



## Defence Committee

Chairman, Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood

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Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP  
Secretary of State for Defence  
Ministry of Defence  
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*Dear Secretary of State,*

We have read your statement to the House yesterday on the launch of the Fleet Solid Support ship (FSSS) competition. As you know, we have followed the progress of these ships closely. They are a crucial naval asset as well as a key test of the National Shipbuilding Strategy and the viability of the UK's domestic shipbuilding capability.

We were therefore disappointed to see that the Government's commitment in October 2020 that the manufacturing team would have to be led by a British company has now been replaced with a requirement for integration in the UK.

- Why was this decision taken and how does it conform with the National Shipbuilding Strategy and the desire to maintain domestic shipbuilding skills?

The announcement on the Ministry of Defence website states that "a significant proportion of the build and assembly work" must be carried out in the UK.

- How will this be defined, and is it in addition to or synonymous with the integration of the ships?

We were also surprised to see that contract award is not expected for two years.

- Please could you provide further information on why the competition phase is expected to take this long, when one competition for the ships has already been held and cancelled.

A competition period this long also increases the risk that the new ships will not be delivered before the one remaining active solid support ship, RFA Fort Victoria, retires. This risk is only heightened by the decision announced this week to sell RFA Fort Austin and RFA Fort Rosalie.

- Please could you confirm when the new FSSS are expected into service and when RFA Fort Victoria is expected to retire?

We be grateful if you would insure that the information requested is supplied in time to be considered as part of our active inquiry into the Navy's purpose and procurement, which is already considering issues around the FSSS.

*Yours sincerely,*

*PP Ellwood*

**Rt Hon. Tobias Ellwood MP**  
**Chair of the Defence Committee**