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Additional Estimates February 2024
Last updated: 9 January 2024
Australian Submarine Agency: SSN-AUKUS
Key witnesses: FADG SSN Construction Kate van Hilst

PDR No: SB23-001206

Australian Submarine Agency: SSN-AUKUS

Handling Note: First Assistant Director-General SSN Construction, Kate van Hilst to lead on SSN-AUKUS.

Key Messages

- Australia's SSN-AUKUS submarines will be built in Osborne, South Australia.
- SSN-AUKUS will be a trilaterally-developed submarine based on the United Kingdom's next-generation design.
- A decision on who will build SSN-AUKUS in Australia is the focus of further consideration by the Australian Submarine Agency and the Australian Government, with support from our international partners and industry.
- The Submarine Construction Yard will be almost 3 times larger than the yard forecast for the Attack class program.
- The Australian Submarine Agency has entered into a contract with Australian steel manufacturer, Bisalloy Steels, for the qualification of Australian steel for use on Australia's future SSN-AUKUS submarines.

Talking Points

If pressed: How much of SSN AUKUS will be built in Australia?

- SSN-AUKUS remains in its design phase.
- The Agency will work with the Australian shipbuilder to define the build strategy following their appointment, noting our intent is to maximise opportunities for Australian industry.
- We will continually assess the capability of Australian industry, and work with our AUKUS partners to ensure the best possible investments are made to support the trilateral submarine industrial base.

If pressed: How many SSN-AUKUS will Australia build?

- We will operate a conventionally-armed nuclear-powered submarine fleet of eight boats.
 - The acquisition of Virginia class submarines will provide Australia with a sovereign conventionally-armed nuclear-powered submarine capability as soon as possible and ensure there is no capability gap.

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- Once the Submarine Construction Yard at the Osborne Naval Shipyard is built, Australia will have capacity to build conventionally-armed nuclear-powered submarines into the future, beyond the initial commitment.

If pressed: Who is going to build SSN-AUKUS in Australia? Will ASC / BAE / General Dynamics Electric Boat / Huntington Ingalls Industries be involved?

- As the Deputy Prime Minister said at the time of the announcement of the Optimal Pathway, a decision on this matter would be taken within 12 months.

If pressed: What will be the Australian industry content for the build?

- Understanding the needs of the enterprise across the duration of a conventionally-armed nuclear-powered submarine build and sustainment program allows us to make informed choices from the outset about construction and sustainment.
- There will be significant opportunities for Australian industry throughout all stages of Australia's nuclear-powered submarine program – from the delivery of the submarine construction yard to the build of the submarines, their operation, sustainment and eventual disposal.
- The opportunities for Australian industry extend beyond the Australian build and sustainment program.
- There will also be opportunities for involvement in the supply chains of our AUKUS partners by contributing to the maintenance of their submarines and manufacturing components for their production lines.

If pressed: Does the awarding by the United Kingdom of the SSN-AUKUS design and infrastructure contract to BAE Systems mean Australian industry will be frozen out of SSN-AUKUS?

- The United Kingdom's announcement relates to a long-term commitment of the United Kingdom, which we will be engaged through AUKUS arrangements.
- SSN-AUKUS will be a trilaterally-developed submarine based on the United Kingdom's next-generation design.
- The design of SSN-AUKUS was always going to be led by the United Kingdom.
- There will be significant opportunities for Australian industry throughout all stages of Australia's nuclear-powered submarine program – from the delivery of the Submarine Construction Yard to the build of the submarines, their operation, sustainment and eventual disposal.
- The opportunities for Australian industry extend beyond the Australian build and sustainment program, encompassing opportunities for involvement in the supply

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chains of our AUKUS partners by contributing to the maintenance of their submarines and manufacturing components for their production lines.

If pressed: How can it take so long to build the SSN-AUKUS submarines in Australia? Has the build start date been brought forward only for political reasons?

- This is the first time that Australia has transitioned from a conventional submarine capability to a conventionally-armed nuclear-powered submarine capability.
- This is the most technologically complex defence program in Australian history.
 - Conventionally-armed nuclear-powered submarines are much larger than conventional submarines with hundreds of thousands of components. The qualification of products for use on a submarine platform take time and we are starting that now.
 - We are focusing on developing the skills required for Australia to become sovereign ready.

