



Senator Claire Chandler

Chair

Senate Standing References Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: [fadt.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:fadt.sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Chair,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Standing References Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade as it inquires into the crucial subject of Australian support for Ukraine.

The Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations (AFUO) represents the interests of the Ukrainian community in Australia. We are the peak body for 22 national community organisations across the country, with interests across culture, business, youth, religion and women's issues.

We lead the Defend Ukraine Appeal (DUA), Australia's largest community-run fundraising effort for life-saving aid for Ukrainian defenders, which has raised over \$1.5 million to date. Since 2015, we have managed the Ukraine Crisis Appeal (UCA) in partnership with Rotary Australia World Community Service (RAWCS) and Caritas Ukraine, which has raised almost \$10 million for emergency and humanitarian aid for Ukrainians impacted by Russia's invasion, be they in Ukraine or temporarily rebuilding their lives and livelihoods in Australia. We also run Future Ukraine, a DGR-registered charity which has raised over \$5.5 million to date and contributes to targeted projects in the fields of rehabilitation, medical evacuation, reconstruction, education, leadership and public information.

Since the start of Russia's war against Ukraine in February 2022, the AFUO has maintained a regular cadence of meetings with elected representatives across the federal Parliament and a number of key state parliaments. We have met with Ministers, Assistant Ministers, Shadow Ministers, committee heads, friendship groups, members, senators, staffers and officials, among others. While the Ambassador of Ukraine to Australia, Vasyl Myroshnychenko, leads official government engagement, we are pleased to augment his efforts and surface community views for consideration.

We trust the Committee finds our submissions useful. We would be pleased to join any public hearings which are scheduled as part of the Committee's work.

Yours sincerely,

**Stefan Romaniw OAM**  
**AFUO Co-Chair**

**Kateryna Argyrou**  
**AFUO Co-Chair**

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## Executive summary

Russia's war against Ukraine represents not only **an existential fight for Ukraine but also a significant challenge to liberal democracies** globally, including Australia. Ukrainians in Australia and in Ukraine are grateful to the Morrison and Albanese governments, and will never forget how Australia has stepped up in Ukraine's darkest hour. While Australia's support has been meaningful and highly valued by Ukraine, our community has continued to advocate to **ensure that the size, frequency and ambition of Australia's contribution grows over time and is systematic in nature.**

To enhance Australia's support for Ukraine, **a whole-of-government approach is necessary.** This entails establishing a Ukraine Support Coordination Office within the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet. Such an office would ensure that Australia's support is strategic, timely, coordinated, and comprehensive. It would evaluate and prioritise Ukraine's needs, ensuring a cohesive and effective response that leverages national capacities and incorporates all levels of endeavour — be they government, business or community driven.

There are **many opportunities for military aid to be amplified.** This includes doubling down on capabilities previously donated to Ukraine, contributing new platforms such as the Hawkeis, and examining soon-to-be-decommissioned Australian Defence Force equipment like M1 Abrams tanks, ASLAVS, and Tiger helicopters. There are opportunities to encourage strong **defence industry exchange** between Australia and Ukraine, deepen engagement with **international coalitions**, such as the Drone Coalition, and we continue to call for a **dedicated budget allocation** for Ukraine to overcome bureaucratic hesitation.

Diplomatic and legal support must also be strengthened. **Reopening the Australian Embassy in Kyiv** would significantly enhance Australia's visibility of events in Ukraine and lend a substantive and symbolic fillip which would benefit the bilateral relationship. **Expelling the Russian Ambassador** and **seizing Russian assets in Australia** are critical steps to hold Russia accountable. Additionally, **closing loopholes in trade sanctions** against Russia would ensure that these sanctions are as effective as possible.

Humanitarian and immigration support for displaced Ukrainians is another crucial area which could be improved. **Extending the subclass 786 Temporary Humanitarian Concern visas** and developing **pathways for permanent residency** would alleviate stress and uncertainty for displaced Ukrainians,

facilitating better integration into Australian society. Addressing such issues would allow displaced Ukrainians to contribute more effectively to Australia's economy and community.

Economic and business engagement between Australia and Ukraine should be prioritised.

**Establishing a Ukraine-Australia tax treaty** would facilitate economic cooperation and encourage Australian businesses to engage in Ukraine's reconstruction and recovery efforts. Such engagement is vital for rebuilding Ukraine's infrastructure and services.

We consider additional work could be done on surfacing information about existing **government programs, scholarships and funding** which might benefit Ukraine, such as the Australia Award Fellowships by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) which enabled seven Ukrainian mental health professionals to visit Australia for a study tour last year.

Public awareness and combating misinformation are also important. **The Australian Government should consistently articulate the reasons for supporting Ukraine.** This would counter pro-Kremlin narratives and explain the importance of defending democracy and global stability. Banning the display of hate symbols, such as **the "Z" symbol** used by pro-Russian groups, would prevent the intimidation of Ukrainians and the promotion of Russia's war efforts.

The AFUO urges the Australian Government to intensify its support for Ukraine through a **consistent, comprehensive and timely** approach. Australia's support must be increasingly **strategic, creative, proactive and flexible**. Deepening Australia's support is crucial not only for Ukraine's survival but also for maintaining global peace and stability. A Russian victory would have catastrophic consequences for the global order and regional security, especially in the Indo-Pacific.

