

Southern African Shipyards confirmed as main contractor for Project Hotel

Written by defenceWeb - 13th Dec 2017



HMS Echo, a Plymouth based Survey Ship, sails into Portsmouth for the first time. She is in Portsmouth for a watch rotation. The ship has recently returned to the Fleet after a period in re-fit in Plymouth. She is due to return to sea after a short period alongside for sea trials.

Durban-based Southern African Shipyards (SAS) is the main contractor for Project Hotel to supply the SA Navy with a new hydrographic vessel and ancillary equipment.

According to State-owned defence and security acquisition agency Armscor "the conclusion of a contract pertaining to Project Hotel has been finalised with SAS. The contract is expected to run for approximately four years excluding the interim support phase".

Solomzi Mbada, Armscor Group Executive: Corporate Support, told defenceWeb the contract price is confidential between the parties "and will not be divulged".

This goes against what President Jacob Zuma, Commander-in-Chief of the SA National Defence Force (SANDF), said in Durban in October. Giving an update on implementation of the oceans economy component of Operation Phakisa, he said the investment needed for a new hydrographic vessel was in the order of R1.8 billion.

The Armscor announcement, to which SAS had not responded at the time of publication, ends a process that started in July 2014 when Armscor issued a tender for a new hydrographic platform for the Navy. The new vessel will replace SAS Protea, which is coming close to 50 years in service. Project Hotel also includes two fully integrated inshore survey motorboats and the upgrading of current shore-based hydrographic office infrastructure at Silvermine.

SAS said earlier this year it was offering the Vard Marine 9 105 design to Armscor to fill Project Hotel. This was after the Durban company, which has previously done major refurbishment work for the Navy, was named preferred bidder.

Vard Marine, formerly STX, partnered with SAS to develop the PC7 ice strengthened vessel 95 metres in length with an approximately 12.24 MW installed diesel electric power plant, giving a maximum speed of 18 knots. The vessel has a 10 000 nautical mile range with 44 days endurance, MarineLink reports. The Vard design will be manned by a crew of 120 comprising ship's company and scientists.

Vard previously designed two 9 105 hydrographic research vessels for the Royal Navy (HMS Echo and HMS Enterprise), delivered in 2002. They feature azimuth thrusters, where the propellers are part of a swivelling pod, allowing for precise manoeuvring. The vessels are fitted with a RHIB, survey motor boat and dive boat.

Vard Marine will be responsible for producing the basic design for the vessel and supporting SAS during the detailed design and construction phase.

The Navy is also looking to acquire three inshore and three offshore patrol vessels under Project Biro, but there is still no finalisation of the main contractor.

Solomzi this month told defenceWeb: "Armscor is currently finalising negotiations and internal approval processes. Once the contract is eventually placed, it is expected to run for approximately seven years".