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▣ **Apr 20, 2013 7:17 PM AT**

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The French Navy FREMM Class frigate Aquitaine rests at berth in Halifax on Saturday, April 20, 2013. The Paris-based naval contractor DCNS wants Canada to consider the frigates for the Canadian Surface Combatant program. (Andrew Vaughan/The Canadian Press)

France showcased its latest warship to the federal defence minister Saturday in Halifax, as the Royal Canadian Navy considers options for designs of its next generation of combat vessels.

Peter MacKay toured the 142-metre Fremm-class vessel Aquitaine, viewing the command-and-control systems on the bridge, as well as its engine rooms and missile systems.

MacKay said he came away impressed with the way the ship had centralized consoles for communications, sonar detection and navigation in the bridge area.

"I have never seen... such an impressive vessel," he said.

The vessel built by French-based DCNS was launched last fall and is being tested with a crew of 94 — less than half the complement of the French navy's previous generation of destroyers.

French pitch new warships for next Canadian navy vessels

Written by Joan Russow
Sunday, 21 April 2013 19:17 -

'I have never seen... such an impressive vessel' — *Defence Minister Peter MacKay*

The publicly owned firm is pitching the vessel as a cheaper design due to a higher level of automation, reducing the need for crew during missions and allowing space for more comfortable living and working quarters than prior French ships.

Capt. Benoit Rouviere, the warship's commander, said the ship costs less to operate and has a crew that performs at a higher level due to the design changes.

"We put a bit more money into buying the ship, but over the life cycle we are trying to save a lot of money," he said in an interview.

MacKay said he's viewing the latest in foreign vessels as Ottawa decides what designs it will use for Canada's next combat vessels.

"The... reason we are taking the time to tour ships such as the Aquitaine is to look at the capabilities of partners, serious navies like the French, to determine the best fit for Canada," he said.

The federal government has chosen Irving Shipyard in Halifax and Seaspan Marine in British Columbia to build vessels for its 20-year, \$35-billion National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy.

Representatives for DCNS told reporters that the publicly owned firm is interested in bidding on designs and components of Canada's new combat vessels once the federal government provides details on what it is looking for.

Olivier Casenave-Pere, Canadian director for DCNS, said an adapted, off-the-shelf design may save Canadian taxpayers money.

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"You will benefit from ships for which studies and developments have already been paid by the French government," he said.

However, he said it's difficult to estimate what the potential cost savings would be without knowing the Canadian navy's design specifications.

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