

Senate Estimates – December 2025

Director-General ASA – Opening Statement

INTRODUCTION

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

I last appeared before this committee just two months ago, and in that short time, the pace of progress in advancing Australia's nuclear-powered submarine program has accelerated significantly.

SUBMARINE MAINTENANCE PERIOD

On 28 October, we marked another significant milestone in Australia's journey to operate and maintain conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarines.

Over a four-week period, HMAS *Stirling* hosted the Submarine Maintenance Period for USS Vermont.

Unlike last year's tendered maintenance period, this year work was carried out without a tender ship, meaning Australian personnel assumed greater responsibility for executing complex maintenance activities on site.

During this maintenance period, personnel from the Royal Australian Navy and ASC worked alongside their US counterparts to action more than 160 maintenance tasks.

To give you some insight of the depth and breadth of the maintenance period, tasks ranged from pure water generation to welding, from paint and blast services to rigging and slinging services.

Over **170 RAN submarine officers and sailors** have trained in the US, with around **70 now serving aboard Virginia-class submarines**; including **13 Australians on USS Vermont**.

Approximately 200 **ASC workers have also trained at Pearl Harbor**, and many were back in Australia applying their skills to deliver this demanding maintenance program.

This is how we build capability: by doing the work, underpinned by rigorous safety protocols and nuclear stewardship, drawing on 70 years of US and UK experience.

The presence of US and UK personnel at *Stirling* reflects the strength of our collaboration and the shared commitment to building capability together.

Planning is already underway for the next Submarine Maintenance Period with a UK Astute-class submarine, which will deepen our experience and readiness as we prepare for Submarine Rotational Force-West in 2027.

These maintenance periods are more than milestones.

They are proof points of progress.

They deepen our partnership with AUKUS allies and deliver the sovereign capability that will strengthen Australia's defence for decades to come.

INDUSTRY

Coupled with this achievement, we are seeing remarkable innovation from Australian industry.

Even during the Submarine Maintenance Period, local companies were front and centre, with Western Australian firms MAK Water and Diverse Welding designing and delivering a world-first mobile pure water plant, meeting stringent US and UK standards, and delivering over **10,000 gallons of pure water**.

This is Australian ingenuity in action, solving complex challenges and setting new benchmarks.

Beyond sustainment, Australia is making strong inroads into AUKUS supply chains.

Just weeks ago, the Government announced HIFraser as the first Australian company qualified to supply components for US Virginia-class submarines through the **Defence Industry Vendor Qualification Program**.

HI Fraser is now **approved to deliver three valve types and pipe fittings** into US submarine programs: an achievement delivered in less than 12 months from contract award to qualification.

And we're not stopping there. Beyond qualification successes, Australian businesses are now gaining unprecedented access to the technical data that underpins US submarine programs. Just weeks ago, around 30 Australian companies participated in an ASA-hosted Industry Day, enabled by the AUKUS licence-free environment. This milestone opens the door for local firms to enter advanced submarine supply chains and aligns with the Defence Industry Vendor Qualification Program, accelerating Australian integration into US and UK programs.

Last month at the **IndoPac Maritime Exposition**, the ASA led meaningful dialogue to shape Australia's future submarine capability.

Through a tailored program, we brought together experts to explore strategic priorities, industry initiatives, and workforce developments.

The message was clear: industry is eager, informed, and ready to step up.

Together with our partners, these efforts are positioning Australian businesses to seize opportunities and play a central role in delivering one of the most complex capabilities in our nation's history.

These successes reflect the momentum of the AUKUS Submarine Industry Strategy, which is embedding Australian capability into US and UK supply chains, creating high-value jobs, and strengthening our sovereign capability.

It builds on earlier wins under DIVQ and the Australian Submarine Supplier Qualification Pilot, which now has eight businesses progressing toward full qualification for US submarine and aircraft carrier programs.

AGENCY AND PEOPLE

These milestones show how far we've come, and they reflect the dedication of our people, who are working tirelessly to deliver this program.

As shown in our recent census results, that commitment remains strong, with **84 per cent of staff believing in the purpose** and objectives of the Agency and committed to our goals.

At the same time, our results show we have work to do on **internal communications, health and wellbeing, and strengthening the connection** between senior leadership and staff across the Agency.

Cultural change takes time and is a long-term commitment.

As a new Agency with a growing and dispersed workforce, our culture is still evolving and will continue to mature as we grow.

I am committed, as is my leadership team, to building a culture where every member of the ASA feels supported, connected, and empowered to succeed as we grow together.

This is a critical program for Australia, and I recognise it places high demands on our workforce.

My goal is to ensure we also provide equally high support for our people.

CONCLUSION

In June next year, I will conclude my tenure as Director-General of the Australian Submarine Agency.

My role in Australia's journey toward a nuclear-powered submarine capability has been one of the greatest privileges of my career.

Over the coming months, my focus remains unwavering: driving the program forward as we prepare for critical milestones, including Submarine Rotational Force - West in 2027.

This is a national endeavour, and I will continue to give everything to ensure continuity, momentum, and success for Australia's nuclear-powered submarine capability.

Thank you, and I welcome your questions.