

JOBS BLITZ IN OUR DEFENCE

CLAIRE BICKERS

FROM BOILERMAKERS TO DATA EXPERTS, SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRIES SEEK TO HIRE WORKERS FOR THE FUTURE

ABOUT 1250 shipbuilding jobs are up for grabs in South Australia this year as the two defence giants building the Future Submarines and Future Frigates go on a hiring blitz.

Hundreds more defence industry jobs will be available on other projects as billions of dollars are poured into military contracts across SA.

Engineers, project managers, welders, fabricators, boilermakers and electricians will be needed, along with office workers and experts in data analytics, artificial intelligence and machine learning.

BAE Systems is looking to hire about 1000 people over 2021 to work on the Future Frigates project as the company gets set to start construction of the first Hunter Class warship in late 2022.

About 200 extra staff will be needed for BAE's other projects this year, including its upgrade of Australia's Jindalee operational radar network, which the Australian Defence Force uses for monitoring the country's ocean borders.

French defence company Naval Group plans to hire about 250 people in SA to work on the Future Submarines project, with construction of the first Attack Class sub set to start in 2024.

Industry and the state and federal governments are ramping up their efforts to develop a secure pipeline of employees for the two mega-projects, which will need more than 4000 direct workers in SA by 2030 and thousands more in the supply chain.

A new \$5m Defence Department program will be launched this year to reskill people who have lost work during COVID-19 to find them roles on shipbuilding projects. It will continue until mid-2022.

"The initiative is aimed at upskilling and training displaced workers through tailored case management, linking potential candidates with appropriate training plans and job placements within the national naval shipbuilding enterprise," Defence Industry Minister Melissa Price said yesterday.

She said the subs and frigates were "two of the biggest, most complex projects ever undertaken in Australia" and it was "critical" to develop a skilled workforce for them in SA.

The State Government will also announce today it has signed an agreement with the Naval Shipbuilding College to work together on building the local workforce.

That includes sharing data on workforce demand and skills gaps, advice on targeted marketing campaigns, education and training courses and advice on solutions to tackle any "systemic issues" across industry or the education and training sectors.

Premier Steven Marshall said it was a "crucial step" for SA's shipbuilding future.

BAE Systems chief people officer Danielle Mesa said the company was looking at several ways to attract and retain staff, including offering more flexible hours or remote-working options.

It was also targeting young Australians through early-career opportunities, apprenticeships and at schools to get teens interested in science, maths, engineering and technology jobs.

Ms Mesa said there was a "perfect storm" of challenges to get workers with the right skills at the right time, including fierce global competition across multiple sectors, longtime issues attracting enough people into STEM careers, and rapidly changing technology.

"Graduates are coming out of university with engineering degrees and, in some cases, we're already starting to reskill them in some of the new technology," she said.

Ms Mesa said competitive salaries were important but the shipbuilding sector could also offer decades of stable work.

"We compete outside of defence to retain people but when you look at things like mining, for example, there have been peaks and troughs – and people also remember the troughs," she said.

Naval Group Australia chief executive John Davis said the company was looking to hire everyone from engineers and welders to legal professionals and office staff.

SA Labor leader Peter Malinauskas said the State Government “must be doing all it can” to give more than 150,000 unemployed or underemployed South Australians every opportunity to get into the workforce.

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Melissa Price