

Senate Estimates – October 2025

Director-General ASA – Opening Statement

Introduction

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

I thank you for allowing me to provide you with a brief opening statement.

The Australian Submarine Agency has continued to deliver at pace since I last appeared before this committee, on 26 February.

Industry Uplift

On 5 March, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Industry launched the AUKUS Submarine Industry Strategy¹.

The strategy provides Australian industry with the clarity it needs to deliver the Optimal Pathway, by creating greater demand clarity for industry to grow and enter AUKUS supply chains.

The Strategy also outlines plans to increase investment attractiveness, simplify regulation, and integrate Australian defence industry into UK and US submarine supply chains.

Already, we are seeing the strategy in action. We are making strong inroads with supply chains with six contracts awarded by the ASA under our Defence Industry Vendor Qualification program, also known by DIVQ.

This program expands and accelerates the qualification of Australian products into US and UK submarine supply chains.

In March 2025, the Government awarded a contract to HII Australia, for delivery of the Australian Submarine Supplier Qualification Pilot², which complements DIVQ.

¹ [Building a strong and resilient industrial base for Australia's submarines | Defence Ministers](#)

² [Australian Submarine Supplier Qualification Pilot Program supporting local business | Defence Ministers](#)

Collaborating with HII Australia uniquely positions the ASA to support Australian suppliers to enter the supply chain for HII Newport News Shipbuilding, the US's biggest shipbuilder.

Eight (8) businesses are already qualified through this pilot, and these businesses are now progressing toward full product qualification, which positions them to supply not only the US submarine fleet but also aircraft carrier programs.

This is an extraordinary leap for Australian industry, and highlights how through the AUKUS partnership, we are making our supply chains stronger and more resilient.

Workforce Uplift

Another key line of focus of the AUKUS Submarine Industry Strategy is growing our skilled workforce.

Ensuring Australia has the workforce to deliver this program remains our biggest challenge, and it is a challenge we are continuing to meet.

Australian industry and Navy personnel continue to build critical experience through targeted international placements.

Over 170 Royal Australian Navy personnel have undertaken US nuclear-powered submarine training.

Around 65 of them have completed training and are now building experience on US Navy SSNs.

To put this in perspective, it takes roughly 134 submariners to crew a Virginia class submarine, and already Australia has around half a crew trained and serving on these submarines.

By 2030, we expect to have 400 Royal Australian Navy officers and sailors trained and ready to serve.

Our industry figures are equally impressive.

Right now, there are around 170 employees of ASC learning hands-on, day-to-day maintenance of Virginia class submarines in Pearl Harbor.

By the end of this year, the number of ASC workers training in Pearl Harbor will rise to approximately 200.

This will increase again to 300 workers by the end of 2027.

By 2030, around 500 ASC workers will be trained to provide maintenance on Virginia class submarines.

I want to stress that these are largely new recruits, not drawn from the Collins-class workforce.

Australian workers are gaining hands-on experience in nuclear-powered submarine maintenance, and these skills will be tested further during upcoming SSN visits.

Supporting these maintenance visits provides vital training and certification for Australian workers.

The maintenance visits also serve as operational milestones in preparing Australia to host and maintain nuclear-powered submarines ahead of the commencement of Submarine Rotational Force – West from 2027.

At the same time, we also have a comprehensive suite of workforce development initiatives underway across the broader nuclear-powered submarine enterprise to support Australia's workforce uplift.

These initiatives span the full pipeline, from education and entry-level skilling to advanced training infrastructure and international collaboration.

Thousands of Commonwealth Supported Places have been provided to universities through the NPS Student Pathways Program with 3,000 undergraduate scholarships for students studying STEM soon to be available through the new Australian Submarine Scholarship Program – Propel – alongside new postgraduate and industry-linked nuclear education offerings.

Entry-level and trade pathways are expanding through programs such as the Defence Industry Pathways Program and the Shipbuilding Employment Pathways initiative, with targeted skilling in areas like welding, non-destructive testing, and STEM cadetships.

Australia is also adopting international best practice through initiatives such as the Train the Trainer pilot, which is helping accelerate trades training using insights from the US Accelerated Training in Defense Manufacturing model.

Across Australia, we are also investing in domestic skilling initiatives, including the Western Australia's Defence TAFE Centre of Excellence and the Propel program, which will offer grants to support early-career pathways into the submarine enterprise.

At Osborne in South Australia, construction is progressing on the Skills and Training Academy Campus, which will serve as the national hub for high-tech education and training.

I was pleased to join the Deputy Prime Minister and the Premier of South Australia in March to mark the commencement of construction.

On a return visit shortly after, I saw first-hand the pace of progress. The Academy will be central to preparing the future workforce for nuclear-powered submarine construction and continuous naval shipbuilding.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure enabling works are also underway at the Osborne shipyard site, and the design of the new shipyard is progressing at pace to support the future build of SSN-AUKUS submarines.

In Western Australia, the first tranche of works has commenced at HMAS *Stirling* to prepare for the rotational presence of UK and US nuclear-powered submarines, and to support Australia's sovereign SSN capability.

These works are essential to ensuring we are ready to host and maintain visiting submarines from 2027.

Trilateral partnerships

The AUKUS partnership continues to mature, underpinned by a shared commitment to delivering a sovereign, trilateral submarine capability.

A key milestone in this evolution was the signing of the Geelong Treaty between Australia and the United Kingdom on 26 July.

Officially known as the Nuclear-Powered Submarine Partnership and Collaboration Agreement, the treaty strengthens cooperation on the design, build, operation, and sustainment of SSN-AUKUS submarines.

It also reaffirms our joint commitment to nuclear safety, security, and non-proliferation.

Complementing the AUKUS Naval Nuclear Propulsion Agreement, which entered into force in January, the treaty further enables industrial integration, port visits, and the rotational presence of UK Astute-class submarines at HMAS *Stirling*.

At the same time, we acknowledge the review of AUKUS currently underway within the United States Administration.

We note this review is consistent with similar reviews that were conducted by the incoming governments in Australia and the UK.

I would emphasise that the program continues to move forward. As reflected in these remarks, there are no brakes being applied.

Conclusion

As the program advances, so too does the Australian Submarine Agency.

Our workforce is not only growing in size but we are maturing in capability.

We continue to sharpen our focus, streamline accountabilities, and ensure we are positioned to attract and retain the specialised skills needed to support the Nuclear-Powered Submarine Program into the future.

This internal evolution reflects the momentum across the broader enterprise.

Thanks to the dedication of ASA staff and our partners across government, industry, and Defence, we remain firmly on track.

We remain on track to host Submarine Rotational Force – West from 2027.

We remain on track to commence the build of SSN-AUKUS submarines at Osborne by the end of the decade.

And we remain on track to deliver the infrastructure, industry, and workforce needed to support and sustain this capability; a capability that will strengthen our national security and regional stability for decades to come.

Thank you again for your time, and I welcome your questions.

[ENDS]