**Part 1** of our submission outlines our support for a renewed whole-of-government approach.

**Part 2** of our submission provides our observations on the terms of reference for the inquiry.

**Part 3** of our submission outlines our recommendations to improve the range and depth of support which Australia is well-placed to provide to Ukraine.

The AFUO stands ready to assist and participate in further inquiries or hearings to advance these objectives.

## **Part 1: Standing up a new Whole of Government approach**

On behalf of the Ukrainian community in Australia, the AFUO is delighted by the Committee's inquiry into the crucial subject of Australian support for Ukraine. At its heart, this inquiry is an opportunity to consider the degree to which Australia's contributions to Ukraine have been well-coordinated, well-calibrated and well-timed to meet Ukraine's many and varied needs since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. While private citizens, business figures and companies have made highly-valued contributions — which have served Ukraine's material needs, saved and supported civilians and defenders, and provided a much-needed morale boost from half-a-world away — the sheer scale of the support that the Australian Government can bring to bear is undoubtedly the most consequential assistance Ukraine can get from our island continent. As such, the AFUO was buoyed to see the terms of reference prompting consideration of the degree to which Australia's contributions were coordinated and consistent at the whole of government level.

The AFUO has been raising the concept of a “whole of government” approach to Ukraine support since May 2023. AFUO Co-Chair Stefan Romaniw OAM presented the Government interlocutors with a proposal in July 2023 highlighting the need for a more systemic approach to issues pertaining to Ukraine. The AFUO also noted this idea in our February 2024 submission to the Inquiry into the Department of Defence Annual Report 2022–23. Co-Chair Kateryna Argyrou reiterated the call, noting in her speech to the National Press Club on the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion this February, that now was the time to establish a robust and effective Ukraine Support Coordination Office within the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet. This idea has also been promulgated by leading figures such as Mick Ryan and others.<sup>1</sup>

A whole-of-government approach includes a clearly articulated strategy which guides the Government's actions and brings the public along for the journey, in service of the significant wellspring of support for Ukraine that exists in the Australian community. It also, fundamentally, includes a recalibration of how the Federal bureaucracy serves the government of the day in meeting Ukraine's needs by leveraging national capacities and political will in ways that ensure support is timely, coordinated and comprehensive.

At its heart, we believe that establishing a Ukraine Support Coordination Office should be a priority, so that there is one part of the government solely focused on evaluating and prioritising Australia's support for Ukraine and delivering better outcomes for taxpayer dollars. This function should be

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<sup>1</sup> Such as the Inquiry into the Department of Defence Annual Report 2022–23

empowered to go out to agencies across the Federal bureaucracy and track what is being done and what is being planned, and judge whether it truly feeds into a first class Australian response.

While Ukraine is on the agenda through current mechanisms like the Senior Inter-Departmental Committee on Ukraine and the Secretaries Committee on National Security, we believe that a new approach is needed to ensure Australia's actions are timely, comprehensive and effectively coordinated. To this end, the idea of a refreshed, ambitious whole-of-government approach to support for Ukraine, by way of a Ukraine Support Coordination Office, is commended to the Committee for its consideration.



## Part 2: Terms of Reference - observations

### Terms of Reference A) ‘...whether the support is timely, coordinated and comprehensive’

Our community is of the view that while Australia’s support for Ukraine is greatly appreciated, it cannot be characterised as ‘timely, coordinated and comprehensive’. There are four key case studies which we believe illuminate some of the key gaps in the Government’s approach to date.

#### 1) MRH90 Taipans

The ‘MRH-90 Taipan helicopters’ decision, which first emerged through reporter Kym Bergmann’s work in December 2023, was a huge missed opportunity for Australia and Ukraine. It stands as the prime example of where Australia’s support has failed to be ‘timely, coordinated and comprehensive’.

Donating the Taipans would have doubled the value of Australia’s total support for Ukraine overnight, and could have bolstered Ukraine’s medevac capability to help provide wounded soldiers with medical attention in the crucial ‘golden hour’, which dramatically improves their chances of survival.

As the Committee may be aware, the Defence Minister’s Office and the Department of Defence had been made aware of Ukraine’s interest in the Taipans as early as the middle of October 2023, one month after the Government agreed to not return the platform to service. The Taipans decision appears to have been made entirely by the Department of Defence without consultation with Ukraine, with Ministers later stressing that the Government had acted on the Department’s advice. There has been no elaboration about the analysis that led Defence to this conclusion or of how factors like risk, safety, battlefield impact, cost, and national interest were weighed in this exercise. There has been no insight provided into whether any consultation was undertaken across government about the appropriateness of this decision, whether it was in the interests of Australian taxpayers, and why the decision had been made for Ukraine that these helicopters were not appropriate, which has a hint of parochialism.

The Taipans episode undermined our community’s confidence that the Department of Defence has robust mechanisms in place to systematically and proactively consider opportunities to support Ukraine. Further, it was unfortunate that the Ukrainian Government was not advised of the Australian Government’s decision on Taipans until February 2024 — 4 months after Senator Fawcett passed on a message about Ukraine’s interest. This delay highlights the clear need for two-way dialogue and

creative thinking, where decisions are made quickly and Australia acts at scale to grasp opportunities to support Ukraine.

## 2) Immigration issues facing displaced Ukrainians

Australia's immigration policies for displaced Ukrainians have been inconsistent and confusing, posing significant challenges and stress for those seeking refuge. After the abrupt and unexpected termination of the 786 visa program in July 2022, different families find themselves on different visa categories, resulting in varying levels of support and differing lengths of stay. This fragmented approach exacerbates the stress and anxiety experienced by these individuals during an already challenging and traumatising time.

