

Australia

Australia to build biggest navy since second world war to meet China threat

Planned upgrade follows defence review that highlighted Beijing's military expansion in Pacific



Australia plans to more than double the size of its naval fleet © David Gray/AFP/Getty Images

Nic Fildes in Sydney 11 HOURS AGO

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Australia is to more than double the size of its naval fleet with an extra A\$11.1bn (\$7.2bn) of investment to adapt to China's military build-up in the Pacific region.

The navy will expand to 26 warships, including 11 new frigates and six new large vessels with long-range missile capability, as Canberra toughens its military stance in response to rising regional tension.

The investment will give [Australia](#) its largest navy since the second world war. It eases fears within the defence community that the government would not meet promises to provide extra funding to upgrade the fleet after a review last year deemed it not fit for purpose.

The plan is aimed at launching new warships more rapidly while maintaining a commitment to increasing shipbuilding capability in Australia.

Under the proposals set out on Tuesday, the government has made cuts to a plan to acquire Hunter frigates from Britain's BAE Systems, which in 2018 won a A\$5bn

acquire hunter frigates from Britain's BAE Systems, which in 2016 won a A\$3.5bn contract to build nine vessels in Osborne, South Australia.

The contract had been in danger of cancellation due to delays and a potential rise in costs to A\$6.5bn. The National Audit Office also criticised the procurement process.

The revised Hunter plan means the navy will now receive six of the originally planned nine vessels.

Australia will also acquire 11 further frigates that can be delivered more quickly.

The naval overhaul comes a year after Australia's Defence Spending Review unveiled the [biggest strategic shift in its military posture](#) in almost 80 years, arguing that intense Chinese-US competition had become the defining feature of the Pacific region.

It cited China's military build-up as the "largest and most ambitious of any country since the end of the second world war".

The overhaul also comes as Australia, the UK and US continue to implement the [Aukus](#) agreement that will deliver nuclear-powered submarines to the Pacific country for the first time.

The government has admitted that the Royal Australian Navy is operating the oldest surface fleet in its history. The new plan — which will take Australian public investment in the fleet to A\$54.2bn over the next decade — is aimed at adding more missile power to the navy's arsenal and introducing faster "shoot and scoot" ships.

Mark Hammond, chief of the navy, said in a statement that the navy needed to be equipped to deter potential adversaries and defend Australia's national interests. "The size, lethality and capabilities of the future surface combatant fleet ensures that our navy is equipped to meet the evolving strategic challenges of our region," he said.

Euan Graham, senior analyst with think-tank ASPI, said the plan represented "a bold move in the right direction" and that the addition of the new frigates represented an unprecedented step-up in fleet capability outside of wartime.

He said the move to buy new frigates "off the shelf" from international suppliers was pragmatic given the navy's needs.

Sam Roggeveen, director of the Lowy Institute's International Security Program, said the addition of the six large optionally crewed surface vessels reflected the lessons of recent conflicts by building more missile capability into the fleet. "The Ukraine war

and the Houthi conflagration have illustrated that the depth of the missile magazines are vital to your survival on the seas,” he said.

Roggeveen said China might not be perturbed by Australia’s overhaul as it already had a vast armoury of weapons designed to sink surface ships. “The idea this could significantly tilt the balance [towards Australia] is mistaken,” he said.

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