Australian Hull Steel for Australian SSN-AUKUS

- The Australian Submarine Agency has entered into a contract with Australian steel manufacturer, Bisalloy Steels, for the qualification of Australian steel for the use on Australia's future SSN-AUKUS submarines.
- The AUKUS partnership presents one of the biggest uplifts in Australia's industrial and defence capability in our history.
- The signing of this contract is a clear demonstration of the progress being made on, and the Government's commitment to, the construction of conventionally-armed nuclear-powered submarines in Australia and support for future Australian jobs.
 - The \$15 million contract will put Australian products at the forefront of our submarine construction.
 - We are committed to supporting Australian industry in the AUKUS trilateral supply chain, including through the qualification of the steel to both the United Kingdom and United States standards.

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Supporting Information

Questions on Notice

Budget Estimates: 30 & 31 May

- **QoN 18, Key Streams for AUKUS**, Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds (Liberal, Western Australia) asked for information on infrastructure at Stirling and Henderson, workforce and the nuclear regulatory system.
- **QoN 92, AUKUS readiness**, Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds (Liberal, Western Australia) asked a list of questions relating to WA infrastructure, WA Government and community engagement, workforce, health and safety, security, and timings.

Senate: 3 March 2023

QoN 65, Workforce demand and skill requirements, Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds (Liberal, Western Australia) asked for details regarding the department's plans for acquiring the skilled workforce needed to support the program.

Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests

None

Recent Ministerial Comments

Nil

Relevant Media Reporting

Australian Steel Qualification

On 9 December 2023 in *The Mirage News*, in an article titled [Australia to Supply Hull Steel for AUKUS Nuclear Subs](#), reported, the Australian Submarine Agency has entered into a contract with Australian steel manufacturer, Bisalloy Steels, for the qualification of Australian steel for use on Australia's future SSN-AUKUS submarines.

Workforce

- On 28 August 2023 in *The West Australian*, in an article titled [No closed shop for AUKUS](#), Katina Curtis reports that the Prime Minister has indicated people working on Australia's new nuclear-powered submarine program will not be required to join a union.

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Division:	SSN Construction
PDR No:	SB23-0001206
Contact: Ms Kate van Hilst First Assistant Director-General, SSN Construction Mob: s47E(c) Ph: s47E(c) Date: 8 January 2024	Cleared by: Mr David Hallinan Acting Director-General Australian Submarine Agency Mob: s47E(c) Ph: s47E(c) Date: January 2024

Questions on notice referred to within the brief:

Budget Estimates 30 and 31 May 2023

Senator Linda Reynolds

Question Number: 18

Date question was tabled: 17 July 2023

Question

Senator REYNOLDS: Thank you; that was a very comprehensive answer. I think you could describe this as a very high-risk critical path project, and you're saying there are three key areas that you are now reviewing to prepare for 2027. Is that early on late 2027?

Vice Adm. Mead: Exact details of when the first submarine will arrive in 2027 are yet to be fleshed out, but we are in very deep discussions with INDOPACOM, Pacific Fleet and Washington as well working out the aspects of that, as we are with the UK.

Senator REYNOLDS: There are three areas. Can you take on notice for me a bit more information on those three areas you say you are working on: the infrastructure at Stirling and Henderson, workforce and also the nuclear regulatory system? Are those the three key streams you're working on at the moment?

Vice Adm. Mead: There are multiple streams, but they are the three that we have clumped together. For instance, on the infrastructure we need to look at what we need to do with our wharf upgrades, supporting infrastructure, the sheds, the maintenance, and, of course, fitting that into the Henderson precinct as well. But I will take that question on notice.

Answer

Infrastructure at Stirling

HMAS Stirling will be progressively upgraded over the next decade to provide a safe and secure facility for conventionally-armed nuclear-powered submarines. The upgrades will be undertaken to initially support the rotational presence of United States and United Kingdom nuclear-powered submarines as part of the Submarine Rotational Force-West (SRF-West)

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from as early as 2027, and then an operating base for Australia's first sovereign Virginia Class nuclear-powered submarines from the early 2030s.

Workforce – maintenance

A significant area of focus is establishing the workforce required to maintain the rotational presence of United States and United Kingdom conventionally-armed nuclear-powered submarines. This effort provides Australians the opportunity to gain qualifications and experience in the maintenance of Virginia class submarines so we are sovereign ready to maintain our own Virginia class submarines from the early 2030s. The maintenance workforce will consist of both industry and uniformed personnel who will be trained in United States and United Kingdom shipyards in the lead up to the first continuous maintenance activity.