Currently, there is no extension of the 786 visa program (which was granted for three years only i.e., until around mid 2025) or a suitable pathway for displaced Ukrainians to secure permanent residency, which is a major concern to our community. The absence of a suitable and achievable pathway to transition from temporary visas to permanent residency leaves many Ukrainians in a state of uncertainty. This uncertainty blocks access to higher education, undermines their ability to plan for their future, pursue stable employment, and integrate into Australian society effectively. Many in the cohort are highly educated, possess skills and training in high-demand occupations, and are motivated to make a contribution to Australia's economic prosperity. Accordingly, a more coordinated and timely response to key issues facing this cohort is greatly needed.

## 3) Ukraine's ongoing energy needs

On 8 December 2023, the *Australian Financial Review* reported on Ukraine's request for further coal contributions to meet its year-round needs. Almost three months later, Whitehaven Coal indicated publicly that it was willing to help Ukraine 'if called upon by the Australian government.'<sup>2</sup> But despite the official request from Ukraine, the media coverage of the request and a fresh intervention from a large Australian resources business, still no response was provided to Ukraine. The Prime Minister and others deflected questions on this request by highlighting other contributions that Australia had made, rather than being willing to indicate a stance on fulfilling Ukraine's coal request. It was not until 31 May 2024 that the Foreign Minister announced \$31 million of assistance to help meet Ukraine's energy and humanitarian needs. This contribution is of course very welcome, but it is unclear why this request was

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<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/ukraine-pleads-with-australia-to-remove-red-tape-holding-back-aid-20240228-p5f8h4.html>

not dealt with earlier given Ukraine's urgent energy needs as well as need for some certainty about partner appetite to fulfil requests.

This example illustrates a failure of Australian support to be made in good time and in a well-coordinated fashion. Ukraine's 'year round' energy needs have been even more pronounced from the start of 2024, with Russia launching six large-scale attacks against Ukraine's energy infrastructure, including an April attack which destroyed the Trypilska Thermal Power Plant, the largest supplier of electricity to Kyiv and surrounding regions. Our community does not understand why the Albanese Government delayed this decision for nearly six months. We believe it was a missed opportunity not to respond quickly to Ukraine's request when it was made in December 2023, and then in the time since, to not provide any insight into the Government's thinking or certainty for Ukraine.

#### 4) Ex-ADF equipment on Pickles Auctions

Throughout 2023, the AFUO discussed with ministers, staffers and officials our interest in securing decommissioned ADF equipment which was being auctioned on the Pickles website. In particular we noticed Unimogs, All-terrain vehicles, Zodiac boats and utility vehicles were available for auction. Given all that the Department of Defence has provided to Ukraine in the form of military support, we believe the items which have been auctioned on Pickles from time to time could have been better exploited by the Defence Department to provide timely and cost-effective military assistance to Ukraine and cultivate a more 'comprehensive' Australian approach.

On 14 March 2024, we received correspondence from Assistant Defence Minister Matt Thistlethwaite MP penned in response to a letter from the AFUO. In it, the Minister wrote:

*"You noted that it appears that ex-Australian Defence Force equipment is being sold at Pickles Auctions. I am pleased to note that the Department of Defence is now focusing more deliberately on Ukraine in disposal considerations."*

While we are pleased that the Department is 'now focusing more deliberately on Ukraine in disposal considerations', we were concerned to know that this was only a recent development. As the outcry from the community and parliamentarians over the Taipans helicopter decision showed, there is a clear expectation that Ukraine be considered and consulted on any kit that Australia no longer needs.

### 5) Grounded DJI drone fleet

As has been widely reported, commercial drones, particularly DJI Mavic models are playing a pivotal role in the war in Ukraine due to their smaller size, economy of scale, reconnaissance, and quick realisation capabilities. One of the most frequent requests the community receives through Defend Ukraine Appeal are for surveillance drones such as Mavic 3 and Mavic 3T. We have multiple stories of such surveillance drones saving many lives of Ukrainian soldiers. For example, a single Mavic 3T drone supplied by our community saved an entire unit, where soldiers were unaware of a Russian unit located 80 metres away about to attack them. With the help of our drone, Ukrainian soldiers were able to survive this attack.

The vast majority of DJI surveillance drones are purchased by volunteers, since they are Chinese made and are unavailable to be purchased by the Ukrainian government due to the ban imposed by the manufacturer.

In 2023, there were media reports which suggested that the Australian Government decided to discontinue the use of DJI drones and grounded the fleet. Software and hardware patches for these drones have been developed in Ukraine which makes them safe to use and the AFUO reached out to the Australian Government with a request to consider transferring the DJI drones to Ukraine where they would save lives. Despite our repeated pleas to send these drones to Ukraine, it was decided to dispose of them instead.

## **Terms of Reference B) ‘...whether support is appropriately coordinated on a whole-of-government and whole-of-country basis’**

The breadth of Ukraine’s needs — for offensive capabilities, for defensive and protective technologies, for coal, for medivac channels — make coordination, consistency and strategy essential. There are also needs to be met among the more than 11,400 displaced Ukrainians who have sought refuge in Australia and have begun rebuilding their lives and livelihoods in various cities and towns. However, Australia’s existing efforts across interests including humanitarian, military, diplomatic and legal appear to have been siloed and sporadic. By not appearing to have a cohesive and well-telegraphed Ukraine strategy which draws together Government and non-government initiatives alike, Australia’s next move has not been easy to deduce.

