



Australian military buys \$5m laser-based anti-drone system

Description

AUSTRALIAN : The Australian defence force has bought a \$5m laser-based counter-drone system.

It acquired the Fractl: 2 system, which its Australian developers say has the precision to shoot down a drone travelling at 100km/h and can be operated remotely.

Drones have become an increasing threat in modern warfare and have been widely deployed in the Ukraine conflict, as well as being used by Houthi rebels to attack international shipping in the Red Sea.

The system is battery-operated and one charge can shoot down 50 drones, its manufacturer say. The laser system, which has been developed by Melbourne-based AIM Defence, replaces the need for ammunition.

The Australian government paid \$4.9m for the prototype from AIM Defence, which says it has performed more than 200 drone defeats both indoors and outdoors.

According to sources, AIM Defence is investing in expanding manufacturing facilities in Melbourne.

The prototype technology is expected to be “in the hands” of ADF operators by mid-2024.

The company, co-founded by the laser scientist Jae Daniel and the technology entrepreneur Jessica Glenn, was this year selected to take part in an international counter-drone exercise by the Canadian defence department.

The Counter Uncrewed Aerial Systems Sandbox 2024 will take place in Canada from May to June and includes 15 companies from across the world, including one other Australian organisation, EOS Defence Systems.

Sean O'Byrne, a professor of aerospace engineering at the Australian National University, said he was not aware of any similar technology being deployed to date, though there were a number of companies worldwide that were interested in the space.

While O'Byrne has not yet seen AIM Defence's technology, he said that as far as the sector went, direct energy is a "horizon technology" in the sense that it was quite new in terms of deployment.

"It's an old technology in terms of the idea, but the systems have not been powerful enough and there are various technical challenges in adaptive optics to focus on a moving target," he said.

"The target might be moving up, down, left, right, towards you or away from you.

"You have to have an optical system that can focus and there are challenges technologically with that and also challenges with delivering enough power to the spot of focus very fast. Building a portable platform that can do all of those things is challenging."

Guardian Australia is awaiting comment from the Australian defence force.

BY Isabelle Oderberg

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