SEA POWER CENTRE – AUSTRALIA · AUSTRALIAN NAVAL INSTITUTE

Speaker biographies

Chief of Navy's History Conference: 125 Years of Australian Naval History

19–20 November 2026
Thursday and Friday

Australian National Maritime Museum
Darling Harbour, Sydney

DAY 1 · THURSDAY 19 NOVEMBER

SESSION 1
Australia, the Royal Australian Navy and the Second World War

Dr Knox Peden is an Academic Research Officer at the Sea Power Centre – Australia and a Visiting Fellow in the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University (ANU). He has published widely on French history, including recent work on the impact and legacy of the Jeune École for naval thought.

Commander Darren Puttock RAN is posted to Fleet Headquarters in Sydney. He has served in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) for more than 28 years, including several operational deployments and command appointments. He is also a PhD candidate at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the ANU, researching RAN history.

Dr Tom Lewis OAM, a retired naval intelligence analyst, has been a military historian since 1990, when the first of his 26 books was published. He was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for services to naval history. He has twice won the Australian Naval Institute (ANI) Commodore Sam Bateman Book Prize, for *Teddy Sheean VC* and *The Sinking of HMAS* Sydney. His most recent book, *Australia's Coastal War*, covers all the enemy submarine, air and surface attacks around the country in the Second World War.

SESSION 2
Shipbuilding and fleet acquisition – the long run view

Dr Richard Dunley is a Senior Lecturer in Naval History and Maritime Strategy at UNSW Canberra, where he teaches at the Australian Defence Force Academy. His research focuses on naval technology in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Captain Alastair Cooper RAN is a historian and naval officer. He is the author of a number of book chapters and journal articles on Australian naval history, and co-editor of *The Navy Chiefs: Australia's Naval Leaders, 1911–1997*.

Dr Allan du Toit retired from the RAN as a Rear Admiral in 2016. Born and raised in South Africa, he joined the South African Navy in 1975 and transferred to the RAN in 1987. He had extensive experience at sea and ashore, including two command deployments to the Middle East. The author of three books, he is a member of the Naval Studies Group at UNSW Canberra and was President of the ANI from 2011 to 2013.

SESSION 3
Deployment of new technology and weapons in regional environments – an historical perspective

Paul Grace is the author of *Operation Hurricane: The story of Britain's first atomic test in Australia and the legacy that remains*, shortlisted for Book of the Year in the 2024 Western Australian Premier's Book Awards. He is the grandson of Flight Lieutenant Ron Grace RAAF, who took part in Operation Hurricane.

Lieutenant Colonel Clare O'Neill CSC is an Australian Army officer who commanded the 51st Battalion, Far North Queensland Regiment, leading surveillance and littoral operations across Australia's northern approaches. She is a Councillor of the ANI and serves in the National Defence Strategy Division, contributing to Australia's strategic defence planning.

SESSION 4

The social dimensions of sea power

Matilda Hatcher is a PhD candidate at the ANU. Her thesis examines the emotions of naval men during the French Wars, unpacking interactions between masculine ideals and sailors' lived experiences. Her honours thesis analysed manliness, visual culture and Napoleonic sailors' war-related disability. She is Reviews Editor of *The Great Circle*.

Dr Ryan Gifford is a Training Systems Officer in the RAN, with a research interest in ab initio training and the reality of entering the world of work. Canadian by birth, he has an interest in early RAN history and recently visited the Bita Paka War Cemetery in East New Britain, Papua New Guinea.

Able Seaman Naffissa Mohamed is a logistics professional in the RAN with a Master of Business Administration, specialising in supply chain support. A Defence linguist and inclusion advocate, she contributes to workforce development and is committed to leadership, operational effectiveness and strengthening Navy capability through diversity.

SESSION 5 · PANEL

Telling Bathurst class corvette stories

Professor Erik Eklund is Deputy Director of Research at the Sea Power Centre – Australia and an Honorary Professor of History at the ANU. He has published award-winning books and articles on Australian regional, social and political history, as well as more recent work on naval history and maritime security.

Dr Antoinette Holm is a Canberra-based writer and researcher. She has published fiction and non-fiction, including recent articles on regional history, industrial heritage and energy transition, and two earlier works of crime fiction. She has worked as an educator and university lecturer and has more than 20 years' experience as a manuscript assessor and writing mentor.