Nuclear Regulatory System

The Defence Legislation Amendment (Naval Nuclear Propulsion) Bill 2023 was the first legislative step in support of Australia's acquisition of conventionally-armed nuclear-powered submarines. This amended provisions of the *Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Act 1998* and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

A new independent statutory regulator, the Australian Nuclear-Powered Submarine Safety Regulator will also be established. The Regulator will be independent of the Australian Defence Force chain of command and directions from the Department of Defence.

The new Regulator will have the functions and powers necessary to regulate the unique circumstances associated with nuclear safety and radiological protection across the life cycle of Australia's nuclear-powered submarine enterprise. This includes associated infrastructure and facilities. The Regulator will work with existing Australian regulators to support the safety of our submariners, Australian and international communities, and the environment.

Budget Estimates 30 and 31 May 2023

Senator Linda Reynolds

Question Number: 92

Date question was tabled: 14 July 2023

Question

1. What is the status of the initial implementation of the Nuclear-Powered Submarine Program in Western Australia, particularly in terms of:
 - (a) The role of the Henderson Shipbuilding yard?
 - (b) The establishment of infrastructure at the HMAS Stirling naval base?
2. Are there any discussions with the WA Government or plans to build the Garden Island Highway to bypass the current traffic "rat run" through suburban Rockingham?
3. Are there any discussions with the WA Government or plans to duplicate or build a second bridge on and off the Garden Island?

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4. Can you provide an update on the timeline for the initial implementation of the Nuclear-Powered Submarine Program in Western Australia, including key milestones and expected completion dates for different phases of the program?
5. What measures have been taken to ensure that the Western Australian shipbuilding industry has the necessary capabilities and resources to effectively participate in the nuclear-powered submarines program under the AUKUS partnership?
6. Precisely in what ways is the Department of Defence collaborating with the WA Government to address any regulatory or logistical challenges related to the implementation of the Nuclear-Powered Submarine Program in Western Australia?
7. What role does the Government see for the WA Government in ensuring AUKUS readiness, and what support is being provided to facilitate their involvement?
8. What specific steps is the Government taking to ensure that the AUKUS partnership progresses as planned and that WA can seize this opportunity for economic growth and success?
9. Can you provide an update on the progress made by the WA Government in preparing for the AUKUS submarine deal, particularly in terms of workforce readiness, housing, emergency and hospital facilities, traffic management, and infrastructure?
10. What measures are being taken to address the housing challenges for deployed staff and their families and also additional overseas contractors working in both HMAS Stirling and the Henderson Shipbuilding yard?
11. When are the first United States personnel and their families expected to arrive in Western Australia? How many personnel will there be?
12. Can you provide details on the workforce development plans and initiatives that have been put in place to meet the demands of the Nuclear-Powered Submarine Program in Western Australia, including the training and recruitment of skilled personnel?
13. What steps have been taken to ensure the safety and security of the personnel involved in the construction and operation of the nuclear-powered submarines, as well as the surrounding communities in Western Australia particularly in the event of a nuclear incident?
14. What contingency plans are in place to ensure the health and safety of the community in case of a nuclear incident, and how is the federal government working with the state government to address the urgent need for local emergency and hospital facilities?
15. What training and regulatory framework will be put in place for Small to Medium Enterprises who will be handling nuclear waste and what is the timeframe for that being implemented?
16. What steps are being taken to address traffic management concerns and improve the condition of local roads on and off HMAS Stirling, particularly in light of the anticipated increase in traffic flow due to the AUKUS partnership?
17. What actions are being taken to address the issue of a stable power supply to the jetty on HMAS Stirling, considering the concerns about reliability?

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18. How is the Department planning to address potential security concerns and increase security measures at HMAS Stirling and the Henderson shipbuilding yard in light of the AUKUS partnership?

19. How is the Department of Defence addressing any potential social and cultural impacts on the communities surrounding the Henderson Shipbuilding yard and the HMAS Stirling naval base, considering the significant influx of personnel and increased activities associated with the Nuclear-Powered Submarine Program?

20. Can you provide an overview of the technology transfer and knowledge sharing initiatives that are being implemented to enhance the local capabilities and expertise in nuclear-powered submarine construction and operation in Western Australia?

21. What plans are in place to maximise the economic benefits and job opportunities for Western Australia arising from the implementation of the Nuclear-Powered Submarine Program, particularly in terms of local procurement, subcontracting, and supply chain integration?

