

Royal Navy infrastructure protection ship accelerated

Press release

Ship to protect UK's critical national infrastructure to be delivered months ahead of schedule



The purchase of specialist ships to protect the UK's critical national infrastructure has been brought forward, the Defence Secretary has announced, as he confirms the National Flagship programme has been suspended in order to deliver this.

The two Multi-Role Ocean Surveillance (MROS) ships will be operated by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and are vital to our national security by protecting our subsea cables and pipelines. The first of these ships will be handed over in January 2023, several months ahead of schedule.

The increasing commercialisation of the seabed for energy and communications purposes has resulted in increased opportunities for adversaries to hold Western subsea critical national infrastructure at risk.

The vessels will be adaptable, and able to provide a range of capabilities, such as operating remote and autonomous offboard systems for underwater surveillance and seabed warfare.

Speaking in the House of Commons, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

In the face of Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and Putin's reckless disregard of international arrangements designed to keep world order, it is right that we prioritise delivering capabilities which safeguard our national infrastructure.

To effectively address the current and future threats, we will now

invest in MROS ships that protect sensitive Defence infrastructure, and civil infrastructure, to improve our ability to detect threats to the seabed and cables. I have also therefore directed the termination of the National Flagship competition with immediate effect to bring forward the first MROS ship in its place and I shall make further announcements on our continued Naval investment in the coming weeks.

In light of this, the National Flagship programme has been suspended to prioritise delivery of the vital MROS capability.

Rear Admiral Rex Cox, CEO of the National Shipbuilding Office said:

The National Flagship project showcased the talent of the UK's maritime industry and I am grateful to all those bidders who took part. The willingness to embrace modern design and production practices with a focus on green innovation embodies the essence of the National Shipbuilding Strategy Refresh. This contemporary approach to shipbuilding and design will be fundamental to the success of the future shipbuilding pipeline.

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