Underwater SMS for Navy divers
Chris Jenkins
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NAVY clearance divers will be equipped with underwater PCs as part of two $18 million electronics systems contracts awarded by the Department of Defence.

The West Australian-based local arm of British multinational Nautronix will supply equipment for both contracts, which will provide Defence with an underwater mine defence computer system and a portable acoustic tracking range.

The mine countermeasure system will provide divers with underwater PCs that allow them to track their position using GPS or sonar technology, log the locations of objects in the water, and communicate with each other by an acoustically powered "underwater SMS" system.

"Basically it's a Windows-based PC housed in a waterproof container," Nautronix chief executive Pat Hall said.

The system was developed in Fremantle as part of the Defence Science and Technology Organisation's technology capability demonstrator program, Mr Hall said.

The mine clearance computers are expected to be delivered to the Navy in 2006 after prototype tests and trials.

The $9.2 million portable tracking range is designed to allow the Navy to test torpedoes and other systems in areas other than its dedicated range off the coast of Western Australia.

The system tracks weapons, ships and submarines, and is expected to be in service by the middle of next year.

The new system would be used to test torpedoes and allow shallow-water certification of Collins-class submarines, according to Defence.

About 80 per cent of the work on the two projects would be performed by Australian companies, Defence Minister Senator Robert Hill said.

The contracts for the marine systems follow Nautronix's successful bid to supply the Navy with electronic navigation systems.

Worth up to $10 million, the deal for the navigation systems was signed in March.

Meanwhile, IBM has secured a $1.9 million deal to supply the LAN components for sonar systems on board the Navy's controversial Collins-class submarines.

The on-board networks are part of the Navy's replacement combat system project, which "relies on a significant amount of commercial off-the-shelf technology," Defence maritime systems division acting head Commodore Trevor Ruting said.

IBM would capitalise on its recent acquisition of integration specialist Logicalis to develop the system, IBM public sector general manager Anthony Best said.
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