22. How is the Department of Defence engaging with local communities, industry representatives, and relevant stakeholders in Western Australia to ensure their meaningful participation and input in the Nuclear-Powered Submarine Program?

23. Are there any additional challenges or areas of concern related to AUKUS readiness in Western Australia that the Department of Defence has identified, and how are they being addressed?

24. I refer to the response to Question on Notice 54: Can you provide an update on the progress of the studies undertaken within the Integrated Infrastructure Program, specifically the Integrated Transport Program study, Maritime and Advanced Collaboration and Technology Hub study, Alternative Energies study, Southern Breakwaters Condition study, and the Northern Harbour Demand study?

25. Can you table a copy of each of these reports?

26. How will the findings and recommendations from these studies be utilized to inform the future development of Henderson and the Australian Marine Complex (AMC) ?

27. What is the timeframe for the implementation of the findings?

28. What specific naval shipbuilding and sustainment needs at Henderson have been identified through the consultation process with the Western Australian Government, and how are these needs being addressed?

47. I refer to the response to my QON No 65 asked on 03 March 2023. Can you provide an update on the progress of the Nuclear-Powered Submarine Taskforce in developing the workforce demand and skill requirements for the nuclear-powered submarine program?

48. What specific actions and initiatives have been undertaken thus far?

49. How is the Department of Defence collaborating with the AUKUS partners to identify and address the workforce growth required for the nuclear-powered submarine program?

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50.What mechanisms or processes are in place to facilitate this collaboration and exchange of Expertise?

51.What education and skilling pathways are being identified and created to support the acquisition and sustainment of nuclear-powered submarines?

52.How are these pathways being tailored to meet the specific skill requirements of the program?

53.How will the workforce growth and skill requirements for the nuclear-powered submarine program be integrated into industry and government practices?

54.What strategies are being implemented to ensure a seamless transition and alignment between workforce needs and available resources?

55.Can you provide more details on how skilled and technically expert personnel from our AUKUS partner nations will be integrated into the workforce growth plans? What roles and areas of expertise are being prioritised for their involvement?

56.What measures are being taken to ensure a sufficient pool of skilled workers domestically to support the workforce growth required for the nuclear-powered submarine program? Are there plans to attract and train individuals within Australia to meet the skill demands?

57.How is the Department of Defence coordinating with relevant educational institutions and training providers to align their programs with the skill requirements of the nuclear-powered submarine program?

58.Are there any partnerships or initiatives in place to enhance the availability of specialized training programs?

59.What steps are being taken to promote the trades and technical professions as viable and rewarding career options in support of the nuclear-powered submarine program? How are perceptions of these professions being improved to attract more individuals into these fields?

60.How will the workforce development efforts for the nuclear-powered submarine program contribute to broader skills and capabilities within the Australian defence industry? Are there plans to leverage these developments for other defence projects or initiatives?

61.How is the Department of Defence monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of the workforce development initiatives for the nuclear-powered submarine program?

62.Are there mechanisms in place to make adjustments or improvements based on feedback and evaluation?

63.What is the timeframe of the Nuclear-Powered Submarine Taskforce that is being developed with our AUKUS partners?

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Answer

Henderson

The Henderson Maritime Precinct is one of Australia's two principal shipbuilding hubs. The Western Australian (WA) defence industry will play a critical role in the future maintenance, operating and basing requirements for Australia's future fleet of conventionally-armed nuclear-powered submarines. Australian Naval Infrastructure (ANI) is working with Defence and the WA Government to progress planning for the delivery of a Large Vessel Infrastructure at Henderson.

Engagement

Commonwealth/WA Government – The Nuclear Powered Submarine Program Steering Group is being established as a sub-group of the existing Joint Henderson Taskforce to provide a structured forum for coordination on issues in relation to the implementation of the Optimal Pathway. The Steering Group is expected to focus on workforce, skilling, infrastructure, safety, security matters and social license.

Local Governments – The Nuclear Powered Submarine Taskforce maintains a close working relationship with the WA local Governments that are proximate to HMAS Stirling and Henderson to ensure appropriate levels of community engagement occurs and information that is important to communities, in relation to the safe and secure operation of nuclear-powered submarines, is shared.

Workforce

In WA the expansion of HMAS Stirling to support the infrastructure required for nuclear-powered submarines is expected to support approximately 3,000 direct jobs over the decade. An additional 500 direct jobs are expected to support the sustainment of SRF-West.

