

ESTIMATES BRIEF – Hot Issue**NPS ROLES****Supplementary Budget Estimates – October 2025****Nuclear Powered Submarines - Roles, Responsibilities and Status of Program****Subject/Issue**

On 14 March 2023, the Australian Government announced the Optimal Pathway which sets out Australia's plan to acquire conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines through the AUKUS trilateral partnership. The nuclear-powered submarine program is one of the six priorities identified in the 2023 Defence Strategic Review. The 2024 National Defence Strategy and the 2024 Integrated Investment Program identify undersea warfare capability as an investment priority.

Key facts and figures

- The Optimal Pathway comprises three phases:
 1. Submarine Rotational Force-West (SRF-West) - From as early as 2027, AUKUS partners will have a rotational presence at HMAS Stirling of one UK and up to 4 US nuclear-powered submarines.
 2. The acquisition of 3 Virginia Class submarines from the United States from the early 2030s. Australia retains the option to seek approval for up to 2 more if required.
 3. The build of Australia's SSN-AUKUS nuclear-powered submarines, to commence in Osborne, South Australia from the late 2020s.
- On 22 March 2024, the Government announced ASC Pty Ltd (ASC) and BAE Systems as Australian's Sovereign Submarine Build Partners and ASC as the Sovereign Submarine Sustainment Partner. In the 2024-25 MYEFO, the Government injected equity into ASC to finance enhanced capacity and to develop its nuclear capabilities.
- Australian Naval Infrastructure Pty Ltd (ANI) is developing the Nuclear-Powered Submarine Construction Yard in Osborne, South Australia. The Government agreed to provide ANI with equity injections for this activity in the 2023-24 Budget, the 2024-25 Budget and the 2024-25 MYEFO.
- On 16 October 2024, the Government announced that the Defence Precinct at Henderson will home depot level maintenance and contingency docking for Australia's future nuclear-powered submarines.

NPS ROLES

- The *Australian Naval Nuclear Power Safety Act 2024* received Royal Assent on 24 October 2024. This Act lays the legal framework to regulate the nuclear safety aspects of Australia's nuclear-powered submarine enterprise.
- With respect to the SSN-AUKUS build, the Australian Submarine Agency, ASC SSN-AUKUS Pty Ltd (newly established subsidiary of ASC) and BAE Systems have entered into agreements to commence preparatory work.
 - On 13 November 2024, the parties entered initial contracts, through the tripartite Mobilisation Deed which established the framework to contract ASC SSN-AUKUS and BAE Systems jointly, or separately through the issuing of tasking statements.
 - On 18 December 2024, the parties entered into their first tasking statements under the tripartite mobilisation agreement enabling them to develop detailed plans, scheduled and workforce initiatives for the Australian build program of the SSN-AUKUS.
- On 17 January 2025, the trilateral treaty, *Agreement Among the Government of Australia, the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Government of the United States of America for Cooperation Related to Naval Nuclear Propulsion* (the Agreement) entered into force. The Agreement provides the legal basis to enable the UK and the US to transfer naval nuclear propulsion technology, materials and information to Australia under the AUKUS partnership.
- On 26 July 2025, Australia and the United Kingdom signed the bilateral Nuclear-Powered Submarine Partnership and Collaboration Treaty (the Geelong Treaty). The Geelong Treaty is a 50-year commitment of UK-Australian bilateral defence cooperation under AUKUS Pillar I, enabling comprehensive cooperation on the design, build, operation, sustainment and disposal of our SSN-AUKUS submarines.
- On 28 August 2025, the *Defence Housing Australia Amendment Bill 2025* received Royal Assent. The Bill amends the *Defence Housing Australia Act 1987* to enable Defence Housing Australia to provide housing and housing-related services to additional classes of persons. This will allow US and UK personnel to receive an equivalent standard of housing and support as their counterparts in the Australian Defence Force.
- On 14 September 2025, the Government announced it will provide \$12 billion towards delivering a Defence Precinct at Henderson to deliver continuous naval shipbuilding and AUKUS in Western Australia. Early independent planning indicates the Henderson Defence Precinct will require investment in the order of \$25 billion over the decade.

NPS ROLES

- This initial investment will underpin the delivery of:
 - The construction of surface vessels for the Australian Defence Force, starting with Army's Landing Craft and, pending successful consolidation, the domestic build element of Australia's future general purpose frigates;
 - Facilities to support the sustainment of Australia's surface combatant vessels;
 - Contingency docking capabilities for Australia's future conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarine fleet from the early 2030s; and
 - Depot-level maintenance, including graving docks.
- This commitment builds on the government's initial \$127 million commitment to progress planning for the Defence Precinct.
- Questions on the details of delivery against the Optimal Pathway should be put to Defence and the Australian Submarine Agency.
 - ASC and ANI can answer for activities they are contracted to undertake.

