



To: Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
Department of Defence – Submarine Rotational Force –
West, Priority Works, HMAS Stirling, Western Australia
Parliament House, Canberra 2600

Submission by: West Australian Regional Meeting (Quakers Australia) on June 30, 2024

Submitted via:

[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Public_Works/
DODSubRotationalForce](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Public_Works/DODSubRotationalForce)

This submission is prepared for the purpose of the inquiry. It has not been published previously.

Introduction: A minute arising from the June 2, 2024 Meeting for Worship for Business by the West Australia Regional Meeting of Quakers responding to the proposed storage of low-level radiation waste from submarines at Garden Island expressed: “We are distressed to learn of the application for storage of low-level radiation waste from visiting UK and US submarines at Garden Island. X will prepare a submission opposing this application on behalf of WARM for the clerk... All those who are part of the WARM community are encouraged to make a submission opposing the application. “

This submission, as follows, has been written to suit the requirements of the inquiry, particularly looking at

1. the stated purpose of the proposed work and its suitability for that purpose
2. the need for the work
3. the cost-effectiveness of the proposal
4. the amount of revenue it will produce if the work is revenue producing the current and prospective value of the work.

1. the stated purpose of the proposed work and its suitability for that purpose

Members of the Religious Society of Friends (known as Quakers) believe that Truth and Integrity are important to the wellbeing of any community.

1.1. The process has three major flaws.

1.1.1. The secrecy of the licence application makes genuine and informed comment impossible. This secrecy is at complete odds with statements claiming transparency and accountability.

1.1.2. The site is meant to be a storage facility for low level radioactive waste. There is no final disposal site selected/determined. Locating a disposal facility for nuclear waste in Australia has been a highly contested area for decades. The Defence department have stated an intent to pursue a disposal site, but intent is not a plan. There is no guarantee one will be found and in that case the storage facility will then become the de facto disposal facility. This is not international best practice. In fact it is extraordinarily poor planning.

1.1.3. By narrowing the requirements to physical assets, it deflects scrutiny of its real purpose and that purpose’s impact locally and much farther afield.

1.2. When Department of Defence describes the aim of the project, it is “to provide critical facilities and infrastructure required at HMAS Stirling to support the initial establishment of the Submarine Rotational Force – West in 2027.” The conceals as much as it reveals. The phrase “Submarine Rotational Force – West” does not properly describe the full purpose of the proposed work, which appears to be to enable an interoperable naval base capable of managing nuclear materials, host nuclear powered and possibly nuclear armed submarines, and with capacity to deal with nuclear emergencies when/if they arise.

1.3. While technically correct, the Defence aim also is coy about the facilities establishing a naval base effectively operating under USA command in times of conflict. Joint facilities in Australia have already been used by a foreign power

without reference to us as host. Former Foreign Minister Gareth Evans spoke of Australia being brushed aside by his joint partners during the first Gulf War: he found the USA dismissed any approach from the Australian Government to share in how a particular “joint” installation would be used in that wartime. The stated purpose should be more plain in its intentions in order for the community to properly comment on its suitability.

- 1.4. Establishing the facilities will involve dredging, incurring destruction in a unique area within the Perth metropolitan area. By referring intrusive activities to the Minister, rather than working within strict environment principles and practice, the proposal is expediting a political decision, rather than proper environmental management.
- 1.5. The capital cost of \$738.1 million diverts much needed resources from sustainable development goals such as environmental work on the area. Spending money on waging threats or actual war is not consistent with action on climate change. The military is exempt from carbon emission counting for the purposes of the IPCC agreement and is yet a major polluter. They should be required to account for carbon emissions as well as opportunity cost on climate action.
- 1.6. The acquisition of Australian nuclear submarines undermines the Peace and Justice of the U.N. Sustainable Development goals by -ignoring the intentions of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty 1970 of which Australia is a signatory, and the Treaty of Raratonga,(1985) which relates to the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The impact of this nuclear submarine base is destabilising for our region., as some of our neighbours have strongly indicated.
- 1.7. As an interoperable base, this proposal also enables US and UK nuclear submarines to dock and frequently visit Stirling Naval Base. Preparing the naval base to be capable of supporting nuclear strikes appears to be an ongoing breach of our commitment under the Treaty of Raratonga, which helps create a nuclear free zone in our region and which applies to the west coast of Western Australia.
- 1.8. Rather than “boosting our deterrence,” the interoperable nuclear submarine base is likely to heighten regional tensions and capabilities for misunderstandings. Deterrence is an unprovable doctrine. While there have been no uses of nuclear weapons since our ally bombed the mostly civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the threat of the use of nuclear weapons, and nuclear testing, has played a negative role in international relations. Other approaches (eg “Spiral theory”, diplomatic efforts) are alternatives to nuclear deterrence thinking, but they are not considered in this proposal.
- 1.9. Article 7 of the Treaty of Raratonga also emphasises keeping the region free of environmental pollution by radioactive wastes and other radioactive matter, which should be acknowledged and addressed by the Standing Committee. The storage of nuclear waste at Garden Island from British and American submarines on rotation is totally unacceptable. How “temporary” is that storage intended to be, and where/when would permanent storage be organised?
- 1.10. The defence brief speaks of the Garden Island facility as 60km south of Perth, which is a misdirection for those who do not know much about the 100km long city which stretches southward of HMAS Stirling, itself adjacent to a suburban precinct.

- 1.11. Reference to nuclear safety is insufficient to describe what will impact the civilian population in the case of an emergency in Cockburn Sound and along the Rockingham coast in a radius of 20km in cases of
 - 1.11.1.A nuclear accident
 - 1.11.2.A nuclear weapons attack on the submarines, either intentionally or by misadventure
 - 1.11.3.A conventional weapons attack on the submarine which manages to break open the nuclear reactors

2. Potential Impact, lack of consultation and opportunity cost of “Value”
 - 2.1. The presence of nuclear submarines and a nuclear powered and possibly nuclear armed submarines has an impact on the region
 - 2.2. Quote “The listed little penguin colony located immediately adjacent to proposed work areas will not be directly impacted by the works” - this underplays the fragility of the endangered colony which is under great stress.
 - 2.3. The building of these facilities creates capacity for the United States to run a command-and-control operation which has not been communicated to nor debated by the community. Similarly, AUKUS has been a compendium of arms trade and research for which the public had no input, nor explanation of how massive funds were made available when so much social and environmental need is neglected. The rendering of “Public Value” by the Department of Defence submission shows how narrowly considered the proposal is.

3. Conclusion
 - 3.1. The level of secrecy in the proposal is an additional example of how nuclear power and nuclear weapons militarise our democracy. There is not enough examination or description of the major requirements and their impacts for the Defence proposal to be considered anything but a gloss on the substantial work it needs to do before approval can be provided.
 - 3.2. The drive to nuclearize Australia’s defence forces, spend massive amounts of public funds, threaten China in the waters of South China Seas rather than defend the continental borders of Australia has a military logic and self-fulfilling nature of its own, driven by anxieties encouraged by the arms trade and lobbyists posing as think tanks connected to arms dealers. Describing the purpose of this facility in narrow terms connected to the building of these premises obscures the nuclear safety risks, ignores the environmental direct damage, devalues opportunity cost, and forsakes peaceful amenity of a beautiful island. A proper focus of defence works needs to attend to real climate change action, through acknowledging the military contribution to carbon emissions, and review narrow definitions of security to include human and environmental security.