Australian Naval Institute

Award of the 2020 ANI McNeil Prize

The Chief of Navy Vice Admiral Michael Noonan announced the winner of the Australian Naval Institute's McNeil Prize for 2020 on December 2.

The recipient is Professor Jason Scholz, The Chief Executive Officer of the Defence Cooperative Research Centre – Trusted Autonomous Systems..

The McNeil Prize is presented to "an individual from Australian industry and academia who has made an outstanding contribution to the capabilities of the Royal Australian Navy". The Prize is sponsored by Lockheed Martin Australia.

The McNeil Prize is named in honour of Rear Admiral Percival McNeil CB RAN (1883-1951). He could be regarded as one of the great champions of Australian shipbuilding. McNeil played a pivotal role in the design and construction of the famed Bathurst class corvettes as well as helping to maintain a local warship construction capability in the post-war period.

Professor Scholz, who is also the Innovation Professor at RMIT University, has made an outstanding contribution to Navy capability and its long-term efficacy, by consistently applying his world-class expertise, experience and energy in the field of autonomous systems and artificial intelligence. He has been central to developing business partnerships between all levels of industry and academia towards innovative autonomous systems and artificial intelligence. This has required exceptional skill, noting the diverse interests between ship-builders, systems integrators and deep level research, to optimise delivery of cutting-edge solutions for Navy capability.

While widely published and his opinions sought all over the world, Professor Scholz is best known recently as co-leading the partnership between Defence and industry in delivering Exercise *Autonomous Warrior 2018* in Australia, and the international trials leading to this unique (and still unprecedented) operational experimentation program. In his role as Chairman of The (FVEY) Technical Cooperation Program (TTCP) for the Autonomy Strategic Challenge, and Australia's representative, he guided the US and UK in the development and side-by-side demonstration of their respective Common Controls Systems and AI applications. This has led to multiple lines of effort within Navy to harness disruptive technologies, large-scale data management and the C2/AI in future warships for Australia's unique circumstances.

Professor Scholz's ongoing leadership as CEO of the DCRC-TAS is well recognised in Australia and internationally by Primes and multiple Small-Medium Enterprises. One of the leading projects for Navy he oversights is a partnership between several Primes, SMEs and multiple university R&D centres towards rapid (autonomous) mine countermeasures. He is a strong proponent of increased medium-size shipbuilding (unmanned) to support a variety of future autonomous systems.

The influence by Professor Scholz on future on-board combat systems, AI and deployable autonomous systems, and therefore the functional design of Navy's Attack Class Submarines, Hunter Class Frigates, Arafura Class OPVs and other major projects well into the future is substantial.

Because of COVID-19 the award of the Prize, which normally occurs at the ANI's annual dinner, was done via a virtual award ceremony