

Fincantieri reconsiders UK support vessels decision

Italian shipbuilder Fincantieri says it may reconsider its bid for UK support vessels following new information after its withdrawal last month. But UK unions press the government to award the contract to a consortium of British firms

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UK unions Unite and GMB urge the government to award the contract for three support vessels to British firms to safeguard jobs



FOLLOWING THE WITHDRAWAL OF FINCANTIERI, WHOSE GENOA YARD IS PICTURED ABOVE, FOUR BIDDERS REMAIN, THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE SAID.

FINCANTIERI, the Italian shipbuilder, has said it will be re-evaluating a bid for new naval support vessels after it withdrew from the process last month.

The [UK government said](#) in November it had selected four international shipbuilding firms and a British consortium to compete for the Fleet Solid Support ships contract.

Following the withdrawal of Fincantieri, four bidders remain, the Ministry of Defence said.

They are: Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering of South Korea, Japan Marine United Corporation, Navantia of Spain, and a British consortium consisting of big names Babcock, BAE Systems, Cammell Laird and Rolls-Royce.

“Fincantieri withdrew from Fleet Solid Support Vessels Tender in mid-April for a number of considerations,” the Italian company told Lloyd’s List. “However, the UK’s Ministry of Defence asked us to consider a new set of information that is going to be provided in the coming days.

“Fincantieri is waiting for such a document that will be carefully considered,” it said. The MoD said it is seeking to procure as many as three ships and is expecting the “tender returns” this July. As the tender process was still ongoing, it could not provide cost estimates for the work.

Media reports pegged the cost at about £1bn (\$1.25bn).

The support vessels are designed to deliver ammunition, food and supplies to UK forces around the world, and will be manned by civilians. They will work alongside the Royal Navy’s fleet.

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary took delivery of the first Tide-class support tanker, *RFA Tidespring*, in 2017, followed by *RFA Tiderace*, *RFA Tidesurge* and *RFA Tideforce* in 2018. The 39,000-tonne ships provide support to the Royal Navy’s Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers and the wider Royal Navy fleet.

Eight firms had registered interest in the contract for the new support vessels, with a final decision expected next year. The vessels will likely enter service in 2026.

The UK’s biggest unions are pressing the government to award the contract to the British consortium dubbed Team UK.

Unite said in a [statement](#) that it “is again calling on the government to support British jobs and build the next generation of naval support ships in the UK”. It is ramping up its [Keep Britain Afloat](#) campaign.

It said almost 2m members from the Unite, GMB, Prospect and Community unions have sent emails urging the government to grant the contract to the British consortium. A Team UK spokesperson said it was pleased “to have been down-selected for the UK Fleet Solid Support programme”, without elaborating.

The UK has four ship construction yards, according to the Confederation of Shipbuilders & Engineering Unions, while six others provide repairs and maintenance or fleet support, or carry out specialist submarine works.

Three of the shipbuilding yards belong to Babcock, BAE and Cammell Laird, while the fourth is owned by Fergusons Marine in Clydeport.

During the past 10 years, three shipyards have had to close, the most recent being Babcock's [Appledore](#) facility in Devon.

There may be more closures, according to the CSEU, which added that the surviving yards have been through redundancy programmes at several points that have led to tens of thousands of job losses.