[redacted]

Until Announced. Timing subject to confirmation of trilateral partners.

[redacted]

After announcement

30 May 2026Z

TALKING POINTS: Virginia Class Submarine Acquisition

Background [redacted]

- Australia and the US Administration have agreed that Australia will purchase three in-service Virginia Class Submarines (Virginia Class Submarines).
    - Australia was previously expected to acquire in-service Block IV SSNs as the first two Virginia Class Submarines to be transferred, with a third to be a new-build Block VII Virginia Class Submarines.
- This agreement will be announced during the AUKUS Defence Ministers' meeting (AUKUS DMM) on 30 May 2026 on the sidelines 23rd Shangri-La Dialogue.
- In December 2023, the US Congress passed the 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) which authorised "*the transfer of three Virginia class submarines to Australia, including two in-service submarines and one off the production line*".
    - See: Passage of priority AUKUS submarine and export control exemption legislation by the United States Congress | Defence Ministers
    - See: Television Interview, ABC News Breakfast | Defence Ministers
- s33(a)(iii) [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Until Announced. Timing subject to confirmation of trilateral partners.

[redacted]

After announcement

Talking Points

- Australia, the UK and the US are 'full steam ahead' on the AUKUS Optimal Pathway.
    - On 31 May, the Deputy Prime Minister and his AUKUS counterparts (US Secretary of War, the Hon Pete Hegseth, and UK Secretary of State for Defence, the Rt Hon John Healey MP) confirmed we remain on track to deliver this ambitious program.
- Australia welcomed U.S. consideration of an approach that would allow the purchase of three in-service Block IV Virginia-class submarines. If this approach is adopted, it would simplify our training, maintenance, and supply chain.
- This approach, if adopted, would enable Australia to operate three Virginia-class submarines from a similar production batch or block. The benefits to Australia would include:
    - Enabling continuity of training and experience to support our growing nuclear-powered submarine workforce;
    - Simplifying supply chain management for critical components to support the future Australian Virginia-class submarine fleet;
    - Standardising the maintenance activities for the Australian Virginia-class submarine fleet; and
    - Reducing Australia's requirement to fund production costs and acquire long lead items over the forward estimates and decade.
- Virginia-class submarines are the most advanced attack submarines in the world. They are the apex predator; with superior stealth, speed, and virtually unlimited range.
- Australia's planned acquisition of Virginia-class submarines increases our sovereign ability to deter conflict and make Australia safer.
    - Along with the continued operation of the Collins Class submarine, this acquisition would ensure Australia does not have a submarine capability gap and continues to maintain and enhance its contribution to regional security.

'Sovereign Ready'

- The Optimal Pathway was carefully designed by AUKUS partners to systematically, incrementally and carefully develop Australia's capacity and capability to steward these submarines over time.

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- 'Sovereign ready' is an important milestone on this Pathway. It refers to the conditions-based approach to determine the point at which Australia has the ability to safely own, operate, maintain and regulate a sovereign conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarine capability.

If asked: What is the difference between the Blocks? Does that impact our capability?

- A "block" refers to a specific construction contract
- Across all blocks, the Virginia-class submarine offers a generational change in submarine capability for Australia, with superior stealth, lethality, speed, endurance and range – and they will increase our ability to deter conflict and make Australia safer.
- Block IV Virginia-class submarines variants concluded construction in 2025.
    - Block IV Virginia-class submarines provide a potent SSN capability.
- The addition of Virginia-class submarines to Australia's inventory represents a significant uplift for the ADF, enhancing lethality, agility and deterrence in a more challenging strategic environment.

If asked: How long into service will each Virginia-class submarine be before acquired by Australia? The third Virginia-class submarines will have a shorter life than a new one. Does that put greater pressure on SSN-AUKUS build?

- Australia would receive three in-service Virginia-class submarines of a similar build, after their first major maintenance period, known as depot level maintenance.
    - This maintenance usually occurs approximately every six years of operations.
- Virginia-class submarines offer a generational change in submarine capability for Australia, with superior stealth, lethality, speed, endurance and range. They have been designed to remain a superior capability for their entire operational life through the rapid introduction of new systems and payloads.
- All Virginia-class submarines are expected to have more than 20 years of life remaining at transfer.

