



# PERTH SOUTH WEST

## Metropolitan Alliance

Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2024

Committee Secretary  
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

To whom this may concern,

### **Submission on Department of Defence – Submarine Rotational Force – West, Priority Works, HMAS Stirling, Western Australia**

The Perth South West Metropolitan Alliance is a long standing grouping of the local governments of Fremantle, East Fremantle, Melville, Cockburn, Kwinana and Rockingham. The region contains the strategic naval infrastructure sites of HMAS Stirling and the Australian Marine Complex and is home to over 460,000 residents, in addition to a range of leading defence industry businesses.

The Alliance acknowledges that AUKUS is imminent and is not seeking to delay the development of the proposed infrastructure. The works that are being reviewed by the Joint Committee comprise enabling works for AUKUS that are confined to HMAS Stirling. The land is controlled by Defence and from an approval perspective, local government is not required to consent to the works.

Although the development activities are limited to HMAS Stirling site, there is a clear nexus between the development and broader impacts on the surrounding communities. The intensification and scaling up of operations at HMAS Stirling have off-base implications, affecting the broader region beyond Defence-controlled land.

The Alliance understands that the proposed works are the first in a series of expansions at HMAS Stirling over the coming decades. Department of Defence base population modelling indicates that previous estimates for the HMAS Stirling Estate Base Plan are significantly lower than the updated projections:

Year	2025	2030	2035	2040
Base Population Projected Growth (Previous estimate)	5,510	6,389	7,022	7,481
Base Population Projected Growth (Current Estimate)	6,000	8,000	9,500	10,500

*Source: Security and Estate Group Response to Cape Peron Transport Needs Study, November 2023*

This projects a 40% population increase above previous estimates by 2040, more than tripling the 2021 Census numbers (3,308 – Source: ABS Census) for workers on the base. These increases necessitate a substantial boost in supporting infrastructure, yet there is no clear plan or funding arrangement, with the growth being substantial, yet incremental. Currently, the financial responsibility for mitigating these impacts falls on the ratepayers of the City of Rockingham, offsetting the impact of activities otherwise exempt from rates.

A proposal of this scale from Defence differs significantly from local governments' interactions with the private sector. For a comparable development by a mining company, conditions of approval would include road studies, housing plans, and contributions to community infrastructure to mitigate impacts. However, as Defence is exempt from local government approvals, we must seek Federal Government support to offset these impacts, relying on Defence to choose to mitigate their impacts, rather than be compelled.

Primary among the off-base impacts are issues related to road network planning. HMAS Stirling is principally accessed via the Garden Island Causeway, through a residential road network in the City of Rockingham. Many HMAS Stirling employees and contractors use Parkin Street, causing high volumes of traffic through a residential area with limited capacity. While perhaps suitable at the outset of the establishment of HMAS Stirling, increased numbers on the base have created significant congestion and safety concerns for local residents, with the road and key intersections no longer able to accommodate the large number of vehicles each day.

Despite plans over the years for alternative vehicle access to bypass the residential road network, no agency has taken responsibility for planning and delivering this critical infrastructure. This has resulted in the farcical situation where the coordination, control and access arrangements for Australia's largest naval base are managed by a local government, far removed from the national significance it warrants.

As AUKUS activities intensify over the coming decades, HMAS Stirling will rely more on regional road connections, including Stock/Rockingham Road, Rowley Road West, and Kwinana Freeway. Despite the clear need for road upgrades, linked directly to HMAS Stirling developments and intensification, no mechanism exists for mandating contributions to local or state government.

Additionally, there is a lack of active transport infrastructure, such as bike and walk paths, and no current services linking the base to nearby train stations or ferry and barging services. Contributions towards public and active transport infrastructure are typically conditioned in other developments, but Defence's exemption leaves these needs unmet.

Housing is another critical issue. While there are plans to house some personnel at HMAS Stirling, the large influx of foreign defence personnel under AUKUS will strain the local housing market, potentially displacing vulnerable residents. To date the Alliance and its members have not been given a comprehensive briefing on how Defence intends to mitigate this impact through the construction of additional housing stock, beyond being advised of the responsible agency. In the context of a private developer, who was importing a workforce to a region, this impact would need to be addressed at the development stage, with a clear agreement in place to offset the impact.

Defence has indicated that while they sympathise with local government's predicament, they are unable to meet off-base mitigation requirements and suggest directing these requests to the Federal Government. However, ignoring these impacts poses a real threat to Defence's social licence in the region, potentially hindering their long term aspirations.

## **Recommendations**

### **Integrated Financing and Infrastructure Plan**

The Perth South West region is facing an unprecedented growth phase, with projects such as Westport (moving WA's Container Port to Kwinana), growth of the Battery Industry, Defence projects at Australian Marine Complex, Heavy Industry and Renewable developments in the Kwinana/Rockingham Strategic Industrial Area as well as AUKUS. This presents a once in a century opportunity to coordinate and transform the region. The level of development planned over the coming decades is not unlike other national mega projects such as Western Sydney Airport.

While plans exist to facilitate the immense population and industry growth, there is no clear funding and infrastructure plan to sustain employment and financing of these nation building projects. An agreement that spans the three tiers of government, providing long-term certainty and strategic planning of the implementation of the projects is worth pursuing to ensure that these projects can be coordinated and implemented in an efficient and cost effective manner. This can only be achieved through Federally led project agreement spanning all tiers of government and it is recommended that this be investigated as a priority.

### **Percent for Community Offsets**

While percent for art initiatives aren't uncommon for government projects, a percentage for community offsets could be initiated for Defence Infrastructure Capital funding. Given local government cannot condition items such as road upgrades or community infrastructure, establishing a fund earmarked for the region, would allow for funding of active transport connections, public transport trials, or road studies. While not fully offsetting the impacts, it would create a funding mechanism that recognises that the impact of Defence's development activities extend beyond their estate.

### **Better engagement of workers in immediate vicinity**

Defence has described their intention to work with local businesses and integrate them into the supply chain for the capital works. We welcome this commitment, but would seek a clear definition of what they determine local business to be, as well as regular and transparent reporting of the targets and achievements of these goals.

### **Improved community awareness of AUKUS objectives and nuclear mindset**

There is no clear analysis of the present level of support for AUKUS in our region, but we would anecdotally note opinions that range from strongly support to staunchly opposed. However from engagement with our residents, most have no clear opinion or awareness of the initiative. While those engaged in AUKUS are aware of the imminent and definitive nature of the AUKUS agreement, our communities are largely unengaged.

Defence's aspirations for Perth's South West corridor are immense, with the region set to play a defining role in the supporting Australia's naval projects. Without better engagement with the community, there remains a real risk to maintaining a level of community acceptance for the range of projects ahead. To date, while we note that Defence has met their statutory requirements under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* and *ARPANSA*, there remains opportunities for far more general engagement the with the communities and businesses in this region, given the scale and timing of the initiative.

Thank you for your consideration of the Alliance's submission. We reiterate that the Alliance is not looking to delay the works proposed. We recognise that they are critical to meeting the short timeframes related to AUKUS. We do, however want an appropriate mechanism to mitigate offsite impacts of the capital works and intensification of HMAS Stirling.

We understand that the Joint Committee may consider travelling to the region to inspect the works and we would invite them to meet with the stakeholders from our group, particularly the City of Rockingham, to truly get an appreciation of the challenges we face without a partnership approach to Defence developments.

Yours sincerely,

Warwick Carter  
Director Perth South West Metropolitan Alliance

