

The acquisition of a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines (some of them second-hand) costing up to A\$368 billion is the largest defence project since World War Two and the worst foreign policy mistake since a failed bid to introduce conscription during World War One, according to former prime minister Paul Keating. Occurring with little public consultation, it was supported by a 'Red Alert' series of fearmongering front-page articles in Australia's 'Nine' newspapers in consultation with the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, which has close ties to arms dealers, and which argued for greater defence capabilities to resist a supposedly imminent war with China. Yet China and Australia have a mutually-beneficial trade relationship which this deal will harm. It will contribute to a regional arms race which could have disastrous consequences. It is already shifting valuable resources away from the more pressing threat of global warming facing both countries. The cost is massive at a time of desperate need for social housing and cost-of-living relief; for that money, far more people could be employed in education, health, housing, agricultural, environmental and social services.

The project can be cancelled with a year's notice according to a revamped AUKUS agreement tabled in federal parliament, and there's no guarantee whether an almost \$5 billion payment to the USA will be refunded if no nuclear-powered boats are delivered. Australia has also agreed to indemnify the US and UK against any loss or injury connected to nuclear materials transferred here. Resistance has been fierce, with a series of protests against plans for a new submarine base in Port Kembla, some drawing 5,000 protesters. The South Coast Labor Council, consisting of unions representing 50,000 workers, fear the base could choke a nascent clean energy sector by taking up scarce land and ushering in security curbs, while the permanent presence of U.S. warships would be a nuclear target. Environmentalists are concerned about the fact that 'Australia shall be responsible for the management, disposition, storage, and disposal of any spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste resulting from the operation of Naval Nuclear Propulsion Plants'. The 'Marrickville Declaration' by 30 community groups such as the Anti-AUKUS Coalition is part of a growing national movement which wants an end to AUKUS, claiming that its cost and the open-ended commitment to foreign military priorities are to the detriment of priorities for a resilient, safe and peaceful Australian society. It also violates Australian sovereignty and our commitment to a nuclear-free Pacific under the *Treaty of Rarotonga* (the *South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty*).

Australia's primary threat is global warming and extreme weather events such as the catastrophic Lismore floods and 2019-20 bushfires. We would be better served by new fire-fighting planes and conversion from military operations to disaster response and emergency relief services. Increased spending on foreign aid, cultural ties, diplomacy, refugee resettlement and nonviolent defence would strengthen regional peace more cheaply and with a lower environmental footprint.

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