The Albanese government’s language on Ukraine in the past two years has been patchy and sent mixed signals to the community. We have been buoyed to hear from ministers that ‘Australia stands with Ukraine’ and will do so ‘for as long as it takes’. And then devastated when ministers say ‘Australia is a long way from Ukraine’, leaving our community concerned about the Government’s commitment to providing continued practical support to Ukraine.

The current formulation is that the Government wants to ‘empower Ukraine’ to end Russia’s war ‘on its own terms’. Empowering Ukraine only happens with action. Ukraine can only win this fight if it is properly armed and supported. To shift the dial, Australia’s contributions — which have become smaller and less frequent over time — must scale up in ambition. Australia’s support must be increasingly strategic, creative, proactive and flexible. It must be consistent, comprehensive and timely. It must leverage the Government’s capacities and those of the private sector and private citizens. Keeping the whole-of-government and whole-of-country frames in mind will improve the chance that Australia’s support will meaningfully help deliver the government’s ambition of empowering Ukraine to end Russia’s war ‘on its own terms’.

### **1) Whole of Government coordination**

As noted above, the AFUO has strongly advocated for the concept of a ‘whole of government’ approach to support for Ukraine since mid-2023. While Ukraine is on the agenda at the Senior Inter-Departmental Committee on Ukraine and the Secretaries Committee on National Security, our community is of the view that these mechanisms are not delivering consistent results. We believe now

is the time to establish a robust and effective Ukraine Support Coordination Office within the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet.

The *raison d'être* of this office is to ensure Australia's support for Ukraine is timely and comprehensive, with efforts appropriately coordinated at a whole-of-government and whole-of-country level. At its heart, a Ukraine Support Coordination Office will ensure there is one part of the government that is solely focused on evaluating and prioritising Australia's support for Ukraine and delivering better outcomes for taxpayer dollars.

In practice, this Office would ensure that Ukraine's needs are actively and regularly apprised by Australia in concert with partners and in dialogue with Ukraine, sensitive to developments on the frontline and in other parts of the country. Once a clear understanding of needs in a certain area was established, the Government would be in a position to consider available capacities, funds and capabilities which can meet Ukraine's priority needs with haste and focus. Increasingly, money and energy from the private sector would be teamed up with Government efforts, ensuring different parts of our community work in tandem to shared ends. A similar effort would be pursued at a global level, with Australia's efforts needing to be well sequenced and joined up with those of Ukraine's other partners to effect maximum positive outcomes.

We believe that this function should be empowered to go out to agencies across the Federal bureaucracy to track what is being done and what is being planned, and judge whether it truly feeds into a first class Australian response. They should have the scope to influence those plans and drive stronger coordination across the Australian government.

## **2) Whole of Country coordination**

Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Australians and Australian businesses have been working and acting to support Ukraine's humanitarian and military responses. These non-government contributions have been made by companies across defence, medicine, logistics, finance, energy, and commodities sectors, among others.

Currently there is no one agency, person or team that corporates or individuals can reach out to seek advice on providing support to Ukraine. There is no 'front door' for stakeholders in the community. Businesses and individuals need to know who they should call for guidance and support as they bring their private resources to bear on meeting Ukraine's various needs. To this end, a Ukraine Support

Coordination Office would also serve an important external-facing engagement function as the key contact for these businesses and individuals which seek to make contributions to Ukraine.

As with government contributions, any support for Ukraine coming from non-government sources needs to be evaluated and calibrated to best meet Ukraine's needs at any given moment. Private offers of support need to be triaged, sequenced and stitched together through a centralised government office so that it achieves the maximum beneficial impact. The Office will chiefly work to ensure that private initiatives complement Government actions. Acting with haste and focus will be key to the Office's success, as private citizens and corporates are often highly motivated and do not want to see their enthusiasm mired in needless bureaucracy.

### **3) Looking ahead to Ukraine's recovery**

One day, Russia's war in Ukraine will end. Along with the vast majority of Australians, we hope this day comes soon and that Ukraine emerges victorious. Australia has a crucial role to play today in supporting this outcome and planning for the end of the war.

Ukraine's reconstruction needs will be immense and are estimated by the [World Bank](#) to be \$486 billion over the next decade (as at 31 December 2023). Ukraine's infrastructure, including power plants, hospitals, roads, and bridges, has been severely damaged. Australian businesses, in partnership with the government, can and should contribute to the rebuilding efforts. Regular dialogue between the government and business is essential to address Ukraine's forecasted needs and identify opportunities for Australian investment, talent, and materials in the reconstruction project. This further underscores the necessity of a central function within the Federal bureaucracy to assess needs and coordinate support at a national level.

Without a clear declaration of Australia's intention to contribute meaningfully to Ukraine's regeneration, Australian businesses lack the necessary signal from the government to consider their potential role in this effort, which would benefit both Ukraine and themselves.

Ukraine will also face huge challenges in community mental health and disability services (it is estimated there are tens of thousands of amputees as a result of the war). Australian state and local government expertise and knowledge in these areas could be highly relevant and helpful. A recent trip to Australia by seven Ukrainian psychiatrists and psychologists for three months training in trauma

management<sup>3</sup> was tremendously successful and worthwhile, with all participants inspired about their ability to adapt learnings to a Ukrainian context.

