



24 May 2023

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee

By online submission

Dear Committee Members,

RE: Defence Legislation Amendment (Naval Nuclear Propulsion) Bill 2023

The Electrical Trades Union of Australia ('the ETU')¹ is the principal union for electrical and electrotechnology tradespeople and apprentices in Australia, representing well over sixty-thousand workers around the country.

The ETU has a long history of opposing uranium mining and the nuclear industry dating back over 70 years, with our official policy against nuclear set in the 1950s informed by the shared experiences of our members returning from Japan after World War II. In the years since, our Union has regularly revisited this policy and engaged experts in the industry to learn more about the nuclear fuel cycle and remain up to date with technological advances.

To this day, we maintain our belief that the nuclear industry presents more issues to Australian workers and communities than it could possibly solve. From the extraction of uranium through to usage and waste disposal, there is no future for nuclear in Australia.

The ETU does not support the watering down of long-standing nuclear prohibitions to allow for the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines. We hold serious concerns that the erosion of these prohibitions for military technology undermines the peaceful intent of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, presents a safety risk to workers and sailors, and risks stranding Australia with dangerous high-level nuclear waste requiring costly management for tens of thousands of years.

We recognise that the current Government has inherited commitments from a previous Government that negotiated those outcomes in secret and that this creates complex and difficult challenges for the current Government. However, there is no broad public support for the decision to acquire nuclear submarines nor is their consensus within the defence establishment or parliament. This decision introduces a step change in Australia's risk profile which should be carefully, methodically, and transparently assessed by the Australian people, rather than moving to open up long held legislative protections to Australia's sovereignty, safety, and environment.

Further, there is no detail in either the Bill, the explanatory memoranda or the Minister's second reading speech to particularise in any way what work or activity needs to occur and by when that the current legislation will prevent from occurring.

Whilst we recognise the importance of building strong relationships with our allies and partners, we believe that these relationships ought to be contingent on an independent Australia, a State that is open and transparent with its people and on strong diplomatic efforts in our region.