



Australian Government

Defence

**Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence
and Trade – Defence Sub-Committee**
Inquiry into the Department of Defence
Annual Report 2023-24

Department of Defence
Supplementary Submission

October 2025

Sovereign Defence Industrial Priorities

Defence has commenced the development of the next iteration of the Defence Industry Development Strategy (DIDS) for release in 2026. The update will ensure alignment with the National Defence Strategy (NDS) and Integrated Investment Program (IIP).

The 2026 DIDS will ensure the Detailed Sovereign Defence Industrial Priorities remain fit for purpose and effectively signal the Australian Government's priorities to Australian industry.

Continuous Naval Shipbuilding and Sustainment

The 2024 Naval Shipbuilding and Sustainment Plan contains several Industrial Cornerstones designed to inform the uplift of the maritime industrial base, including the Sea Systems Implementation Program. The Sea Systems Implementation Program aims to manage, monitor and support the achievement of the Continuous Naval Shipbuilding and Sustainment (CNSS) Sovereign Defence Industrial Priority, as set out in the DIDS. Moving forward, Defence will conduct rolling assessments and implement solutions for mission critical components for the existing fleet, to achieve value for money outcomes that drive resilience in the supply chain and support ADF preparedness priorities.

Enhanced self-reliance and resilience of guided weapons and explosive ordnance

The Australian Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance (GWEO) Plan (the GWEO Plan), released on 30 October 2024, is the public statement of intent for the GWEO Enterprise, setting out its objectives, initiatives, resources, and operating principles. A domestic GWEO industrial base is critical to the success of the GWEO Plan.

Under the GWEO Plan, the Government has prioritised four initial manufacturing projects linked to building domestic defence industrial capacity:

- Naval Strike Missile and Joint Strike Missile Production;
- Guided Weapons Production Capability—Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS);
- Large Calibre (155mm) Munitions Manufacturing; and
- Solid Rocket Motor Manufacturing.

Implementation of these priority projects is well underway:

- Construction has started with Kongsberg Defence Australia for a purpose built factory in Newcastle, New South Wales for the production and maintenance of the Naval Strike Missile and Joint Strike Missile. Production will commence in 2027, reaching full rate production in 2028.
- The Commonwealth and Lockheed Martin Australia are in contract for the GMLRS Risk Reduction Activity, with initial manufacture of the first batch of GMLRS missiles commencing in Defence facilities by the end of 2025.
 - A larger Australian Weapons Manufacturing Complex will be operational by 2029, with the permanent infrastructure capable of producing up to 4,000 GMLRS missiles per annum.
- A Request for Tender to forge 155mm M795 artillery shells has been released and is expected to be finalised in Quarter 1 2026.

In December 2024, the Request for Information on the manufacture of rocket motors closed, with responses used to inform a strategy to establish a domestic Rocket Motor Manufacturing capability.

Innovation, research and advanced capability acceleration

The Advanced Strategic Capabilities Accelerator (ASCA) was established on 1 July 2023 to accelerate the development asymmetric capabilities for the ADF. With investment of up to \$3.8 billion over the next decade, ASCA, in partnership with industry and research organisations, aims to rapidly pull-through disruptive technologies to deliver game changing capabilities. ASCA is a key element of the Defence Innovation, Science and Technology Program, supporting capability acquisition reform through more flexible and agile contracting mechanisms.

ASCA's key outcomes since February 2025 include:

- ASCA, now part of the Vice Chief of the Defence Force (VCDF) Group, is a key element of Australia's Defence innovation efforts to accelerate the development and delivery of minimum viable capabilities into operational use.
- ASCA's transition to the VCDF Group builds on its progress to date and formalises the relationships between operational requirements and technological innovation as well as capability integration, development, management and sustainment;
- The ASCA Mission process has evolved, working in close collaboration with Service Capability and Delivery Managers to establish Mission business cases that will ensure the capabilities being developed are well-aligned with Defence priorities and transition into future IIP pathways;
- ASCA is now executing five missions; three are in contract with vendors, and two expected to reach contract in 2025; and
- ASCA continues to grow its collaboration with Australian industry and research organisations, through its Missions program and by strengthening its outreach program through industry briefings and engaging with Office Defence Industry Support (ODIS).

ASCA's Missions align with Defence's strategic priorities, as determined by the VCDF, and the Mission specifications agreed by relevant Capability Managers. ASCA's Missions Program is accelerating the delivery of innovative solutions by partnering with industry to transform disruptive technologies into operational capabilities that directly address Defence's highest priorities. Recent ASCA missions such as, Black Thorn, Talon-Strike and Syracuse demonstrate ASCA's focus on rapidly developing asymmetric capabilities to strengthen Australia's strategic advantage. Additional missions are in development.