ESTIMATES BRIEF – Hot Issue

NPS ROLES

Supplementary Budget Estimates – October 2025

Key Points

Phase 1 - Submarine Rotational Force-West (SRF-West)

From 2023, Australian military and civilian personnel will embed with the UK and US Navies and – subject to necessary arrangements – within UK and US submarine industrial bases. This accelerates the training and development of Australian personnel. The US commenced increased SSN port visits to Australia from 2023, with Australian sailors joining US crews for training and development. The UK will increase port visits to Australia from 2026. Building on these increased port visits, from as early as 2027, the UK and the US plan to establish a rotational presence of one UK Astute class submarine and up to four US Virginia class at HMAS Stirling, Western Australia. This initiative will be known as Submarine Rotational Force-West (SRF-West).

Key Activity	Responsible entity	Public Commitments / Announcements	Key Dates
Infrastructure development of HMAS Stirling	Department of Defence (Security and Estate Group)	Investment of \$8 billion over the next decade.	Commenced 2024.
Sustainment Services for US Navy flagged vessels.	US Navy will provide sustainment (as required) of their vessels with ASC and Royal Australian Navy support as required in order to begin training	N/A.	Expected from 2027.
Early Training – Embedment through Pearl Harbor	ASC	As at end of July 2025, 150 ASC Pty Ltd personnel are now engaged in training activities in Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard.	Commenced 2024.

NPS ROLES

Phase 2 – Acquiring US Virginia Class SSNs

To expand Australia's stewardship capacity and provide it with an SSN capability as soon as possible, Australia intends to acquire an existing SSN capability – the US Virginia class SSN. The US intends to sell Australia three Virginia class SSNs from as soon as the early 2030s, which was authorised by the US Congress in December 2023. Australia retains the option to seek approval for up to two more.

Acquiring Virginia class SSNs will ensure there is no submarine capability gap as Collins class submarines are retired.

Key Activity	Responsible entity	Public Commitments / Announcements	Key Dates
Infrastructure development for sustainment (Henderson Western Australia)	Department of Defence (Naval Shipbuilding and Sustainment Group) in consultation with the Australian Submarine Agency	<p>Investment of \$12 billion towards delivering a Defence Precinct at Henderson – 14 September 2025 (Refer to Media Release below). Early independent planning indicates the Henderson Defence Precinct will require investment in the order of \$25 billion over the decade.</p> <p>This is in addition to the initial investment of \$127 million over three years. Henderson Defence Precinct announced – 16 October 2024 (Refer to Media Release below).</p>	Planning commenced 2024.
US Submarine Industrial Base Uplift	Australian Submarine Agency	Congress passed the <i>National Defense Authorisation Act</i> in December 2023, enabling Australian investment into the US submarine industrial base.	Two tranches of investment, totalling a value of USD 2 billion, have been transferred to the US in 2025.
Acquisition of Virginia Class	Australian Submarine Agency	Decision pending.	Expected early 2030s.

NPS ROLES

Industrial workforce development and sustainment planning	ASC	ASC was announced in March 2024 as the sustainer for Australia's Nuclear-Powered Submarines.	Commenced 2024.
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Phase 3 - SSN-AUKUS

AUKUS partners will deliver SSN-AUKUS – a trilaterally-developed submarine based on the UK's next-generation design that incorporates technology from all three nations, including cutting edge US submarine technologies. SSN-AUKUS will be the future attack submarine for both Australia and the UK.

Australia and the UK intend to start building SSN-AUKUS in their domestic shipyards before the end of this decade. Australia plans to deliver the first Australian built SSN-AUKUS to the Royal Australian Navy in the early 2040s, while the UK will deliver its first SSN-AUKUS to the Royal Navy in the late 2030s.

Key Activity	Responsible entity	Public Commitments / Announcements	Key Dates
Infrastructure development (Osborne, South Australia)	ANI	Nuclear-Powered Submarine Construction Yard contractual announcements (throughout 2023 and 2024).	Design work, early enabling works and some environmental approvals have commenced.
SSN-AUKUS Submarine Build	BAE Systems and ASC via an Incorporated Joint Venture	Announced by Deputy Prime Minister on 22 March 2024.	Formed a collaborative arrangement (via a Heads of Agreement) in March 2024, which will lead to the establishment of a long-term incorporated Joint Venture.
UK Industrial Uplift, incl. Rolls Royce Production Line	Australian Submarine Agency	Initial investment of \$4.6 billion over next decade.	Commenced.