Craig Monahan is an experienced and highly regarded filmmaker who is committed to making films in Australia. He is the producer and director of a planned film on HMAS *Armidale*.

DAY 2 · FRIDAY 20 NOVEMBER

SESSION 6

Essential enablers

Dr Neil Westphalen graduated from the University of Adelaide Medical School in 1985 and has served in the RAN for nearly 40 years, 30 of them full time. He completed a history PhD through UNSW Canberra in 2025, titled 'By Constant Care: Health Support for RAN Operations 1901–1976'.

Dr Paul Chamberlain wrote his PhD thesis on sea power as statecraft in the contemporary Indo-Pacific, with case studies from Australia, Japan and Singapore. He was a Research Fellow at the Yokosuka Council on Asia-Pacific Studies in 2025–2026 and a Visiting Research Fellow at the National Institute for Defense Studies, Japan. He was a Canadian defence and security official for more than 15 years, including as Policy Advisor to the Commander of the Royal Canadian Navy.

Dr Victor Rudenno has a background in engineering and finance. An amateur historian, he is the author of *Gallipoli: Attack from the Sea*, which covers naval and submarine warfare and is published by Yale University Press and UNSW Press, and in Turkish by Middle East Technical University. His presentation is based on his book *The First Gulf War: RAN Logistics*, to be published by the Naval Historical Society of Australia.

SESSION 7

Navy, maritime trade and prosperity in the Empire and in our region

Dr Alex Little is an early career researcher who recently completed his PhD at Australian Catholic University. His forthcoming book, *Imperial Advance: Colonial Australian Contributions to British Wars, 1885–1902* (McGill-Queen's University Press), examines Australia's contribution to British imperial wars of the late Victorian and early Edwardian era.

Dr Ross Mackie is a historian and researcher at the Sea Power Centre – Australia and a Visiting Fellow at UNSW Canberra. He holds a BA (Auckland), MA (UNSW Sydney), MPhil (Massey) and PhD (UNSW Canberra), and is researching the management of Australia's maritime supply chain during the Second World War.

Cooper Kingsley is a Data Scientist with the Naval Shipbuilding and Sustainment Group, focused on the economic optimisation of capability development, and a researcher with the Army Battle Lab. Formerly Staff Officer Grade 2, Land Options Analysis, contributing to the Integrated Investment Portfolio, Cooper is soon to be admitted as a lawyer specialising in the law of the sea, with a dissertation on integrating equitable property rights into tortious claims for ecosystem damage within exclusive economic zones, and is completing a Master of Business Administration in financial analysis at UNSW Sydney.

SESSION 8

Underwater cultural heritage, diplomacy and statecraft

Dr Natali Pearson is Senior Lecturer in Heritage Studies in the Discipline of Archaeology at the University of Sydney. She holds an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (2025–2027) for her research on sunken warships and maritime heritage diplomacy in South-East Asia. Her first book, *Belitung: The Afterlives of a Shipwreck*, is published by University of Hawai'i Press and NUS Press. She is President of the Indonesia Council, a member of the International Council on Monuments and Sites and a Councillor of the Australasian Institute for Maritime Archaeology. Before entering academia, she worked for the Department of Defence and the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre.

Commander Mick de Ruyter RAN is a hydrographic surveyor and mine warfare officer in the RAN, and a maritime archaeologist with an affiliation at Flinders University. Alongside his staff roles, he supports the Sea Power Centre – Australia and other Defence agencies on wreck and unrecovered casualty cases.

SESSION 9 · CLOSING PANEL

Strategy, command and the way ahead

Vice Admiral Peter Jones AO DSC RAN (Retd) served in the RAN for 40 years, including command of both the RAN Task Group and the coalition Maritime Interception Force in the Iraq War. He is an adjunct professor with the Naval Studies Group at UNSW Canberra and the author of three naval biographies.

Dr Miranda Booth is a Lecturer in Contemporary Defence and Strategic Studies and a member of the War Studies Research Group at UNSW Canberra. A scholar of international relations and strategic studies, her research examines contemporary defence policy, strategic narratives, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the Asia–Pacific. As a co-investigator on a Department of Defence Strategic Policy Grant project, 'Pacific maritime security coordination: partnerships, priorities and possibilities' (2024–2026), she provides insights and recommendations to enhance targeted and coordinated maritime security assistance.