

Shipbuilding plan confirms skilled foreign workers 'essential' to rapid naval expansion

By Defence reporter Andrew Greene

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Australia's long-awaited naval shipbuilding plan has acknowledged South Australia will struggle to provide the thousands of skilled workers needed for a massive expansion of the Navy's fleet, with foreign workers and interstate talent needed to help meet ambitious production deadlines.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull will today join Defence Industry Minister Christopher Pyne at the Osborne shipyards in Adelaide to release the 114-page document detailing Australia's largest ever shipbuilding and sustainment program.

The Naval Shipbuilding Plan outlines over \$1 billion in infrastructure upgrades at the Osborne shipbuilding facilities and Western Australia's Henderson shipyards, while confirming construction is scheduled to begin on Australia's Future Frigates by 2020.

According to the plan the existing infrastructure at Osborne is "sufficient" to continue block assembly of Australia's three air warfare destroyers, but "inadequate" for "high productivity construction" of major surface combatants such as the future frigate.

Design for the Osborne South facilities will continue to be refined by Defence "in coming months", with construction of new surface ship infrastructure to commence in the "second half of 2017".

Completion of the infrastructure development is expected to be completed by the "second half of 2019", but the report warned "this is the most time-critical component of the Government's planned infrastructure works to enable the future frigate construction program to commence in 2020".

"This is the largest single Commonwealth investment in any single state ... it is going to create another 5,000 jobs in shipbuilding directly again, almost all of which will be in South Australia, and another 10,000 in sustainment," Mr Turnbull told ABC Radio Adelaide this morning.

"This is a massive commitment to South Australia and the proposition that the Federal Government is neglecting South Australia is frankly nonsense and it defies the reality of this incredibly substantial nation-building commitment.

"As the naval shipbuilding plan says with our shipbuilding in the past we have had a boom and bust cycle ... it's coming to an end.

"And it is coming to an end because of my Government, my leadership, my commitment."

Foreign managers 'essential', potential need for skilled interstate workers

The document predicted by 2026 more than 5,200 workers would be needed in South Australia, but acknowledged foreigners would be "essential" to "fill middle management and supervisory roles".

"It is expected that over time the number of skilled workers from international shipyards will decline as the Australian workforce becomes familiar with construction requirements and develops more specialised skills," the document stated.

"This will be an important area of discussion with selected shipbuilders as projects develop."

The document also flagged a future taxpayer-funded advertising campaign to attract workers to Adelaide.



PHOTO: The Navy's fleet is set to be massively expanded. (ABC News: Michael Coggan)

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"The Government will explore the potential for skilled workers to relocate from interstate to South Australia," the shipbuilding plan said.

"A public communications strategy will be important to raise awareness of the long-term and sustainable careers which will become available in naval shipbuilding as a result of the Government's investments."

Defence Teaming Centre chief executive Margot Forster said the vast majority of the construction workforce would be sourced locally.

But she said the inconsistent nature of Defence projects has led to a shortage of workers for supervisory and middle management roles.

"Australia ... has not had a continuous shipbuilding program," Ms Forster said.

"So what we have suffered from is coming into these programs, learning the skills, delivering quality products and then having to dismantle the workforce because there isn't a follow-on project."

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Topics: defence-industry, defence-and-aerospace-industries, government-and-politics, henderson-6166, australia, osborne-5017

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