NPS ROLES

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Infrastructure development for sustainment (Henderson, Western Australia)	Department of Defence (Naval Shipbuilding and Sustainment Group) in consultation with Australian Submarine Agency	Investment of \$12 billion towards delivering a Defence Precinct at Henderson – 14 September 2025 (Refer to Media Release below). Early independent planning indicates the Henderson Defence Precinct will require investment in the order of \$25 billion over the decade. This is in addition to the initial investment of \$127 million over three years. Henderson Defence Precinct announced – 16 October 2024 (Refer to Media Release below).	Planning commenced 2024.
Skills and Training Academy Campus (STAC)	ANI, Australian Submarine Agency and South Australian Government	Investment of \$480 million announced by Deputy Prime Minister on 5 March 2025. ANI announced Kellogg, Brown and Root, and Architectus engaged as design partners.	Design works progressing and initial ground works have commenced.
Australia's AUKUS Submarine Industry Strategy	Australian Submarine Agency	Announced by Deputy Prime Minister on 5 March 2025.	Commenced 2025.

PATHWAY TO AUSTRALIA'S NUCLEAR-POWERED SUBMARINE CAPABILITY

Embeds and Industrial Workforce
(From 2023)

Increasing Port Visits (From 2023)

SRF-West
(As early as 2027)



Australia Sovereign Ready (Early 2030s)

Australian Virginia Class Submarines



Australian Shipyard Design and Construction (From 2023)

Construction of SSN-AUKUS (During the 2020s)

Planned Delivery of UK's First SSN-AUKUS (Late 2030s)

Planned Delivery of Australia's First SSN-AUKUS (In early 2040s)



Collins Class Capability



2023

2033

2043

2053

Stewardship Pathway

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ESTIMATES BRIEF – Hot Issue

NPS ROLES

Supplementary Budget Estimates – October 2025

Background

Following the announcement of the AUKUS Optimal Pathway on 14 March 2023, the Government began a 12-month process to select Sovereign Submarine Partners who will build and sustain Australia's future nuclear-powered submarines.

Appropriate confidentiality mechanisms and probity arrangements are established ensuring limited access and visibility of Australian Submarine Agency information.

Supporting information

Questions on Notice

- No QoNs asked.

Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests

- No FOIs asked.

Recent Ministerial Comments

14 September 2025, Media Release, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP: [Additional Defence funding to deliver the Henderson Defence Precinct](#)

- “Today’s investment is another way we are delivering record defence funding to bolster Australia’s capabilities. This world class precinct will create more than 10,000 local jobs and strong opportunities for local industry. There is no greater honour than serving our country in our nation’s uniform and my Government is dedicated to investing in the defence capabilities our nation requires.”

26 July 2025, Joint Statement with the United Kingdom (UK): the Hon Richard Marles MP: [Joint Statement on the Australia United Kingdom Nuclear-Powered Submarine Partnership and Collaboration Treaty](#)

- “On 26 July 2025 in Geelong, Australia, the Honourable Richard Marles MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, Australia and the Right Honourable John Healey MP, Secretary of State for Defence, United Kingdom (UK) signed the bilateral Nuclear-Powered Submarine Partnership and Collaboration Treaty (the Geelong Treaty) at the UK-Australia Defence Ministers’ Meeting in Geelong, Victoria. The Geelong Treaty is a historic agreement, the commitment for the next 50 years of UK-Australian bilateral defence cooperation under AUKUS Pillar I.”
- The Treaty will enable comprehensive cooperation on the design, build, operation, sustainment, and disposal of the SSN-AUKUS submarines. It will support the development of the personnel, workforce, infrastructure and regulatory systems required for Australia’s SSN-AUKUS program. It builds on the strong foundation of trilateral cooperation between Australia, the UK and the United States, advancing the shared objectives of the AUKUS partnership.

NPS ROLES

- The Treaty is consistent with Australia's and the UK's respective international nuclear non-proliferation obligations under international and Australian safeguard agreements.

17 March 2025, Media Release: The Hon Pat Conroy MP: [First trainees and apprentices commence pathways programs to grow South Australia's skilled defence industry workforce](#)

- The Defence Industry Pathways Program and the Shipbuilding Employment Pathways pilot initiatives are being delivered by the Albanese Government in partnership with the Malinauskas Government. The programs commenced with a first cohort of 30 trainees and apprentices on 17 March 2025.
- Almost 300 more young South Australians will have access to the new training and employment pathways to equip them with skilling requirements tailored to the requirements of Australia's maritime sector.