The Albanese Government has yet to declare Australia's readiness to commit resources to these critical tasks or recognise the importance of these discussions. This should be a bipartisan effort, with the Federal Opposition also making a matched declaration to ensure continuity in the event of a change of government.

#### **4) Lessons learned from the community**

The AFUO would welcome a chance to share with government interlocutors the knowledge, networks and outcomes we have generated across the portfolio of AFUO initiatives. The AFUO leads the Defend Ukraine Appeal (DUA), Australia's largest community-run fundraising effort for life-saving aid for Ukrainian defenders, which has raised over \$1.5 million to date. Since 2015, we have managed the Ukraine Crisis Appeal (UCA) in partnership with Rotary Australia World Community Service (RAWCS) and Caritas Ukraine, which has raised almost \$10 million for emergency and humanitarian aid for Ukrainians impacted by Russia's invasion, be they in Ukraine or temporarily rebuilding their lives and livelihoods in Australia. We also run Future Ukraine, a DGR-registered charity which has raised over \$5.5 million to date and contributes to targeted projects in the fields of rehabilitation, medical evacuation, reconstruction, education, leadership and public information.

We believe there are clear lessons to be learned from these community-born initiatives, which further highlight ample opportunities to drive more creative, deeper engagement between the Australian-Ukrainian community and all levels of Government. The military and humanitarian situation in Ukraine is dynamic and fast-changing; through our many community initiatives, our community leaders have their finger on the pulse. Contributing our community's know-how and real-time feedback would be a worthwhile foundational activity in scoping the Ukraine Support Coordination Office, to which the AFUO would be delighted to participate.

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<sup>3</sup> The seven Ukrainian mental health professionals were recipients of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Australia Award Fellowships, and travelled to Australia in September 2023. They were based primarily at the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS).



**Terms of Reference C) “...efforts to hold Russia to account, including by addressing mis- and dis-information in Australian public debate and the region”**

**1) Responding to misinformation**

Despite wide-spread support of Ukraine by the Australian government and public, since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion, Ukrainians have been subject to intimidation by pro-Putin, far right groups and individuals.

Pro-Putin rallies

From September 2022 to December 2022, the pro-Putin propagandist Simeon Boikov — the self-styled ‘Aussie Cossack’ — led a series of public rallies in Sydney and a selection of other state capitals. Though publicised as “Neutrality Marches” opposing the Australian government’s support of Ukraine, the speeches and use of “Z” and pro-war symbols, flags, banners and t-shirts displayed by rally attendees reflected Russian propaganda and disinformation narratives and sought to threaten and intimidate Ukrainians. Over forty complaints were filed with the NSW Police regarding the Aussie Cossack 22 October 2022 rally alone. Despite 93ZA Crimes Act NSW, NSW State police lacked the clear direction of legislation to prosecute racial hatred and support for genocide.

On 28 April 2023, at the Sydney Town Hall, an “Orthodoxy in Australia” concert of Easter music was hosted by the Russian Orthodox Male Choir of Australia to an audience of members of NSW Parliament, Sydney City Council and the public. At the concert’s conclusion eight members of the Aussie Cossacks group took to the stage in t-shirts with “Z” symbol.

Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore issued a public apology on behalf of Sydney City Council, stating “Sydney Council does not tolerate displays of hate or discrimination anywhere in our city, and we are extremely disappointed, even angry, that this event...was hijacked by a group that promoted Russia’s bloody invasion of Ukraine... “

Our community is concerned that Federal and State governments lack adequate legislation to close down public rallies and events which actively promote Russia’s actions in Ukraine which, as is well documented, are illegal, immoral and run directly counter to Australia’s interests.

“Z” is a hate symbol and should be banned by Federal legislation

In a multicultural democracy such as Australia, any neo-Nazi or neo-fascist symbols of racial victimisation or intimidation are abhorrent to international human rights, rule of law and the Australian national values of tolerance, inclusion, and respect for diversity. One of the symbols used by the Russian state to express pride in the Russian Army and its genocidal, murderous actions in Ukraine has

been the “Z” symbol. The “Z” has been widely emblazoned across Russian tanks, armaments and printed in pro-war propaganda, and is used by pro-Putin individuals and organisations as a symbol of support for Russia’s invasion.

The “Z” symbol has been used to deliberately harass and intimidate our community, and has caused great distress particularly amongst recently arrived displaced Ukrainians. Unfortunately, Federal and state police and agencies appear powerless to respond. Accordingly, we believe there is an opportunity for the Government to expand the scope of existing counter-terrorism legislation (which bans Nazi and Islamic State symbols) to include neo-fascist, hate symbols like the “Z” symbol, which glorify Russia’s war against Ukraine. We note that 10 countries have criminalised the display of the symbol “Z” including Estonia, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova and Ukraine. Australia should follow suit.

## **2) Explaining the ‘why’ of Australian support**

One of the strongest ways the Australian Government can play a role in addressing misinformation is by consistently explaining WHY Australia is supporting Ukraine. In our system of government, it is important that the Government clearly explains the rationale for policy decisions and government

expenditure. This practice goes to the heart of transparency, accountability and taking the public 'along for the journey'.

Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, the Australian public has heard a number of reasons why Australia is supporting Ukraine. Despite that, the foundational pillars have not emerged in a way that has cut through in the community. There is a clear opportunity for the Albanese Government to consistently explain to the Australian public at large just why it is important that Australia supports Ukraine. In this way, each announcement can fit into a cohesive bigger picture which shows just why Australian (and Western) support is essential and why Russia must be defeated. Much of this argument comes down to rules, norms and values, but also the very tangible reasons about why we should want to help Ukraine to defend itself, its people and its democracy. Such a clear and consistent articulation would go some way to countering persistent messaging from pro-Kremlin sources about the inevitability of a Russian victory.

### **Part 3: Recommendations to improve range and depth of support to Ukraine**

Ukrainians are incredibly grateful for contributions made by the Government, businesses and individuals — they have been life-saving and morale-boosting. But as a community, we think our Government has the capacity to do more. Now is the time to be bold, to double down, and to act quickly. Help Ukrainians to hold the line. Defending democracy isn't easy, fast or cheap. But it is the right thing to do.

Below we have articulated some types of support which we believe Australia is well placed to deliver and which would go some way to broadening and deepening the range of assistance provided to Ukraine. This is not an exhaustive list, and we are well-aware that members of our community and others have made many detailed recommendations based on their unique experiences, however we hope that the ideas canvassed below are useful in illustrating some of the opportunities which would help to ensure that support emanating from Australia is timely and comprehensive.

#### **Military**

First, we acknowledge that requests for military support turn on official dialogue between Governments, with Ukraine ably represented by Ambassador HE Vasyl Myroshnychenko. However, we frequently receive questions, information, support and encouragement from our community to this end. We take seriously our responsibility to elevate the voices and ideas of our community around opportunities to bring Australia's defence industry and capabilities to bear to the mutual benefit of Canberra and Kyiv:

1) **Deepen defence industry engagement:** Our community has been delighted to know that Australian defence industry SMEs have contributed to Ukraine's battlefield needs, be they offensive, defensive, or related to reconnaissance and surveillance. With support from the Australian government and foreign buyers, Ukraine has provided local companies like Droneshield, SYPAQ, Minelab and SPEE3D with a proving ground and a profile for their products, which supports their R&D and growth. Government has a unique role to play to encourage local defence firms to think about, cater to and learn from Ukraine's battlefield applications, as well as explore opportunities to partner with and mature Ukraine's nascent defence industry. Ensuring strong defence industry exchange between Australia and Ukraine is in our shared interest. We implore the Government to continue to look for creative ways to get Australian defence innovations into Ukraine.

- 2) **Provide unique feedback from the frontline to advance Australian capability (examples: drones, anti-drone technology and electronic warfare systems):** The war in Ukraine resulted in a revolution of warfare with drones dominating the battlefield. Surveillance drones have almost eliminated the fog of war, making the entire battlefield transparent in real time. Cheap kamikaze drones are being successfully used to destroy multimillion dollar tanks and other military equipment. Water and underwater drones helped Ukraine counter the domination of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Anti-drone technology, such as signal jammers and anti-drone guns, is also rapidly being developed by both Ukraine and Russia to counter enemy drones. Ukraine, Australia's ally, is currently one of the world's leaders in drones, anti-drone systems and electronic warfare. It would be of mutual benefit to establish a partnership where Australian Defence works in collaboration with Ukrainian experts to advance innovation in these fields, to battle test the latest development and to ramp up drone, anti-drone, and electronic warfare systems production to the benefit of both Australia and Ukraine.
- 3) **'More of the same':** As the Committee is aware, Ukraine's needs are immense. While our community often encourages creative thinking about the types of support Ukraine would benefit from, there is also value in relying on tried and tested contributions. Australia has generously contributed Bushmasters, which have reached iconic status in Ukraine and have been deeply appreciated by the Ukrainian Armed Forces for their functionality and superior performance. Australia has also provided uncrewed aerial systems, M40 trucks, M113 armoured vehicles, M777 Howitzers, anti-armour weapons, de-mining equipment and counter-drone systems, along with 105-millimetre light-artillery ammunition and 155-millimetre artillery ammunition jointly produced with France. We understand from contacts on the frontline that all of these items have been utilised and valued, and that repeat deliveries would be of great utility and warmly welcomed.
- 4) **Never-before-supplied kit:** In April 2024, President Zelenskyy met in Ukraine with our Co-Chair Stefan Romaniw, where he stressed that Australian defence capabilities have come to be very highly valued in Ukraine. To this end, we encourage the Committee to consider opportunities for the Government to supply equipment and capabilities which have not been supplied before. We continue to believe that one such opportunity exists with the Hawkei All-terrain Military Vehicle. We understand from media reporting around concerns in Australia that the brakes are not up to spec for Australian road conditions, and that the bonnet is not bullet-proof. On balance, neither are material issues for Ukraine, so we encourage the Government to examine the actual hurdles and consider the value of this platform and others from Ukraine's standpoint.

5) **Recycling ADF platforms:** The AFUO continues to receive requests from our community imploring us to encourage the Albanese Government to consider donating decommissioned ADF equipment and to examine capabilities that will be phased out or which are surplus to ADF needs. Such platforms include M1 Abrams tanks, F-18s, ASLAVS, mortar systems and, soon, the Tiger helicopters. We believe it is desirable to seek early agreement on these options to have them committed to Ukraine, rather than to work to reverse an adverse decision as in the case of the MRH-90 Taipans.