The ASCA Innovation Incubation program is addressing capability priorities by rapidly adapting, testing and acquiring technologies through short-term, lower cost projects. As a direct outcome of the DIDS, ASCA hosted Pitch Days that provide an opportunity for industry and academia to showcase innovative technologies and solutions to Defence. ASCA hosted the inaugural Pitch Day on 18 September 2024 and will host the second on 3 November 2025. In addition, ASCA facilitated the Sovereign Uncrewed Aerial System Challenge and initiated the AUKUS Maritime Innovation Challenge in March 2025.

The Emerging and Disruptive Technologies program is delivered by Defence Science and Technology Group and focuses on long-term research partnerships that will benefit future Defence capability. During 2024 and 2025, ASCA announced over \$65 million in quantum and information warfare contracts across 24 industry and academic partners.

Under the DIDS, ASCA is implementing a number of actions that will harness the innovation ecosystem and partner with industry and academia to identify and develop capabilities that address Defence's highest and most urgent strategic capability priorities, including:

- developing and implementing a new approach to identifying, validating, and articulating problem statements so it can partner with industry to accelerate capability delivery;
- establishing methods to identify and partner with non-traditional sectors to expedite delivery of priority capability solutions;
- developing a pre-agreed acquisition pathway to fast-track the transition of minimum viable capabilities into operational use; and
- communicating priorities for innovation at least annually in the form of ASCA problem, innovation or opportunity statements.

ASCA is responding to the DIDS by establishing and bedding down its operational model and processes and has developed a rolling program of activities for industry participation.

ASCA's priorities remain:

- increasing the number of missions being delivered;
- enabling more effective industry engagement through efficient co-design and procurement processes;
- deepening and harmonising Australia's Defence innovation systems with AUKUS partners, commencing with formalising a partnership arrangement with the US Defense Innovation Unit (DIU);
- refining ASCA's operating model, governance and organisation structure based on lessons learned; and
- continuing to better align and integrate with the Defence enterprise and One Defence Capability System.

AUKUS

AUKUS Pillar I including the delivery of the AUKUS Optimal Pathway is progressing under the Australian Submarine Agency. The Department of Defence is progressing work on Pillar II.

The AUKUS partnership continued to build on the decades of close defence cooperation between Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). AUKUS Pillar II harnesses the ingenuity of AUKUS partner nations to deliver asymmetric capabilities needed to maintain Australia's, and its partners', military edge in the Indo-Pacific. It continued to strengthen our partnerships to contribute collectively to security in the Indo-Pacific by bolstering Australia's deterrence through denial and delivering tangible capability. AUKUS Pillar II also drove greater integration between the three countries' innovation, capability and acquisition systems.

AUKUS Pillar II continued to develop capability faster and more effectively than any one of the nations could achieve alone. Partners have had successes in enhancing undersea strike and reconnaissance by integrating the ability to launch and recover undersea vehicles from each other's submarine torpedo tubes. They are developing common advanced artificial intelligence algorithms for deployment on P8-A Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft to process data from each nations' sonobuoys – giving our anti-submarine operators the ability to make superior decisions in near-real time.

AUKUS Pillar II partner nations have accelerated the development of quantum technology for precision navigation and timing in military capability, using superior Australian atomic clock technology. AUKUS Pillar II partner nations also accelerated the testing of hypersonic vehicles and related technologies under the Hypersonic Flight Test and Experimentation Project Arrangement.

Through the Maritime Big Play experiment and exercise series, AUKUS partner nations have tested and refined their ability to jointly operate uncrewed maritime systems, share and process data, and provide real-time maritime domain awareness in support of decision making. AUKUS partners conducted several collaborative Maritime Big Play demonstrations in July 2025 at Exercise TALISMAN SABRE 2025, including:

- Live testing to advance the AUKUS Secure Interoperable Acoustic Communication (ASIAC) capability;
- Demonstration of the ability to task the Speartooth Large Uncrewed Underwater Vehicle, as well as the pooling of satellite communication and acoustic communication to share information with an underwater uncrewed vehicle (UUV) using “gateways”; and
- Demonstration of the ability for Australia to transfer mission control of a UK extra-large autonomous underwater vehicle, located in the UK, back to the UK remotely from Australia.