5 March 2025, Joint Media Release: The Hon Richard Marles MP, The Hon Pat Conroy MP, The Hon Peter Malinauskas: [Major milestone for South Australia's skills and training academy](#)

- "The Albanese Government is investing \$480 million in our naval shipbuilding and submarine construction workforce with the build of the Skills and Training Academy at Osborne in South Australia."
- Ground works have now commenced at the site for the Skills and Training Academy Campus, which will be designed and delivered by Australian Naval Infrastructure (ANI). Kellogg, Brown and Root, and Architectus have been engaged as design partners.
- The design and build will also be supported by Australia's Sovereign Submarine Build Partners, BAE Systems and ASC Pty Ltd.
- The design of the Skills and Training Academy Campus will simulate the submarine construction yard, providing hands-on skills and classroom-based learning. The facility will include trade workshops, state of the art classrooms and a large central submarine mock-up area.

10 February 2025, Joint Media Release: The Hon Richard Marles MP, The Hon Pat Conroy MP: [Australian defence industry reaping the benefits of AUKUS trade reforms](#)

- "Australian businesses are already seeing the benefits of the export licence-free environment the Albanese Government established with the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) on 1 September 2024."
- "In less than six months, these generational reforms have provided over 210 companies across Australia with unprecedented access to the world's largest defence markets and have already facilitated over \$25 million in licence-free exports to the UK and the US."
- These reforms will support advanced scientific, technological and industrial cooperation under the AUKUS pact. To implement these reforms and increase industry engagement, \$28 million was committed in the 2024-25 Budget.

21 January 2025, Joint Media Release: the Hon Richard Marles MP, The Hon Pat Conroy MP: [Supporting Australian Industry to join AUKUS submarine supply chains](#)

NPS ROLES

- “The Albanese Labor Government is investing an additional \$262 million to support local defence industry uplift and develop Australia’s AUKUS nuclear-powered submarine supply chain.”
- Over the next two years the Albanese Government will fund a range of initiatives to uplift our local defence industry, supporting around 125 businesses across Australia to invest in their own capabilities to meet the high standards of submarine build and sustainment activities in AUKUS nations.
- This investment comes as the AUKUS Naval Nuclear Propulsion Agreement, signed last August, enters into force. The Agreement will enable the transfer of Virginia-class submarines from the US to Australia from the 2030s, as well as the transfer of information and equipment from the UK for use in Australia’s SSN-AUKUS submarines

16 October 2024, Joint Media Release: The Hon Anthony Albanese MP, The Hon Richard Marles MP, The Hon Pat Conroy MP: [New Defence Precinct at Henderson to deliver continuous naval shipbuilding and nuclear-powered submarine maintenance | Defence Ministers](#)

- “The Albanese Government will establish a consolidated Commonwealth-owned Defence Precinct at Western Australia’s Henderson shipyard to underpin tens of billions of dollars of investment in defence capabilities in the West over the next two decades and support in the order of 10,000 well-paid, high-skilled local jobs”.
- “It also represents a major milestone on the AUKUS pathway as Australia develops the capability to safely and securely own, operate and sustain conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarines”.
- “..the Defence Precinct at Henderson will be the home of depot-level maintenance and contingency docking for Australia’s future conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarines. These vital maintenance capabilities will be established at Henderson in accordance with domestic processes and regulatory requirements, and consistent with Australia’s international obligations to maintaining the highest standards for nuclear safety, security and safeguards”.

“The Albanese Government will make an initial investment of \$127 million over three years to progress planning, consultations, preliminary design and feasibility studies as well as enabling works for the Defence Precinct at Henderson. This work will inform future decisions on delivery options and models for the Defence Precinct at Henderson”.

Relevant Media Reporting

- [Australian Government and industry partners reach SSN-AUKUS agreement - ASC](#), 18 December 2024, ASC.
- [US launches AUKUS review to ensure it meets Donald Trump's 'America First' agenda - ABC News](#), 12 June, ABC News.
- [Joint Statement on the Australia-UK Nuclear-Powered Submarine Partnership and Collaboration Treaty - GOV.UK](#), 26 July 2025, Ministry of Defence, UK Government.
- [Defence Housing Australia Act amended to expand housing and related services offering](#), 29 August 2025, DHA.

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