Geurts: Urgency, Discipline Hallmarks of Frigate Selection Process

Marinette Marine will base the FFG(X) guided-missile frigate on Fincantieri's FREMM frigate, which is in service with the Italian and French navies.

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy's top acquisition official praised the government team that selected and the industry teams that submitted proposals for the design of the Navy's next-generation small combatant, the FFG(X) guided-missile frigate, the first of which is scheduled to be delivered in 2026. Design of the frigate has begun three months ahead of schedule.

The Navy announced on April 30 that it had awarded a detailed design and construction contract to Marinette Marine, a Fincantieri company based in Marinette, Wisconsin.

See: Marinette Marine Wins Guided-Missile Frigate Contract

Marinette is building the Freedom-class littoral combat ships for Lockheed Martin and will turn to building the new frigate that will be based on the Fincantieri FREMM frigate, which is in service with the Italian and French navies.

"I am very proud of the hard work from the requirements, acquisition and shipbuilder teams that participated in the full and open competition, enabling the Navy to make this important decision today," said James F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, in the Navy's April 30 announcement.

"Throughout this process, the government team and our industry partners have all executed with a sense of urgency and

discipline, delivering this contract award three months ahead of schedule. The team's intense focus on cost, acquisition and technical rigor enabled the government to deliver the best value for our taxpayers as we deliver a highly capable next-generation frigate to our warfighters."

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> *Rear Adm. Casey Moton, program executive officer for unmanned and small combatants*

Geurts noted in a May 1 teleconference with reporters that the selection of the frigate design three months ahead of schedule was accomplished despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Navy and stressed again that the decision was made with "a sense of urgency but also a sense of discipline."

He said that by "integrating the requirements, acquisition planning and conceptual design we were able to reduce the span time by six years as compared to traditional shipbuilding programs. … It's the best I've seen in the Navy thus far at integrating all of our teams together and it's a model we are building on for future programs."

The detail design and construction (DD&C) contract awards $795.1 million for the design and construction of the lead ship plus nine separately priced options for up to nine more ships. The contract also provides for "post-delivery availability support, engineering and class services, crew familiarization, training equipment, and provisioned item orders," the April 30 Defense Department contract announcement said.

The price of the lead ship, including the design cost, is marked as $1.281 billion, which includes the $795 million for the shipbuilder's design and construction, with the remainder for government-furnished equipment (GFE) and other items and services.

The Navy has a cost objective for the follow-on ships of $800 million each and a threshold of $950 million. According to a Navy independent cost estimate, the follow-on ships will cost $781 million (in constant 2018 dollars) on average. If all options are exercised, the contract's cumulative value for the 10 frigates would be $5.58 billion. The Navy has a requirement for 10 more small surface combatants but has not yet settled on an acquisition strategy for the second set of 10, Geurts said.

He said that by selecting a proven hull and adding a proven combat system, weapons and sensors, the Navy was able to keep the cost under the objective cost per platform cap of $950 million (in fiscal 2018 dollars).

"The Navy conducted this competition using a tradeoff process to determine the proposal representing the best value, based on the evaluation of non-price factors in conjunction with price," the contract announcement said.

"The Navy made the best value determination by considering the relative importance of evaluation factors as set forth in the solicitation, where the non-price factors of design and design maturity and objective performance (to achieve warfighting capability) were approximately equal and each more important than remaining factors."

Construction of the first frigate is scheduled for no later than April 2022, with delivery set for 2026. Initial operational capability is slated for 2029 or 2030 and full operational capability scheduled for 2031 or 2032. The contract calls for final work to be complete by 2035.

Rear Adm. Casey Moton, program executive officer for unmanned and small combatants, who also spoke at the teleconference, said the maturity of the selected design "was one of the non-price factors" that influenced the decision.

"The parent design really set us up well here," Moton said of

the nondevelopmental FREMM design that was selected.

He also cited the work that Fincantieri put into and will put into the Marinette shipyard as another non-price factor that was weighed in the selection decision.

Moton also said he was very comfortable with how the plan for acquisition and integration of government-furnished equipment was proceeding and that the GFE “will be ready on time.”