

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Economics References Committee

Inquiry into Australia's sovereign naval shipbuilding capability

15 October 2021

PDR Number: IQ21-000272

ARPANSA and nuclear propelled submarines - operational requirements, staffing, and resourcing.

Written

Senator: Kim Carr

Question:

Will ARPANSA require a new charter to be able to deal with the acquisition, sustainment, disposal of nuclear propelled submarines in Australia?

What definitional issues has the agency identified in the ARPANSA Act should there be aquation of nuclear propelled submarines?

What resourcing and scale up of operations will be required for ARPANSA if nuclear propelled submarines are procured?

How many staff does ARPANSA have working on the Nuclear Submarine taskforce looking at the procurement proposal over the next 18 months?

What qualifications and skills framework do we require for the workforce both uniform and civilian? Who is required to develop and regulate this?

Answer:

Will ARPANSA require a new charter to be able to deal with the acquisition, sustainment, disposal of nuclear propelled submarines in Australia?

ARPANSA does not operate under a charter. ARPANSA's roles and responsibilities are outlined in the *Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Act 1998* (the Act) and Regulations.

The multi-agency Nuclear-Powered Submarine Taskforce will examine the Act and other relevant legislation to establish a fit-for-purpose legislative framework to support Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines. Any new legislative framework would determine ARPANSA's role and mandate concerning the submarines.

What definitional issues has the agency identified in the ARPANSA Act should there be aquation of nuclear propelled submarines?

The ARPANS Act does not specifically address naval nuclear propulsion. The Act under Section 10(1)(a) prohibits the construction or operation of certain nuclear installations, including a 'nuclear power plant'. Neither the Act nor Regulations define a 'nuclear power plant'. There is no mention of nuclear reactors for naval propulsion. 'Nuclear installation', as defined in the Act, does not specifically include nuclear reactors for propulsion.

Section 7 states that the ARPANS Act is not to prejudice Australia's defence. The Chief of the Defence Force, after consulting with the Minister – being the Minister responsible for ARPANSA - may declare that specified provisions of the Act do not apply to the Defence Force. However, in doing so, the CDF must promote the object of the Act to the greatest extent.

As mentioned above, the multi-agency Nuclear-Powered Submarine Taskforce will examine the Act and other relevant legislation to establish a fit-for-purpose legislative framework to support Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines.

What resourcing and scale up of operations will be required for ARPANSA if nuclear propelled submarines are procured?

The impact on ARPANSA's workforce and resourcing requirements will only be able to be determined when the decision is made on how the nuclear submarine program will be regulated.

How many staff does ARPANSA have working on the Nuclear Submarine taskforce looking at the procurement proposal over the next 18 months?

ARPANSA's effort to support the Nuclear-Powered Submarine Task Force is a daily whole-of-agency effort. The agency is also working closely with the Department of Health on how the Health portfolio will support the task force. ARPANSA has seconded one senior regulatory officer who is integrated within the Task Force at Defence. This officer is in daily communication with ARPANSA.

What qualifications and skills framework do we require for the workforce both uniform and civilian? Who is required to develop and regulate this?

As mentioned, over the next 18 months, ARPANSA will work with the Task Force in Defence to examine the full suite of requirements that underpin nuclear stewardship, which includes safety, design, construction, operation, maintenance, disposal, regulation, training, and environmental protection.

Although ARPANSA has no experience in regulating naval propulsion units, it has competency in regulating research reactors, including the shutdown 10 MW HIFAR reactor and the operational 20 MW OPAL reactor, both located at the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation's campus at Lucas Heights. ARPANSA has over 300 person years of nuclear regulatory and operational experience, including experience in overseas nuclear power programmes.