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If asked: If Australia gets a fourth or fifth Virginia-class submarine, will they also be from the same Block?

- As AUKUS partners announced in March 2023, under the Optimal Pathway, the US intends to sell Australia three Virginia-class submarines, with the potential to sell up to two more if needed.
    - Australia retains this option to acquire a fourth or fifth Virginia-class submarine from the US if needed.
    - The next Phase in the Optimal Pathway is the SSN-AUKUS, which is progressing at pace to deliver a first SSN-AUKUS in the early 2040s.
- However, it would be inappropriate to speculate on future government decisions should a scenario requiring this option arise.

If asked: Is this a change to the Optimal Pathway?

- As stated in the 2023 Optimal Pathway announcement, the intent is for the US 'to sell Australia three Virginia-class submarines pending approval from the US Congress, with the potential to sell up to two more if needed.'
    - Further to this announcement, Australia was to acquire two in-service Virginia-class submarines of the same Block and a third new-build Virginia-class submarines of a different Block.
- If the new acquisition strategy is enacted and implemented, Australia would be able to acquire three in-service Virginia-class submarines, all of the same Block.

If asked: What impact will this have to future submarine availability? Will they be older and retire earlier?

- Virginia-class submarines are an apex predator with superior stealth, speed, and range.
    - They are capable of performing a range of tasks including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance and protecting sea lanes and lines of communications. They will enhance deterrence by keeping maritime threats further from Australia's territory and people.
- Australia's acquisition of Virginia-class submarines will increase our sovereign ability to deter conflict and make Australia safer.
- The Australian Government has carefully sequenced our Optimal Pathway for Australia's acquisition of conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarines, together with our continued operation of our Collins-class submarines to maximise submarine availability.

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If asked: What are the longer-term impacts of this decision?

- The planned approach to purchase three in-service Virginia-class submarines would not alter our plan to have at least three Virginia-class submarines in-service with the Royal Australian Navy from the early 2030s.
- Operating three SSNs from a similar Block provides ongoing benefits including:
    - Workforce training continuity.
    - Simplified supply chains.
    - Standardised maintenance procedures.
    - Cost consistency across the first three boats.

If asked: US commitment to AUKUS

- There is longstanding bipartisan support for AUKUS in all three countries. AUKUS is happening now, and all three partners are committed to the delivery of the program.
- President Trump affirmed US support for AUKUS during his 20 October meeting with Prime Minister Albanese, noting that AUKUS is “full steam ahead”, and the AUKUS Defence Ministers have reaffirmed that Pillar I is on track.

If asked: US legislative consideration

- The amended approach to VCS sales would require a change to U.S. law.

If asked: Australian decision making and/or link to the Pentagon’s AUKUS Review

- The Virginia-class submarine acquisition strategy under consideration follows extensive consideration and analysis on the best long term outcome for Australia’s national interest.
- The approach being considered was always Australia’s preferred option given it simplifies operations and maintenance for Australia.
- The approach under consideration has strong advantages to support Australia’s nuclear-powered submarine program, including simplifying the training, supply chain, maintenance and operation of our SSN fleet.

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If asked: Australia's contribution to the US submarine industrial base

- We have been clear that Australia's contribution to the US submarine industrial base is focused on increasing maintenance and production capacity to increase the number of submarines in the water and enable the sale of Virginia-class submarines to Australia.
- The US is committing funding from Australia's contribution to a range of activities to strengthen the submarine industrial base.
    - This includes investments in recruiting, training and retention of the submarine industrial base workforce at US shipyards, and upgrading facilities, equipment and infrastructure needed to deliver, repair and maintain submarines at US shipyards.
- Australia's financial contribution is complementary to significant work and investment already underway by the US government.
    - The industrial uplift is being managed by the US government.

If asked: Will Australia modernise its Virginia-class submarines in step with US Navy configuration?

- The details of Australia's sovereign approach to implementing Virginia-class submarines upkeep, update and upgrade are all subjects of future work.
- Australia is working closely with the relevant US agencies in the development of its Virginia-class submarine sustainment strategies and plans.
- Australia has named Lockheed Martin Australia as its preferred Combat System Integrator that is expected they will assist in the future update and upgrade of the Virginia-class Combat System.

If asked: How much will the Virginia-class submarines cost? What's the discount from a new submarine?

