

# NAVY FRIGATES PROGRAM BOOSTED BY 40 RECRUITS

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BAE Systems Australia has welcomed a record number of apprentices for its \$45bn Hunter-class frigates program at the Osborne Naval Shipyard.

The 40 new recruits will take up a range of roles in manufacturing, piping and mechanical trades, joining more than 1800 workers on the program.

That number includes close to 1400 based at the shipyard, where schedule protection blocks – to be used in the first of nine anti-submarine warfare frigates – are currently under construction.

The latest intake represents the largest ever cohort of apprentices to be deployed on the Hunter program.

BAE Systems Australia Maritime managing director Craig Lockhart said five members of the group would begin work as electro-technology and machining apprentices at production workshops, while seven apprentices were existing employees who were continuing their career as mature-age apprentices.

“We welcome each apprentice into the Hunter program and look forward to their development and contribution towards continuous naval shipbuilding (CNS) in Australia,” he said.

“I started my own career journey as an apprentice technician and look forward to working alongside the cohort as they progress, developing skills and a combined capability that ensures South Australia is a key part of CNS for decades to come. Each apprentice underscores Australia’s commitment to establishing a sovereign capable workforce in the shipbuilding industry.”

Metal fabrication apprentice Wren said joining BAE Systems and the frigates program offered an opportunity to secure a “career for life”.

“I’m really passionate about the shipbuilding industry, and I’m looking to build a career in it,” she said.

Education, Training and Skills Minister Blair Boyer said it was an exciting time to be entering the defence industry, with the state preparing for a “nation-leading role in the AUKUS deal and the ramp up of the Hunter-class frigate program build”.

“The Malinauskas government is committed to building a highly skilled defence industry workforce, and we are proud to be working with leading companies like BAE Systems to achieve this,” he said.

The Hunter program is expected to create and sustain more than 5000 jobs at BAE Systems and the wider Australian defence supply chain, including up to 1000 apprentice and graduate roles.

However the recruitment drive comes ahead of a critical review into the Royal Australian Navy’s fleet of warships, with speculation the review could result in cuts to the number of frigates built at Osborne. The findings of the review, and the federal government’s response, are expected to be announced in the first quarter of this year.

BAE Systems in November pitched a major design change to the navy, involving building a more lethal ship, by adding 64 vertical launch missile cells to take the total to 96.

If accepted by the navy, the evolved guided missile frigate would be built from the fourth ship constructed at Osborne.