

SEASPAN

This West Coast shipbuilder is delivering the first class of large vessels under Canada's NSS

BY JOETEY ATTARIWALA

Fresh off the launch of its third Offshore Fisheries Science Vessel (OFSV), the future CCGS *John Cabot*, Seaspan Shipyards is set to deliver the ship to the Canadian Coast Guard in a matter of weeks. The handover of the vessel, the third delivered in just 14 months, completes the first entire class of ships built under Canada's National Shipbuilding Strategy (NSS) program.

Seaspan's pride in the OFSV is apparent and entirely understandable. Completing three ships in 14 months is already a rare achievement for large new vessel construction. But, also consider that when the third OFSV slid into the water for the first time on July 3, it was 97% complete, a number that exceeds international shipbuilding benchmarks for completion at launch.

Even more impressive, construction was completed in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. As Seaspan Shipyards CEO, Mark Lamarre, tells it, "... the pandemic tossed us all into uncharted territory. We gave people choices and we followed all public health guidance. We put all protective measures in place. And most important, we stayed true to our core value of safety, keeping the protection and well-being of our team as our utmost priority - all with the hope that we could keep our programs moving forward."

Lamarre proudly expressed his admiration for what the Seaspan team has accomplished, telling CDR, "The collective effort of the entire team — here at Seaspan, plus our pan-Canadian supply chain, and our partners at the Coast Guard — is the single biggest reason we were able to launch this ship in these conditions. The pandemic presented challenges none of us had seen before. The whole team really put their shoulders into it and came up with innovative and ingenious ways to solve each challenge. I couldn't be prouder."

Following delivery, the CCGS *John Cabot* will head out to sea to its home base in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. Together with her sister ships, the CCGS *Sir John Franklin*, stationed in Victoria, British Columbia, and the CCGS *Capt Jacques Cartier*, based in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, the OFSV fleet will serve Canada's Coast Guard sailors and Fisheries and Oceans scientists for generations to come.

Delivering the third and final OFSV is part of what has already been a watershed year for Seaspan Shipyards, and it shows no signs of slowing down. In fact, it seems the shipyard is just getting started — "firing on all cylinders" as Lamarre describes it.

All told, more than 1,200 Seaspan Shipyards employees and more than 400 Canadian suppliers, many of whom are small and medium-size companies, contributed to the construction of the OFSV fleet.

ONE OF THE MOST MODERN SHIPYARDS

Since Seaspan's Vancouver shipyard was selected in 2011 as the prime contractor to deliver non-combat vessels under NSS, the company has undergone a fundamental transformation. It invested \$185 million to modernize its shipyard infrastructure. It introduced advanced shipbuilding technologies, and it invested in developing skilled workers. Today, the company employs approximately 2,700 workers across its three shipyards in Vancouver and Victoria.

It is now one of the best capitalized and most modern shipyards in North America, with excess capacity and capability to deliver the entire NSS non-combat program of work, and that includes the Polar Icebreaker.

Seaspan has also continued to build up strength in Canada's marine supply

chain. Genoa Design International, based in Newfoundland and Labrador, is just one example. Genoa provides 3D modeling and production design services to engineering firms and shipyards across North America. Specifically, the company builds a fully integrated virtual ship - the 3D model - and then uses it to deliver accurate and timely manufacturing information.

Gina Pecore, CEO of Genoa, told CDR, "Seaspan's approach was, and continues to be, identifying a connected and capable sub-contractor team, and then working alongside these firms to identify gaps and opportunities, knowing that strength in its suppliers is strength for Canadian shipbuilding and for our Coast Guard and Navy."

Pecore added, "... This is exactly what Canada needs if we're going to be successful in transitioning our own shipbuilding programs into global competitiveness."

"Canada now has shipbuilding capability and capacity on the West Coast and a flourishing marine industry that did not exist nine years ago," Lamarre said. "The marine industrial sector in BC and Canada has been re-established and is thriving."

GREAT PROGRESS ON JSS

In parallel with completing the OFSVs, the Seaspan team continues to make great progress on its fourth vessel, the first of two critically important Joint Support Ships (JSS) for the Royal Canadian Navy.

As a warship, the JSS will feature sophisticated damage control and defence systems that will allow it to conduct a full range of military operations in high-threat environments — an operational environment in which converted commercial container ships cannot engage.

The project recently marked a major milestone with the announcement on 15 June that Canada awarded a performance-based contract to Seaspan's Vancouver Shipyards for the full construction of two Joint Support Ships. The contract will allow the transition to full-rate construction of JSS1.

Speaking to Seaspan employees during a recent visit to the Vancouver shipyard, the Minister of National Defence, the Honourable Harjit Sajjan, commented, “By investing in a National Shipbuilding Strategy, we are providing a roadmap for our Government to build and acquire the ships it needs by working and supporting shipbuilding companies, industrial partners, and workers right here at home.”

A BUILT IN CANADA WARSHIP

The progress the team is making on JSS is obvious to anyone with a view of the North Vancouver skyline. Block by block, the JSS is taking shape rapidly at the Vancouver shipyard. From the first cut of steel back in 2018, to the ceremonial keel laying in January 2020, JSS1 - the future *HMCS Protecteur* - has emerged as a towering part of the landscape and when completed it will be the largest naval ship by length ever built in Canada.

“We are incredibly proud of this progress,” Lamarre said, “When the first JSS enters service in 2023, the Royal Canadian Navy will once again have a warship purpose-built in Canada to military standards and able to support the broadest range of Canadian military missions and operations wherever they are needed.”

But, JSS isn’t all that is keeping Seaspan busy these days. The design team is already through functional design for the next Coast Guard ship, the Offshore Oceanographic Science Vessel (OOSV), which is on track to cut steel later this year. Seaspan Shipyards will also be building 16 Multi-Purpose Vessels for the Canadian Coast Guard.

And now Seaspan is teaming up with Ontario-based Heddle Shipyards to secure the contract to build the Polar Icebreaker for the Canadian Coast Guard. This was originally a part of Seaspan’s NSS mandate but it was recently and unexpectedly removed from the NSS Umbrella Agreement that Seaspan signed with Canada back in 2012.

Of course, The Polar Icebreaker is urgently needed to replace the Coast Guard’s aging flagship icebreaker, the CCGS *Louis S. St-Laurent*, which is set to retire at the end of the decade and needless to say,



Seaspan Shipyards is set to deliver the CCGS *John Cabot* to the Canadian Coast Guard

Seaspan says it is ready, willing and able to do the job.

NSS IS RENEWING THE NATION’S FLEET

When NSS was announced, the Government of Canada made a commitment to rebuilding Canadian shipbuilding capacity through the process of renewing the nation’s fleet. It’s clear that Seaspan Shipyards has taken that charge and executed on that mission especially since the arrival of Lamarre and his team. The company has modernized its yards, invested in its workforce, invested in a robust Canadian supply chain, and designed and built world-class ships with delivery benchmarks that exceed global standards.

Seaspan Shipyards is a textbook example of what national shipbuilding strategies set out to accomplish. All the pieces are in place to ensure that the pernicious boom and bust cycles of the past stay in the past.

As Lamarre told CDR, “ . . . we’ve recapitalized our shipyard and built a new generation of shipbuilders that I believe are even more talented and will be more experienced than those of my generation. We’re already seeing signs of massive ship-to-ship learning — a hallmark of a great shipyard team. Now our job is to keep that momentum going. To do that, we need to be designing and building ships.” ■

Joetey Attariwala is CDR’s Senior Staff Writer



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