

# Money handed over for new marine training centre

BY ANDREW A. DUFFY, VICTORIA TIMES COLONIST FEBRUARY 13, 2012



Lynne Yelich, minister of state, Western Economic Diversification, announces money for a new marine trades training centre at the Esquimalt Graving Dock in Victoria on Monday.

**Photograph by:** Darren Stone, Victoria Times Colonist, Feb. 13, 2012

Amid a sea of red and blue hard hats and with the frigate HMCS Calgary as a backdrop at the Esquimalt graving dock, the federal government Monday handed over more than \$1 million to help construct a dedicated marine training centre.

Lynne Yelich, minister of state for Western Economic Diversification, said the money is the first concrete step in a federal plan to make the most of the shipbuilding industry in the west.

The Western Canadian shipbuilding industry got a huge boost last fall when Seaspan Marine was awarded an \$8 billion federal contract to produce non-combat vessels as part of the National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy.

Most of the work on the vessels will be done in Vancouver, though Seaspan's Victoria Shipyards will be responsible for finishing and trials.

Yelich said the plan will see Western Economic Diversification working with small and medium sized businesses to help them capitalize on the shipbuilding strategy, navigate through the federal procurement process and link western businesses to decision makers and partners in the industry.

"Many of these businesses will benefit by capitalizing on secondary opportunities," she said. "We will be working on informing Western Canadians so they can take full advantage of the national strategy for shipbuilding, showcasing the capabilities of Western Canada's shipbuilding industry to key partners

and we will focus on investing money where it matters to ensure Western Canadian shipbuilding remains strong and competitive.”

That’s where the \$2.5 million training centre comes in — additional capital funding is coming from the province and industry.

“This investment helps ensure the sustainability of B.C.’s shipbuilding and repair industry by training highly qualified workers,” she said.

It’s expected as many as 4,000 direct and indirect jobs will be created in B.C. as a result of the shipbuilding strategy.

Yelich certainly wasn’t about to find an argument anywhere on the docks Monday morning.

“This initiative is extremely critical, we’ve had an industry that for the last 15 years has been struggling with what I call dependable-irregular work — you know you’re going to get it but you don’t know when so you get troughs and valleys — but anytime you put in a training program you send a message,” said Malcolm Barker general manager of Victoria Shipyards. “You only do that because you know you have a future, and a dedicated industry training centre is an indication (industry and government) believe there is a strong future for the shipbuilding industry.”

George MacPherson, president of the B.C. Shipyard Workers Federation, said it’s a huge moment for workers as it gives them a future in the industry.

“Most people don’t realize we have lost three generations of workers because of the downturn in the industry, we haven’t been able to train people and get them up to speed,” he said. “This will get us back to ground zero so we can start training people at entry level programs and upgrading skills.”

The building, to be erected on land near the Songhees Wellness Centre being constructed at the corner of Admirals and Maplebank roads, is expected to be open in September. Builders expect to break ground later this month.

“Right now we are developing the training curriculum. We are doing the gap analysis between where industry is right now and where we feel it needs to be,” said Barker. “We want to get those fundamental courses in place to get ready for the younger guys, the middle manager guys, the planners and the schedulers, all the funny little courses that are particular to the shipbuilding industry.”

The centre is expected to be self-financing with course costs covering operational expenses. Barker said they expect to have two years of operational funding in place before it opens.

“(The centre) marks an initial milestone in the development of the industry for a growing and healthy workforce,” said John Shaw, Seaspan vice president. “We have gone from questioning the existence of shipbuilding and repair on the west coast to today being on the verge of having to hire hundreds of skilled workers and a solid decade and more of us building ships for the Royal Canadian Navy and Canadian Coast Guard.”

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