6) **Deepen support for international coalitions**

Our community has warmly welcomed Australian contributions to, and participation in, internationally coordinated support mechanisms for Ukraine. This includes the Australian Defence Force commitment to the training of Ukrainian recruits in the United Kingdom (Operation Kudu), the Drone Coalition led by the United Kingdom and Latvia, and the grant to the International Fund for Ukraine, which directly supports the procurement of priority military capabilities. We hope this type of engagement can be deepened and further developed.

7) **New money is needed:** Under current arrangements, all support for Ukraine comes out of existing capabilities, stockpiles and budgetary allocations, none of which are replenished. As a result, it has become increasingly clear to our community that the biggest handbrake to additional military aid for Ukraine is hesitancy in the Department of Defence. We continue to call for a dedicated new Budget allocation of ring-fenced money to provide further military support to Ukraine as a way of negating bureaucratic dynamics which compete head-to-head with the interests our community has in seeing Australia deliver more military aid to Ukraine.

**Diplomatic and legal**

1) **Reestablish the Australian Embassy in Kyiv:** Australia is the only one of Ukraine's partners which has not returned a diplomatic presence to Kyiv, and our community believes it is more important than ever that the Embassy reopen. Increasingly, this view has been shared by government backbenchers including Senator Deborah O'Neill and Mr Julian Hill MP. Keeping the Embassy closed poses significant challenges to Australia's ability to conduct routine diplomatic business. It also inadvertently serves to undermine the valuable support — both moral and material — that Australia has offered since Russia commenced its full-scale invasion. Reopening the Australian Embassy would be a smart step towards ensuring that Australia's support was increasingly coordinated at a whole-of-government level.

2) **Expel the Russian Ambassador:** The AFUO has, for over two years<sup>4</sup>, called on the Australian Government to expel the Russian Ambassador to Australia, following the lead of over twenty countries which have expelled Russian diplomats since the start of the full-scale invasion, including Germany, France, Netherlands, United States, and Japan. Russia's Ambassador to Australia Aleksey Pavlovsky has continued to support Russia's war on Ukraine. Australia has previously expelled Russian diplomats, most recently in 2018 following the poisonings of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury, UK. We maintain that Russia's actions in Ukraine are an affront to international rules and norms and a challenge to liberal democracies around the world, so should be met with meaningful repercussions.

3) **Seize Russian assets in Australia:** The global movement to seize Russian assets is gaining momentum as countries seek to hold Russia accountable for its invasion of Ukraine. Confiscating assets can be pivotal in providing financial resources to rebuild Ukraine's infrastructure, support displaced populations, and revitalise the economy. It also could put pressure on Putin and influence his strategic decision making. We welcome the recent decision at the June 2024 G7 summit to loan US\$50 billion to help Ukraine, with interest from frozen Russian assets being used as collateral.

Australia should follow the lead of the United States, the United Kingdom, and European Union members, which are all considering legal frameworks and international cooperation to freeze and confiscate Russian assets. The case for Australia's involvement has been publicly made to the Government by way of a letter signed by notable figures including former prime ministers, former senior cabinet ministers, former ambassadors, former premiers, former military leaders, union leaders, think tankers, advocates and academics.<sup>5</sup> Overcoming potential legislative hurdles to participate actively in this initiative would reaffirm Australia's commitment to upholding international law, supporting democratic values and ensuring that Russia pays a price for its aggressive actions.

4) **Close loop-holes which continue to permit trade with Russia:** Our community was alarmed by reports in May 2024 that Australia's two-way trade with Russia amounted to \$984 million in 2022-23, which rivals the value of support Australia has provided to Ukraine since the start of the full-scale invasion. While we do not have the technical expertise to examine this issue, as a matter of principle we believe it is important for the Government to provide assurances that all sanctions on trade and individuals are working to maximum effect and that any gaps are closed as a priority. We maintain that

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<https://afuo.org.au/current-affairs/media-releases/calls-for-the-russian-ambassador-to-australia-and-diplomats-to-be-expelled-visas-suspended/>

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<https://www.smh.com.au/world/europe/australian-elite-seek-to-divert-russia-s-9b-dirty-money-to-ukraine-20240408-p5fi55.html>



the primary goal is to cease imports from Russia, as well as the export of any strategic or potential dual use goods, which probably includes most minerals.

## **Business**

1) **Prioritise establishment of a Ukraine-Australia tax treaty:** The government has a role to play in encouraging Australian businesses to grasp commercial opportunities in Ukraine today — of which there are many, particularly in innovative technological applications of defence capabilities — while ensuring they clear any roadblocks so that Australian businesses can more easily calculate the risk and upside of setting up in Ukraine and contributing their expertise to the country.

A key concern is double taxation, whereby earnings are taxed in both Australia and Ukraine, and applied to both Australian businesses operating in Ukraine, and Ukrainians working or doing business in Australia.

For this reason, we welcome the efforts of the Treasury to explore a Taxation Treaty with Ukraine<sup>6</sup>. Such a move, which is long-overdue, will be the foundation of the sort of international economic cooperation, especially in trade and investment, which Ukraine needs today and will need even more in a post-war scenario.

