

Defence Portfolio

COMMITTEE INQUIRY QUESTION

(Question No.88)

Senator Anthony Chisholm asked the Department of Defence, upon notice, on 18 October 2021:

Is there any paid work that Australian businesses will be involved in, within the next 18 months on the new nuclear submarine program? Will Australian industry be engaged in any contracted work on the new nuclear submarine program in this next 18 months?

The Department of Defence has provided the following answer to the Senator's question:

Over the next 18 months, Australia, the UK, and US, through the AUKUS trilateral effort on conventionally-armed nuclear-powered submarines, will examine the full suite of requirements that underpin the delivery of these submarines in order to determine the optimal pathway for Australia. Australia will leverage the technology, capability and design expertise from the UK and US and will also evaluate a variety of considerations, including but not limited to submarine design, construction, safety, operation, maintenance, disposal, regulation, training, environmental protection, installations and infrastructure, industrial base capacity, workforce, and force structure. Australian industry will be engaged throughout this process, including through contracted work with the Nuclear Powered Submarine Task Force.

Defence Portfolio

COMMITTEE INQUIRY QUESTION

(Question No.99)

Senator Anthony Chisholm asked the Department of Defence, upon notice, on 18 October 2021:

Previously, the preponderance of Australian submarines in the region was going to be six attack and four Collins submarines in 2042. When is the preponderance of Australian submarines expected to occur?

The Department of Defence has provided the following answer to the Senator's question:

The optimal path to nuclear propulsion will be considered by the Nuclear-Powered Submarine Task Force.

Defence Portfolio

COMMITTEE INQUIRY QUESTION

(Question No. 100)

Senator Anthony Chisholm asked the Department of Defence, upon notice, on 18 October 2021:

In the Committee hearing, the possibility of a second Life-of-Type Extension for Collins class was canvassed. Where has this issue been canvassed publicly before the Senate hearing? Where is a second LOTE program reflected in public materials? What is the estimated out turned cost for the second LOTE?

The Department of Defence has provided the following answer to the Senator's question:

Any need for further extensions of the service life of Collins fleet will depend on outcomes of work of the Nuclear Powered Submarine Task Force over the next 18 months. Further service life extension would also be subject to feasibility assessments as the submarines progress through the currently planned extension.

Defence Portfolio

COMMITTEE INQUIRY QUESTION

(Question No.101)

Senator Anthony Chisholm asked the Department of Defence, upon notice, on 18 October 2021:

The 2020 Strategic Update noted the assumption around 10-year warning times for conventional conflicts was no longer suitable, and strategic circumstances were cited as a reason for the AUKUS arrangements. But without leasing an existing UK or US new submarines we appear likely to get new submarines at a later date than we were looking at with the Attack Class and using just the Collins Class into the 2040s.

What actually motivated the decision – the potential for nuclear-powered submarines, or that it was a convenient way to drop a project the Government was dissatisfied with? What advice has Defence given to Government on the nuclear-powered submarines and strategic circumstances warranting the nuclear-powered submarines? When was this given? Who provided the advice?

The Department of Defence has provided the following answer to the Senator's question:

In launching the Defence Strategic Update in July 2020, the Government outlined how rapidly Australia's strategic environment was deteriorating. In recognition of our deteriorating strategic environment and the rapid militarisation of our region, the Prime Minister directed the Secretary of Defence and the Chief of the Defence Force to bring forward a strategic review focused on enhancing Australia's defence capabilities.

As the Chief of the Nuclear-Powered Submarine Task Force, Vice Admiral Jonathan Mead said at the Senate Estimates References Committee on Shipbuilding on 15 October 2021, he led a small team from February 2021 through to September 2021, undertaking a classified Defence Capability Enhancement Review.

The classified review reaffirmed the need for Australia to invest in high-end capabilities that bolster our deterrence and better prepare us to respond in the event of conflict in our region. In particular, the review reaffirmed that future submarine capability would be critical to our defence strategy and that Australia should explore the feasibility of acquiring nuclear-powered submarine technology.

Defence Portfolio

COMMITTEE INQUIRY QUESTION

(Question No.102)

Senator Anthony Chisholm asked the Department of Defence, upon notice, on 18 October 2021:

If our strategic circumstances have changed so dramatically in the past few years to justify the Attack Class cancellation, what other platform changes are required since 2016 Integrated Investment Program or the Naval Shipbuilding Plan?