- The acquisition strategy under consideration could reduce Australia's requirements to fund production costs and acquire long lead items over the forward estimates and decade.
- The exact details on cost are subject to future government decision making.

Contact officer: s47E(c), a/ADG Strategic Engagement and Policy

Contact officer phone: s47E(c)

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Until Announced. Timing subject to confirmation of trilateral partners.

[redacted]

After announcement

Clearance	Name	Appointment	Date and time
Reviewed by	s47E(c)	a/ADG SE&P	26/05/26
TP Consulted by	RADM David Mann	HVDD	27/05/26
TP Consulted by	RADM Thomas Phillips	HNSMC	27/05/26
TP Consulted by	Timmy Lam	CFO	27/05/26
TP Consulted by	Marlena Davis	a/COO	27/05/26
TP Cleared by	Elicia Rudnicki	a/HPSE	27/05/26
ASA Media	s47E(c)	ASA Media	26/05/26
ODDG-S	Mikaela James	A/g DDG	28/05/26

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Joint Statement, AUKUS Defence Ministers' Meeting

Today the Honourable Richard Marles MP, Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, the Honorable Pete Hegseth, U.S. Secretary of War, and the Right Honourable John Healey MP, UK Secretary of State for Defence, met at the U.S. Embassy in Singapore and re-affirmed their commitment to delivering the AUKUS partnership.

Pillar I – Conventionally-Armed, Nuclear-Powered Submarines

Through discussions today, the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretaries confirmed that AUKUS Pillar I remains on track to support Australia's acquisition of a conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarine capability.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Secretaries confirmed key milestones continue to be met for Submarine Rotational Force-West (SRF-West) and announced the finalization of necessary arrangements for the establishment of SRF-West in 2027. SRF-West will directly support submarine deployments by expanding maintenance options and sustainment infrastructure in the region and will accelerate Australia's readiness to own, operate, maintain, and regulate a sovereign conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarine capability. Just this month, the United States authorized establishment of the U.S. Navy support elements for SRF-West and will begin rotating the first U.S. Navy personnel to HMAS *Stirling* later this year. Likewise, the United Kingdom reaffirmed its commitment to have a rotational presence as part of SRF-West and noted the successful Submarine Maintenance Period conducted earlier this year by HMS ANSON.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Secretaries acknowledged Australia's planned investments of up to AUD 8 billion at SRF-West for infrastructure and logistics support at HMAS *Stirling*, along with Australia's initial down payments of AUD 3.9 billion to deliver the new Submarine Construction Yard in South Australia and AUD 12 billion for the Henderson Defence Precinct—including to support the delivery of contingency docking and depot level maintenance capabilities.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Secretaries welcomed the proposed approach to streamline Australia's acquisition of Virginia-class submarines (VCS), simplifying supply chain management, operational and maintenance requirements, and maximising cost efficiencies. This approach would enable Australia to acquire three in-service VCS in lieu of a mixture of new and in-service VCS variants.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Secretaries acknowledged significant progress in the design and delivery of SSN-AUKUS, which will provide the UK and Australia with an advanced warfighting capability. This progress has been underpinned by investments from both the UK and Australia, including GBP 6 billion that the UK committed in 2025.

Pillar II – Advanced Capabilities

The Deputy Prime Minister and Secretaries reaffirmed the critical importance of accelerating the delivery of advanced capabilities under AUKUS Pillar II. They announced the first AUKUS Pillar II Signature Project: developing cutting-edge payloads and enabling systems for AUKUS partners' Uncrewed Undersea Vehicles (UUVs), with delivery starting in 2027. This project is intended to significantly enhance AUKUS partners' ability to protect critical national seabed infrastructure; deploy cutting edge surveillance, reconnaissance, and strike capabilities; conduct logistics operations; and bolster superiority in anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare, mine countermeasures, electronic warfare, and contested littoral manoeuvre.

Defence Trade and Industrial Base Collaboration

The Deputy Prime Minister and Secretaries confirmed their support for expanding the breadth of the AUKUS licence-free environment between AUKUS partners by taking expeditious and practical steps to narrow the list of excluded technologies. The Deputy Prime Minister and Secretaries also reaffirmed the value of the Advanced Capabilities Industry Forum and deepening collaboration across the trilateral defence industrial base.