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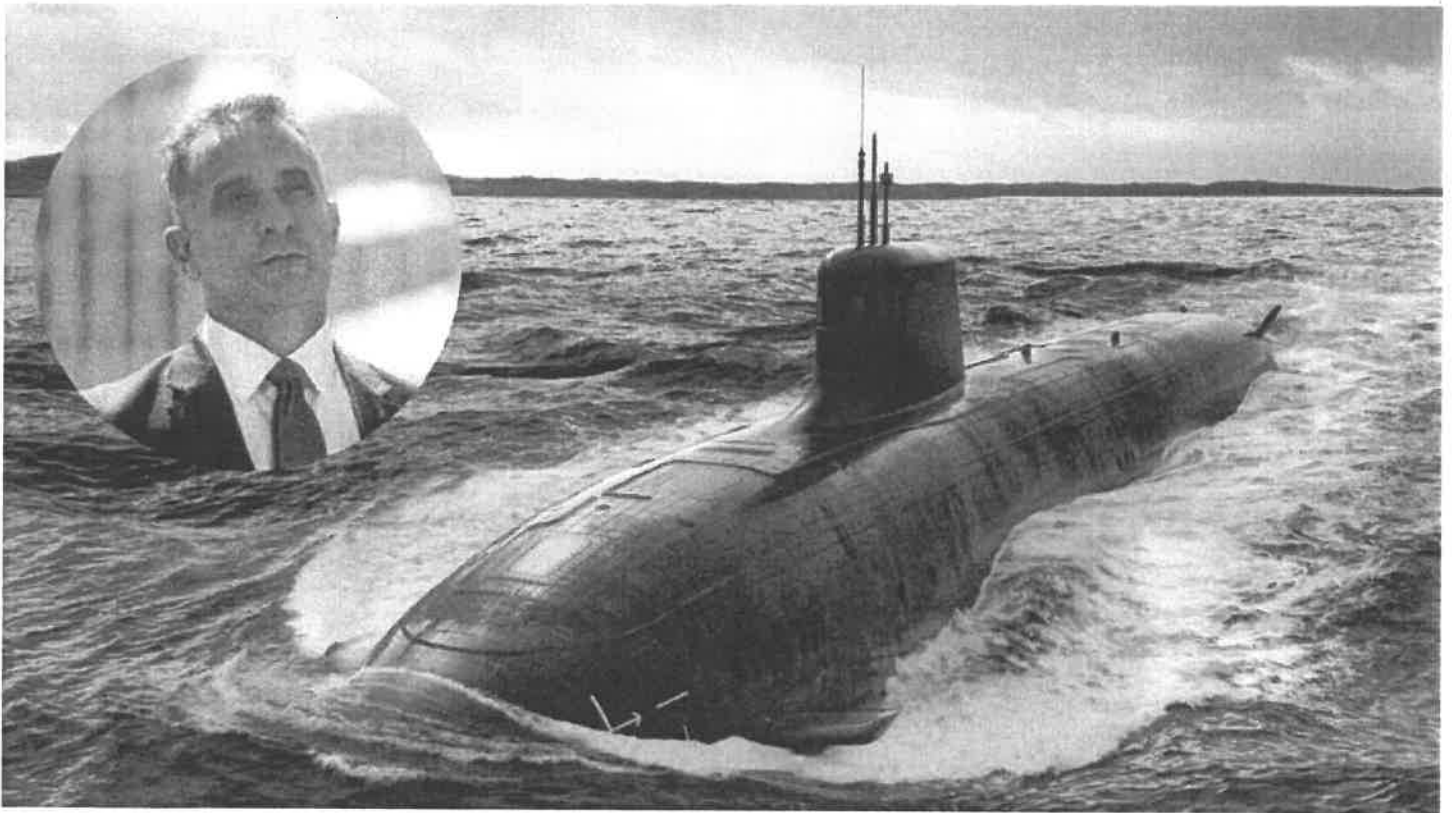
EXCLUSIVE

Defence Industry Minister Paul Papalia demands urgent review of AUKUS university placement after WA 'snubbed'



Josh Zimmerman The West Australian
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Josh Zimmerman



Paul Papalia has demanded an immediate review after WA was allocated just one tenth additional university places in STEM courses funded by the Commonwealth. Credit: The West Australian



WA universities have been snubbed by the Albanese Government as part of preparations to train the workforce required to operate a future fleet of nuclear-powered submarines, the State's Defence Industry Minister has claimed.

Paul Papalia has demanded an immediate review after WA - which will house Australia's nuclear submarine base under the landmark AUKUS deal - was allocated just one tenth of 4001 additional university places in STEM courses being funded by the Commonwealth.

Curtin University was handed 320 places, UWA 56 and Murdoch 50 for a total of 426 - with Edith Cowan University missing out completely.

That compares to 700 placements for the University of Adelaide alone, and an additional 330 for fellow SA institution Flinders University.

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“The Federal Government’s allocation of university STEM placements in support of AUKUS is deeply disappointing and does not reflect the importance of Western Australian universities and our defence industry,” Mr Papalia said.



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“When the AUKUS submarine optimal pathway was announced in March, South Australian universities were allocated 800 placements, which has since been increased to 1000, despite the fact they won’t have nuclear-powered submarines hitting the water for at least a decade.”

Under the AUKUS deal, visiting US and UK nuclear submarines are slated to begin rotating through HMAS Stirling from as early as 2027.



📷 Veterans Issues Minister Paul Papalia. The State Government's Psychiatric Assistance Dog Pilot will see the RSLWA partner four veterans with trained assistance dogs to improve mental health outcomes. Pictured at Kings Park. Credit: Danella Bevis/The West Australian

The naval base near Rockingham will undergo an \$8 billion upgrade to prepare it to welcome Australia's first Virginia-class submarines, purchased from the US, in the early 2030s.

When announcing the major redevelopment of HMAS Stirling - which will need to be capable of maintaining nuclear-powered submarines - Treasurer Jim Chalmers said the work would take a decade and create 3000 direct jobs.

An extra 500 highly-skilled technicians will also be required to sustain visiting vessels from 2027.

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Mr Papalia said the Cook Government had worked with all of WA's public universities to prepare a bid for 1677 STEM placements in recognition of "the State's

urgent requirement for nuclear-powered sustainment capability”.

“Instead of putting university STEM placements in WA where the nation needs them, the lion’s share of placements have gone to universities on the East Coast where nuclear-powered submarines will not be based for decades,” he said.

“WA is where the AUKUS agreement becomes real and the Federal Government must immediately revisit this unacceptable allocation.”



 The acquisition of nuclear-powered subs under AUKUS is critical for Australia, the government says. (Richard Wainwright/AAP PHOTOS) Credit: AAP

A spokesperson for Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles said the allocation of places was an independent process that assessed universities against a range of criteria, including “the relevance of proposed course and the ability to meet the increased demand for advanced technical skills.”

The Australian Submarine Agency and the Federal Department of Education led the process and none of the courses nominated by ECU were assessed as suitable.

“Other criteria included planned investments to engage quality teachers, the expected level of unmet demand from students, plans to support the expansion of

enrolment levels and initiatives to increase participation of students from underrepresented backgrounds,” Mr Marles’ spokesperson said.

“Western Australia is important to both our ADF and the pathway by which Australia will acquire nuclear-powered submarines and we will continue to work collaboratively with Premier Cook and the WA Government to achieve these key outcomes.”

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