

Australia unveils massive shipbuilding plan

SYDNEY, Australia: Australia revealed details of a massive shipbuilding strategy on Tuesday, its largest peacetime naval investment, with plans to construct dozens of new submarines and frigates to shore up its defence capabilities.



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Prime minister Malcolm Turnbull said the Aus\$89 billion (US\$66 billion) package -- first flagged in 2015 to replace its ageing fleets - would boost local industry, with up to 5,000 jobs created in shipbuilding directly and double that in the supply chain.

"We will transform our naval shipbuilding and sustainment industry here in Australia, with Australian workers, in Australian shipyards, using Australian resources," he said as he officially released the plan.

"This is a plan for jobs, a plan for security, a plan for the opportunity that investment in our defence industry brings not just today and tomorrow, but for generations to come."

Nine frigates, 12 offshore patrol vessels

The program will produce nine frigates and 12 offshore patrol vessels, along with 19 Pacific patrol boats for neighbouring countries.

It also includes 12 new submarines at a cost of Aus\$50 billion, with French naval contractor DCNS last year selected to

design and build them at an Adelaide yard, beating off competition from Japan and Germany.

While no specific threat was cited, defence minister Marise Payne said the program was designed to ensure "we have the most capable, agile and potent Australian Defence Force that we are able to achieve".

"The future frigates, the offshore patrol vessels, the future submarines -- these are platforms that will deliver... the capability that we need to ensure we are protecting Australia and our interests."

Better able to "detect, track and, if required, destroy"

Under the plan, Australia's current ANZAC and Adelaide class frigates will be replaced with new ships better able to "detect, track and, if required, destroy enemy submarines".

Its Armidale offshore patrol vessels, designed for border protection, will also be renewed, along with its diesel and electric-powered Collins Class submarine fleet.

Turnbull said more than Aus\$1.3 billion would be injected to modernise facilities in South Australia and Western Australia states so the work could go-ahead.

A shipbuilding college would also be established to train workers.

Construction of the patrol boats is slated to start in 2018 with the frigates beginning two years later and the submarine build getting underway around 2022.

Source: AFP

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