

The Defence Secretary has today cut the first steel for HMS Prince of Wales, the Royal Navy's second Queen Elizabeth Class aircraft carrier.

During the ceremony at the BAE Systems shipyard in Govan, Dr Liam Fox started the computer-guided laser to cut the first piece of hull for the second of these new 65, 000 tonne ships, the largest ever built for the Royal Navy.

Dr Fox said: "We are committed to delivering this next generation of powerful British aircraft carriers that will mark a step change in our carrier strike capability and form the cornerstone of the Royal Navy's Future Force 2020. This major construction project is creating and sustaining thousands of jobs in shipyards around the country."

The new Queen Elizabeth Class carriers, which are being built by an alliance of BAE, Babcock, Thales UK and the Ministry of Defence, will give the Royal Navy a four acre military operating base which can be deployed worldwide. Both will have nine decks, plus a flight deck the size of three football pitches. Each carrier will have two propellers weighing 33 tonnes - nearly two and half times as heavy as a double decker bus - producing a maximum speed of over 25 knots. The class will operate at least twelve of the carrier variant Joint Strike Fighter jets that are highly capable, offer value for money, and allow for unparalleled interoperability with our allies.

Second Sea Lord, Vice-Admiral Charles Montgomery, who also attended the steel cutting ceremony, said: "The Queen Elizabeth Class will provide Britain with the means to deliver air power from the sea, wherever and whenever required, and in a stronger and more decisive form than ever before. In addition they will be able to undertake a wide range of tasks including support to peace keeping operations and delivery of humanitarian aid in times of crisis. They will undoubtedly prove a tremendous asset both to the Royal Navy and to the UK as a whole."

Major sections of HMS Prince of Wales will be constructed at six shipyards around the UK and will then be transported to Rosyth dockyard in Fife where the two ships will be assembled. Construction of the HMS Queen Elizabeth is well under way with components currently being brought together where they will be assembled using a 223 foot crane. Completion of the first ship is expected towards the end of the decade.