The Department of Defence has provided the following answer to the Senator's question:

Navy's platforms continually evolve in response to changing strategic circumstances.

Defence Portfolio

COMMITTEE INQUIRY QUESTION

(Question No.104)

Senator Anthony Chisholm asked the Department of Defence, upon notice, on 18 October 2021:

On the 1st of June 2021 in Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade Legislation Committee Estimates Mr Moriarty stated: “Perhaps I could help by saying that the review is underpinned by a detailed intelligence assessment, and it's going to look at the impacts of the changing threat environment and developments in technologies to determine the suitability of our planned capability investments in meeting our strategic objectives”.

Can I confirm that a threat assessment has already made? Can you share details of that with us?

The Department of Defence has provided the following answer to the Senator’s question:

A detailed intelligence assessment informed Governments decision that a nuclear-powered submarine was the most appropriate capability to meet our strategic objectives into the future. Intelligence assessments are classified.

Defence Portfolio

COMMITTEE INQUIRY QUESTION

(Question No.106)

Senator Anthony Chisholm asked the Department of Defence, upon notice, on 18 October 2021:

Does Defence consider it is more likely the review will conclude manufacturing of the submarines – at least the first few – would occur in the UK?

The Department of Defence has provided the following answer to the Senator's question:

The precise details of construction, including what components will come from each partner, will be determined during the 18 month period of work.

The Australian Government remains committed to Australian workers and Australian industry.

Defence Portfolio

COMMITTEE INQUIRY QUESTION

(Question No.107)

Senator Anthony Chisholm asked the Department of Defence, upon notice, on 18 October 2021:

The Australian reported on October 5 that British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said it was “inevitable” that Australia would turn to Five Eyes intelligence partners to deliver a nuclear-powered submarine and he was confident the boat would be British-made. In a separate report, The Australian said Australia is far more likely to buy a version of Britain’s Astute submarine than the US Virginia class under the AUKUS defence partnership according to Bryan Clark, a senior fellow at Washington’s Hudson Institute who “said his discussions with US Navy and defence industry figures suggested the Virginia class design would not be made available to Australia”.

Does Defence concur with these comments?

The Department of Defence has provided the following answer to the Senator’s question:

The Nuclear-Powered Submarine Task Force is at the start of an 18-month trilateral consultation period to seek an optimal pathway to deliver this capability. We will leverage expertise from the United States and the United Kingdom, building on the two countries’ submarine programs to bring an Australian capability into service at the earliest achievable date. Our trilateral consultations will examine all options to identify a pathway that will meet Australia’s strategic requirements and meet the Australian Government’s expectations regarding cost, scale, complexity and delivery timelines.

Defence Portfolio

COMMITTEE INQUIRY QUESTION

(Question No.108)

Senator Anthony Chisholm asked the Department of Defence, upon notice, on 18 October 2021:

On the day of the announcement, the UK Prime Minister was publicly noting the 18-month scoping study would likely land on a conclusion with ‘jobs and prosperity’ for the UK, and he has “no doubt whatever that it will bring hundreds of high-skilled, high-wage jobs of the kind that we want to see in our country, and increasingly are seeing”.

Does Defence concur with these comments?

The Department of Defence has provided the following answer to the Senator’s question:

The Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS committed to foster deeper integration of security and defence-related science, technology, industrial bases, and supply chains. Over the next 18 months, Australia, UK, and US, will examine the full suite of requirements that underpin the delivery of these submarines. We will leverage expertise from the United States and the United Kingdom, building on the two countries’ submarine programs to bring an Australian capability into service at the earliest achievable date.

Defence Portfolio

COMMITTEE INQUIRY QUESTION

(Question No.109)

Senator Anthony Chisholm asked the Department of Defence, upon notice, on 18 October 2021:

When was ASC informed about AUKUS? When were they consulted? Has any consultation occurred yet about the use of the facilities Naval Group were using to transition to nuclear-powered submarines?

The Department of Defence has provided the following answer to the Senator's question:

ASC was informed on 15 September 2021.

The Department of Defence led Nuclear-Powered Submarining Task Force will work over the next 18 months to develop a detailed plan for the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines and the infrastructure required to build these submarines at Osborne.