

Blacktree Technology joins Airbus as first Team Maier partner for future military satellite communications

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Canberra, 7 July 2021 – Airbus is welcoming Australian ultra-high frequency (UHF) ground systems specialist Blacktree Technology as the first member of its teaming arrangement, to respond to Australia’s JP9102 tender to deliver a complete Defence Satellite Communications System.

Designated Team Maier, the teaming arrangement is designed not only to deliver a sovereign military satcom solution for Australia, but to grow the defence and space eco-system for the long-term. Through this unique approach, Airbus will bring on board partners across space, technology and academia, enabling further innovative solutions and niche capabilities to the Commonwealth.

As the world’s pioneer in secure military satcom, and operator of the UK MOD’s Skynet 5 military satcom system, Airbus has worked with Blacktree for 15 years as part of the Skynet programme. Blacktree partnered Airbus on Skynet 5 to install the UHF antennas for three of Airbus’ satellite ground station sites.

Joe Nevin, CEO of Blacktree, said “Working with Airbus on the Skynet programme to deliver innovative solutions to the UK MOD, was a key enabler in our mission to become a global market leader in satcom ground segment solutions. Blacktree’s reach now extends from our headquarters in Australia, to solving communications problems for customers in the UK, Europe, US, and to our long-standing customer, the Australian Defence Force. We welcome the opportunity to join Team Maier to deliver world leading, proven, sovereign solutions to military satcom programmes in Australia and, in particular, JP9102.”

Martin Rowse, Campaign Lead for the JP9102 programme, said “At Airbus, we are always looking to increase our engagement with experts in military satcom, particularly SMEs, an approach that has proven successful and beneficial to all parties on the Skynet 5 programme. With this latest move, we will collaborate with Blacktree to explore how we can support the development of their capability and increase innovative solutions to existing and future customers. This is key as the Australian Defence Force prepares to move to a fully sovereign military satcom provision under the JP9102 programme.”

In 2016, Airbus established a brand new purpose built satellite ground station in Adelaide to receive Airbus Defence and Space’s Skynet secure military satellite communications. Blacktree installed the UHF antennas at the Australian facility which extended Airbus’ existing chain of teleports in France, Germany, Norway, the UK and the USA, providing global coverage in both fixed and mobile satellite services.

Airbus is continuing to expand its investment and presence with vital secure connectivity services in Australia, having delivered naval communications solutions to the Royal Australian Navy for over 40 years.

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Airbus has been responsible for delivering all secure beyond line of sight communications to the UK MOD for 18 years, owning and operating the Skynet military communications satellite fleet. During that time Skynet 5 satellites have been crucial to keeping armed forces in theatre in touch with each other and bases back in the UK. And the satellites also provide a key part of service personnel being able to keep in touch with loved ones back home as part of the WelComE welfare communications service.

Airbus is committed to building its links and cooperation with defence and security businesses across Australia for military satcom technology and services to build and deliver sovereign capability and innovation, supporting the growth of Australia's sovereign space capability.

Note to editors:

The Skynet 5 programme, managed by Airbus, has provided the UK MOD with a suite of highly robust, reliable and secure military communications services, supporting operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Balkans. The programme commenced by using the legacy Skynet 4 satellites and then augmenting them with a fully refurbished ground network before launching the Skynet 5A, 5B, 5C and 5D satellites between 2007 and 2012.

Through the many years of Airbus delivering an exceptionally reliable Skynet service the programme has reduced or removed many of the technical and service risks for the MOD, whilst ensuring unrivalled secure satellite communications to UK forces delivering both operational and information advantage at the greatest time of need.



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