

## MILITARY

# Ottawa shifts course on warship program

Combined bids with existing designs intended to speed up delivery

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The federal government is looking at changing course on the largest shipbuilding program in Canadian history, and will now examine combining bids for new warships into one package in the hopes it will allow vessels to be constructed more quickly.

The \$26-billion Canadian Surface Combatant project will see a new fleet built to replace the Navy's destroyers and frigates. The plan established by the Conservative government was to have companies submit bids for the design of the ships, and to consider separate bids for the integration of the various systems on board those vessels.

But the federal government will now look at combining those two processes, with a designer and integrator submitting a combined bid.

The government will decide in a few months on how it wants to proceed.

"One competitive process versus two is much faster," Lisa Campbell, assistant deputy minister for acquisitions at Public Services and Procurement Canada, said in an interview Tuesday. "It takes out a whole bunch of the design technical risk of trying to fit together a combat systems integrator with a warship design that possibly was more customized."

The warship designs will be off-the-shelf vessels, she added.

"We're talking about existing designs," Campbell said. "That eliminates a lot of technical risk and will get us to building ships sooner."

The first of the Canadian Surface Combatants were supposed to be delivered around 2026. But Campbell said this new process would allow for the first ship to be delivered in the early 2020s.



ANDREW VAUGHAN/THE CANADIAN PRESS FILES

The \$26-billion Canadian Surface Combatant project will see a new fleet built to replace the Navy's destroyers and frigates. The plan, initiated by the Conservative government, has been dogged by concerns about delays and increasing costs.

She said Halifax-based Irving Shipbuilding will still be the prime contractor for the surface combatants, but the government will ensure there is maximum use of other Canadian firms on the program. As many as 80 domestic companies could potentially provide equipment, and the bids from the warship designer and integrator will be evaluated in part on how well those firms are represented.

"We decide the evaluation process," Campbell said, and Irving will "execute it."

Government officials are now talking to industry representatives about the changes.

Two variants of the new ships are expected to be built. One type will provide air defence and command and control, while the other will be a general purpose type to

do the jobs now handled by Canada's Halifax-class frigates.

The CSC project has been dogged by concerns about delays and increasing costs.

Last year, Vice-Admiral Mark Norman, the head of the Royal Canadian Navy, acknowledged that the project's cost would be well above its \$26-billion budget.

The Liberal government has committed to moving ahead with the surface combatant program, putting an emphasis on the number of jobs it could create.

Campbell said the shipbuilding strategy is now proceeding well.

"The shipyards had to get to a certain industrial capacity before we would let them start building ships," she said.

"They are exactly at the point in time we thought they would be right now."

Two posted comments:

What's the betting the shipbuilding will now be 'consolidated' on the East coast??

It would be better than the west coast, the area with the highest living costs!