Defence is already taking steps to develop the workforce. The first cohorts of Australian submariners have undertaken training in the UK and US. New Australian workers are being accepted into shipbuilding training programs through the Sovereign Shipbuilding Talent Pool (SSTP) and Defence is working to extend the opportunity to work in the UK and US nuclear-powered submarine programs to the Australian industrial workforce. The Government is expanding graduate numbers in engineering and science fields through a targeted competitive grant program providing 4,000 Commonwealth Supported Places over four years to eligible institutions that deliver STEM qualifications required by the Australian Submarine Agency. In addition the Defence Industry Pathways Program will be extended to continue the pipeline of skills and talent into the Defence shipbuilding industry in WA.

Health and Safety

A sophisticated safety architecture will surround Australia's Nuclear Powered Submarine program, building on our 70-year unblemished track record of operating nuclear facilities and conducting nuclear science activities. Informed by the UK and US expertise, Australia will develop a comprehensive safety management system to support the safe operation of Australia's nuclear-powered submarine enterprise. This will be underpinned by a system of regulation calibrated to the unique needs of Australia's nuclear-powered submarine

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capability. Regulatory oversight will occur across the nuclear aspects of the submarine platform, supporting facilities and infrastructure, leveraging the work of existing nuclear regulators.

The Government already works closely with State Governments through the Visiting Ships Panel arrangements to ensure Australian communities are safe when nuclear-powered vessels visit our country. Since 1960 Australia has hosted over 285 visits by UK and US nuclear-powered vessels with over 1,800 days in port. These arrangements between Federal and State Governments will continue and strengthen with the increased number of visits from our AUKUS partners this decade, and for the acquisition of our Australian nuclear-powered submarine fleet.

Security

The Nuclear Powered Submarine Taskforce has worked closely with Australian, UK and US security and intelligence partners – including ASIO and the Australian Cyber Security Centre – to develop a threat-informed, risk-led approach to security understanding and requirements. Defence intends to leverage the established Defence Security Principles Framework (DSPF) and the Defence Industry Security Program (DISP) that defence industry is already participating in. This also includes use of the Australian Cyber Security Centre's (ACSC) 'Essential 8' cybersecurity controls. These frameworks and programs will be complemented by increased audit and assurance activities to ensure all program partners are consistently meeting the required standards for personnel, physical, information, and cyber security, with effective governance.

Senate Question 3 March 2023

Senator Linda Reynolds

Question Number: 65

Date question was tabled: 17 May 2023

Question

Does the Department of Defence believe there are sufficient qualified, skilled and experienced workers in the Australian labor market to support the Nuclear Powered Submarine program development and maintenance without relying on increased skilled migration? If so, why?

Has the Department undertaken any modelling on the labor force requirements for AUKUS submarines and what proportion of that labor force might need to come from overseas in the first instance to provide the experience with nuclear powered submarines and their associated ecosystems?

A) If so, when will this be released to industry to include SME to understand the scale of the gap and where they might access this labor force and what steps the government is taking to ensure access to these people?

B) If not, how does the department believe it will ensure access to appropriately qualified, skilled and experienced people to provide the breadth of industrial capabilities around the NPS ecosystem?

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Has the Capability and Acquisition Sustainment Group updated relevant industry panels to integrate new skillsets, like nuclear power qualified expertise required for the NPS ecosystem?

Does the government believe that the NPS ecosystem labor force will have enhanced mobility across the AUKUS partners to avoid the “zero sum” risk of protectionism and/or “poaching” between nations?

A) If so, what steps have been agreed between the partners to allow this mobility to service all the AUKUS partners NPS ecosystems?

B) If not has agreement been reached on how Australia will access these knowledge Skills and experience without affecting partners NPS plans?

Has the department developed a faster system to provide appropriate visas to AUKUS partners working on the NPS? If not, have the current excessive delays in processing skilled visas been factored into the planning for how long it will be before Australia can build a NPS?

Answer

Workforce demand and skill requirements for the nuclear-powered submarine program are being developed by the Nuclear Powered Submarine Taskforce in collaboration with our AUKUS partners. Education and skilling pathways are also being identified and created to support the acquisition and sustainment of nuclear-powered submarines, and the greater Australian nuclear enterprise across industry, Navy and government. We are working closely with our AUKUS partners to identify where skilled and technically expert personnel from our partner nations can best support the workforce growth required. Administrative arrangements to support the workforce requirements will be developed across government.

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