

LOCKED AND LOADED FOR FRIGATES TEST PHASE

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BAE Systems Maritime Australia project controller Tayesha Papa and fabrication manager Mick Noy. Picture James Elsby

AUSTRALIA'S biggest surface shipbuilding project has reached a critical milestone, with the start of a two-year testing phase that will shape the future of the 30-year program.

Prototyping on the \$45bn Hunter-class frigates program will involve the construction and assembly of five representative ship blocks, as well as the testing of systems and processes at the Osborne shipyard.

Premier Steven Marshall, Senator Simon Birmingham and BAE Systems Australia chief executive Gabby Costigan will visit Osborne today to officially launch the prototyping phase. BAE Systems Maritime Australia managing director Craig Lockhart said the milestone was a major achievement given the global impact of COVID-19.

"The primary purpose of prototyping is to test the systems top to bottom, side to side, and make sure that we can repeat that process in a highly productive advanced manufacturing environment," he said.

BAE Systems Maritime Australia, which was renamed from ASC Shipbuilding this week, recently employed its 1000th employee in the Hunter program, with that number to double by the end of next year.