## **Support for displaced Ukrainians in Australia**

1) **Resolve visa immigration issue:** Since 24 February 2022, the Department of Home Affairs has granted over 11,500 visas to Ukrainian nationals in Ukraine and thousands more to Ukrainian nationals elsewhere. Nearly 11,400 Ukraine national visa holders have since arrived in Australia, but it is not currently clear how many are still onshore, as some have returned to Ukraine. We are grateful for the resettlement of Ukrainians seeking safe refuge in Australia, and we are also proud of how displaced Ukrainians have integrated into Australian society.

Overall, Australia's immigration policies for displaced Ukrainians have been inconsistent and confusing, posing significant challenges for those seeking refuge. This uncertainty has also created opportunities for exploitation of a vulnerable cohort of people by unscrupulous operators and migration agents. The lack of a fit-for-purpose emergency humanitarian program, the lack of communication, and the current

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<sup>6</sup> <https://afuo.org.au/community/afuo-submission-to-the-federal-treasurys-consultation-on-the-expansion-of-australias-tax-treaty-network/>

fragmented approach to visa pathways has exacerbated the stress and anxiety experienced by Ukrainian displaced persons and community members during an already painful time.

For the Committee's consideration, we are pleased to offer the following recommendations to help ensure Australia's actions on immigration policy are as coordinated and comprehensive as possible:

1. Extend the subclass 786 Temporary Humanitarian Concern visas for displaced Ukrainians for a further 3 years to remove immediate stress from community members.
2. Develop dedicated pathways for permanent residency for displaced Ukrainians, in consideration of the barriers that many of the Ukrainian cohort face
3. Expand access to other humanitarian programs for Ukrainians
4. Expand relative sponsorship criteria for family visas in humanitarian cases (e.g. siblings, cousins etc)
5. Provide accelerated family reunification pathways for split families

## **Appendix A**

### **Backgrounder on Russia's war against Ukraine**

Russia's war against Ukraine is as ferocious and deadly as ever. Ukrainians have spent over 800 days fending off Russia's genocidal attacks, terrorism, aggression, destruction, missile strikes, war crimes and human rights abuses including unlawful child deportations, brutal executions, torture and sexual violence. In just the first six months of this year, Russia has launched over 10,000 bombs, missiles and drones on Ukraine, deliberately targeting and destroying half of Ukraine's energy infrastructure.

Despite this, Ukrainians have not faltered in their courage, resilience and bravery. They understand they cannot live under Russia's tyrannical rule or abide by Moscow's view that Ukraine should not exist. This is an existential fight for Ukraine.

It is also a direct challenge to all liberal democracies like Australia that support the rule of law and seek a global order which is not determined by force and aggression. Ukrainians have accepted this challenge and are at the frontline of pushing back against a dark and brutal authoritarianism that threatens global peace and stability.

A Russian victory in Ukraine will have catastrophic consequences for the global order. In a recent speech at the National Press Club, Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister the Hon Richard Marles MP recognised that 'the strategic landscape in the Indo-Pacific is intimately connected with the success of Ukraine in its efforts to resist Russian aggression'. Russia is a Pacific Rim nation, and Russia's conduct as an Asia-Pacific power is undoubtedly a regional security priority Australia must address.

Russia's brutal adventurism is a global challenge, not a problem to be handled by 'Europe' or Washington. If Russia succeeds, Australia's adversaries will think the West is weak. They will take the lesson that the West lacks grit and focus. The upshot is that the capabilities of AUKUS will need to come online much sooner than we are ready for. Supporting Ukraine helps secure our region. It strengthens the global order that we depend on. We cannot afford to do less.

## **Backgrounder on Australian support to date**

The Ukrainian community is incredibly grateful for all that the Morrison and Albanese governments have contributed to Ukraine since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Australia's solidarity and commitment is essential and appreciated. The support which has been committed and delivered has been meaningful and has assisted Ukraine in its fight against Russia.

Australia's Bendigo-made Bushmasters have been described as 'Aussie mateship on wheels', saving lives and protecting Ukraine's defenders. As Ambassador Myroshnychenko has said, "Australia's aid for Ukraine has a multiplier effect — it not only directly meets needs in Ukraine but also affirms and strengthens Ukrainians in their pursuit of our common values and withstanding Russia's illegal invasion."<sup>7</sup> Australia should particularly be commended for joining the Drone Coalition, led by the United Kingdom and Latvia, and for making a contribution to the International Fund for Ukraine. We encourage further involvement and leadership in such efforts.

For a period of time in 2022, Australia was the leading non-NATO contributor to Ukraine. We are now fifth. Compared to other countries, our contribution is relatively modest — Australia ranks 35th of 41 donor countries by GDP, as tracked by the Kiel Institute. Australia is last among the developed G20 countries which support Ukraine. We do 13% of what our AUKUS partners do — Australia's bilateral aid totals 0.041% of GDP compared with 0.31% for both the United States and United Kingdom. Canada, to which Australia is often compared given our similarly sized economies, has also contributed 0.31% of GDP to Ukraine. Japan, with which Australia shares a similar outlook on interests, assessments and values, has contributed over three-times as much as Australia.

Australia's \$1.06 billion of total support comes at a time when elevated commodity prices, mostly due to Russia's actions, have delivered a 'war windfall' of over \$100 billion over the last two years. If the Government is serious about helping Ukraine to "end this war on its own terms" — as Ministers note is their goal — Australia's support needs to be delivered at a scale and frequency that will help shift the dial. As the 12th largest economy in the world, Australia can and must do more for Ukraine.

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<sup>7</sup> P.13, The Advertiser, 4 June 2024