

Senate Estimates – February 2026

Director-General ASA – Opening Statement

INTRODUCTION

Thank you Chair, Vice Admiral Jonathan Mead, Director-General Australian Submarine Agency.

We have had a busy and productive start to the year, with 2026 set to be a pivotal year for Australia's path to delivering a nuclear-powered submarine capability.

TRILATERAL PARTNERSHIP

The program is full steam ahead with full commitment of all AUKUS partners.

The recent United States review into AUKUS has not slowed our progress. Cooperation across design, industrial integration, workforce development and capability planning has continued at pace, demonstrating the maturity and resilience of the partnership.

The partnership was reaffirmed at the fourth AUKUS Defence Ministers Meeting in Washington on 11 December 2025.

UK SUBMARINE MAINTENANCE PERIOD

We are working towards another significant milestone in the first quarter of 2026, where HMAS *Stirling* will host a maintenance period for a visiting UK Astute class submarine. This will be another major step deepening Australia's readiness for Submarine Rotational Force-West which we are on track to commence by the end of 2027.

This Submarine Maintenance Period will allow Navy, ASC and industry personnel to further develop skills and practical experience working on, and supporting a nuclear-powered submarine at the home of Australia's submarines. These activities also reinforce the disciplined approach to safety and stewardship that underpins all work on nuclear powered

submarines, reflecting the standards long upheld by our US and UK partners.

It will allow our people to test their training in real-world operations, strengthen our ability to deliver complex maintenance activities, and importantly, broaden Australia's experience by working on another class of nuclear-powered submarine.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure delivery across the country continues to accelerate as the nuclear-powered submarine enterprise moves from planning into execution.

At HMAS *Stirling*, construction is ramping up with priority works progressing across operational berths, radiological material management capabilities, upgraded security, new living-in accommodation, logistics facilities and improved base entry. The scale of activity on Garden Island reflects a workforce and an enterprise rapidly moving from preparation into delivery.

That momentum is mirrored at Osborne. Enabling works, the Production Demonstration Facilities and the Skills and Training Academy Campus are all progressing strongly. Full-scale construction of the wider shipyard is scheduled to commence shortly, and the Skills and Training Academy continues to progress toward delivery for the first training cohort expected in 2028.

INDUSTRY

Industry integration remains a central focus of the enterprise, with strong progress already underway. The Defence Industry Vendor Qualification and Australian Submarine Supplier Qualification Programs are accelerating the entry of Australian companies into UK and US submarine supply chains. The continuity and expanding maturity of these initiatives ensures Australian industry is prepared to meet the long-term demands of the program.

As announced by the Minister for Defence Industry on 23 January 2026, the Australian Submarine Agency has supported grants to eight Australian companies to support the AUKUS nuclear-powered submarine program.

These investments are strengthening the capability of Australian suppliers to meet the future requirements of nuclear-powered submarine build and sustainment, and to compete for opportunities within UK and US supply chains.

WORKFORCE

Workforce growth continues to be one of the enterprise's most significant achievements. The ASA now comprises of roughly [1000] people, with APS, ADF, contractors and experts from the US and the UK supporting Australia's capability uplift.

More than 170 Royal Australian Navy personnel have undertaken US nuclear-powered submarine training, with around 70 now serving aboard Virginia class submarines. This month, the next group of Royal Australian Navy submarine officers will graduate from the Submarine Officer Basic Course at Groton in the US. After completing this intensive 12-week program, officers are assigned to submarines, bringing new skills, operational understanding and readiness into the fleet.

The ASA is working closely with the UK and US Governments and industry partners to place personnel in UK and US shipyards and facilities. As of January 2026, more than 200 ASC employees have participated in hands-on training in Pearl Harbor and 136 trainees and apprentices are participating in the Defence Industry Pathways Program and Shipbuilding Employment Pathways initiative, with more intakes scheduled this year.

By the end of 2027, approximately 300 ASC personnel will be undertaking Virginia class maintenance training in Pearl Harbor, and by 2030 around 500 ASC workers will be trained to provide maintenance for Virginia class submarines.

This ongoing uplift, supported by new trade pathways and advanced training infrastructure, is essential to building the capability required to support Australia's acquisition and sustainment of nuclear-powered submarines.

CONCLUSION

The enterprise enters 2026 with confidence and growing momentum. With the upcoming Astute class maintenance period, substantial infrastructure delivery at HMAS *Stirling*, continued growth in workforce capability, strong industry participation and deepening trilateral cooperation, we remain firmly on track to host Submarine Rotational Force West in 2027 and to deliver Australia's sovereign nuclear-powered submarine capability.

Thank you. I welcome your questions.