

LITHGOW ARMS TO MANUFACTURE AUSTRALIAN-DESIGNED AND DEVELOPED AR

THE REGIONAL NEW South Wales town of Lithgow will be the location for manufacture of Australia's first locally designed and developed AR weapon following the signing of an agreement between Thales Australia and Melbourne's Wedgetail Industries this month.

The new Australian Combat Assault Rifle (ACAR) will be aimed at fulfilling the needs of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), law enforcement agencies and export customers.

Identifying a significant gap in the small arms market for a reliable and rugged Australian-made AR platform, Wedgetail and Thales Australia's Lithgow Arms initiated a design and development effort on the new weapon system in early 2022. The work was undertaken at Lithgow Arms' C3 – a small arms and weapons systems 'incubator' established on site at the Lithgow facility designed to assist and bring on board small-to-medium enterprises (SME) in the defence industry.

Wedgetail worked closely with Lithgow Arms manufacturing experts and other small arms SMEs to prototype, test, evaluate and qualify the design of the ACAR for large scale, local production at Lithgow.

Matt Duquemin, Thales Australia's Director Integrated Weapons and Sensors, said, "We are proud to work together with Wedgetail – helping develop and grow the innovation and ingenuity of Australian SMEs by bringing down costly barriers to entry often experienced by Australian companies in the defence industry".

Mr Duquemin said that Lithgow Arms will continue to work with its SME partners to grow a sustainable and competitive sovereign small arms industry capability



ABOVE: The Australian Combat Assault Rifle in 5.56mm (top) and 7.62mm (bottom) calibres. Images: Thales

in regional New South Wales to keep pace with the requirements of the ADF.

The ACAR was shown for the first time last October at the 2022 Land Forces exhibition. The weapon is now at the pre-production stage and ready for full-rate production, Thales told *DTR*.

The standard ACAR is chambered in 5.56mm NATO and also available in 7.62mm and .300 Blackout. A 6.8mm version is in the final stages of qualification.

The 5.56mm ACAR with 12-inch (305mm) barrel is 730mm long with the adjustable buttstock collapsed and weighs

2.7kg empty. Magazine capacity is 20 and 30 rounds. The gun features a cold hammer forged chrome-lined barrel, forged 7075-T6 aluminium alloy upper and lower receivers with an anodised finish and a full-length Picatinny rail on the upper receiver. All weapons are suppressor-compatible.

Lithgow Arms and Wedgetail are currently involved in the spiral development of the ACAR platform to include tailored variants specific to end-user requirements, as well as integrating the weapon with Thales digital sub-systems such as clip-on night vision equipment. **DTR**

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