the arrival were the associate Minister of Defence, Hon. Heather Roy and the Maritime Component Commander, Commodore Ross Smith, who were ferried out to meet the ship before she entered Auckland Harbour.

While on board, Ms Roy took the opportunity to officially release the results of the public consultation of the Defence Review paper. The Defence Review has provided the first opportunity in 12 years for broad-based consultation on New Zealand's long-term defence policy.

But it was the Navy's day as it finally welcomed home its last ship and her ship's company to the naval base. The Protector Project has not been without its challenges and for New Zealand to get seven new naval ships of the size, capability and complexity as these vessels has to be the deal of the century and the envy of many other small-nation navies.

Yes, the RNZN has inherited some problems when taking delivery and the media was quick to beat up on it. Instead, journalists should have focused their comments on the problems with the contractor, Tenix, which was found wanting in its

ability to deliver to the contracted specifications.

There were some design problems with the *MRV Canterbury*, the safety of the original RHIB sea-boats (now replaced) and the weight of the OPVs.

What is not mentioned in the same negative beat-up is that the Chief of

Navy, along with the Ministry of Defence and Crown Law, was able to negotiate a A\$83 million refund from the contractor's new owners, BAE, who adopted a responsible approach when handing over the last ships for the RNZN's acceptance.

This leaves a very sweet taste, as the Navy can now get on with the business of commissioning all the ships into active service and plan for the remedial work required to bring *Canterbury* up to her full operational ability within the original contract budget.

Not only has the RNZN increased its capability, it now has the capacity to provide challenging careers for many more young New Zealanders to go to sea and serve one's country. That sounds like a pretty good investment all-round to me.



The Hon Heather Roy and Lt Cdr Simon Griffiths

## SPECIFICATIONS

Length overall	85m
Beam	14m
Draught	3.6m
Displacement	1900 tonnes
Propulsion	2 x MAN Burmeister & Wain 12RK280 marine diesels
Power	2 x 5400kW
Speed	22 knots (maximum), 12 knots (economical)
Range	6000 miles at medium speed
Complement	45 core complement (including 10 flight crew)
Accommodation	34 additional personnel, including trainees, other government agencies or embarked forces
Armament	Bushmaster 25mm gun, 2 x .50 calibre machineguns
Sea-boats	2 x 7.3m Zodiac RHIBs