

Shipbuilding umbrella agreements expected

BY CARLA WILSON, TIMES COLONIST JANUARY 12, 2012

Prime Minister Stephen Harper will today be in Halifax and Vancouver, where he is expected to announce umbrella agreements with shipbuilders on each coast.

The agreements are a key stage in the process to line up \$8 billion worth of shipbuilding contracts with Seaspan Marine on the west coast and \$25 billion worth of work with Irving Shipbuilding in Nova Scotia.

B.C. and Nova Scotia celebrated in October when the yards won the right to negotiate specific contracts. The work represents thousands of jobs in each province in a sector that has spent decades fighting for survival.

Irving is building combat vessels, while Seaspan, owner of Vancouver Shipyards and Victoria Shipyards, is building noncombat ships.

Harper will be at Irving Shipbuilding in the morning before crossing the country to be at Vancouver Shipyards mid-afternoon.

Umbrella agreements set out the roles and responsibilities of the federal government and the shipyards over the life of the individual contracts.

Seaspan and the federal government reached an agreement-in-principle in late December.

The next step is to negotiate contracts to build individual ships. Seaspan officials expect that it will take another four to five months to develop detailed designs, based on federal plans, for the first ships. These are likely to be either fisheries vessels or an oceanographic vessel.

The first steel will likely be cut in early 2013.

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