Importantly, Defence has deepened trilateral industry engagement to increase the speed and scale of capability delivery, including through the Advanced Capabilities Industry Forum. On 1 September 2024, the *Australia's Defence Trade Controls Amendment Act 2024* came into effect. As a direct result, the industry, higher education and research sectors in Australia, the UK and the US have been able to export and supply most military and dual-use goods, technologies and services among and between AUKUS partners without requiring a permit or licence.

These reforms unlock opportunities to enable industrial collaboration, fielding cutting-edge defence technologies through cooperation and co-development. Sectors can now share, innovate and collaborate on most defence technologies together without the need to apply for licences under each country's export control regimes.

Progress on the transformation to an integrated focused force

Since our February 2025 Submission to the Subcommittee, Defence has continued to implement the 2024 NDS and accompanying 2024 IIP. Progress includes:

- Investment of \$1.7 billion to acquire dozens of Ghost Shark autonomous undersea drones capable of intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and strike operations, as well as the ability to be armed with torpedoes and sea mines;
 - The Ghost Shark platforms will be delivered through a five year contract with Anduril, with more than 40 Australian companies working as part of the Ghost Shark supply chain;
 - The Ghost Shark autonomous undersea drones will deliver a significant boost to Australia's undersea warfare capabilities and complement Navy's future surface combatant fleet and conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarines;
- Defence has accelerated the delivery of a larger and more lethal surface combatant fleet with the selection of the upgraded Japanese Mogami class frigate as the preferred platform for Navy's future fleet of general purpose frigates;
- A continuous schedule of shipbuilding work in Western Australia has been developed, including through the execution of the Strategic Shipbuilding Agreement with Australia's newly established Strategic Shipbuilder, Austal Defence Shipbuilding Australia Pty Ltd;
- A Precision Strike Missile has been successfully fired for the first time at the Mount Bunday Training Area in the Northern Territory, making progress towards boosting Australia's long-range strike capability;
- An Australia-US Memorandum of Understanding has been signed for production, sustainment and follow-on development of the Precision Strike Missile;
- Investment of up to \$2.1 billion has been made for additional stocks of advanced AIM-120D-3 and AIM-120C-8 medium-range missiles, designed to counter threats at extended ranges. This acquisition is through the US Foreign Military Sales Program;
- The first Arafura Class offshore patrol vessel, HMAS *Arafura*, has been commissioned;
- An MQ-28A Ghost Bat capability demonstration has been completed at Woomera, involving a single operator aboard an airborne E-7A Wedgetail aircraft taking control of two Ghost Bat aircraft to conduct a mission against an airborne target;
- The Minister for Defence Industry, the Hon Pat Conroy MP, announced an initial rolling wave of contracts to 11 vendors, including five Australian companies, to rapidly deliver counter-drone technologies through Project LAND 156;
 - The Minister for Defence Industry also announced additional contracts to 20 vendors, including 14 Australian companies;
 - Leidos Australia was appointed the LAND 156 Systems Integration Partner in a contract valued at \$45.9 million;
- Initial tests were recently completed on the first MQ-4C Triton remotely piloted aircraft system, based at RAAF Base Tindal, Northern Territory and the second and third aircraft arrived at the facility in May 2025;

- AIM Defence were awarded a \$4.9 million contract to provide the Fractl Portable High Energy Laser system to Defence for test and evaluation; and
- Trials to further develop drone systems were conducted at Exercise TALISMAN SABRE 2025 in July 2025 including:
 - The 1st Armoured Regiment testing the optionally crewed M113AS4 Modular Robotic Vehicle with remote weapon stations, and first-person view drones, for the first time in a combat field environment; and
 - The Integrator Tactical drone, operated by Army's 20th Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery which was deployed to conduct operational testing and evaluation as part of its introduction into service.

As part of the biennial National Defence Strategy cycle, Defence's current force design processes include an Integrated Capability Assessment to identify capability requirements and opportunities, and re-evaluate factors that determine the relative priority of Defence capability projects. The assessment takes Government direction and priorities, and uses a threat-informed, strategy-led, evidence-based approach to develop a comprehensive understanding of the strategic landscape and the risks it presents to Defence missions and tasks.

During an Integrated Capability Assessment, Defence analyses the current Integrated Force over a ten-year timespan. Options are developed to address risks and are present as force structure options and opportunities for inclusion in the IIP. The options and proposed changes consider capability development and delivery schedules, and fiscal implications.

Defence prioritises projects within the IIP to deliver an integrated, focused force structure by considering:

- How a capability, and its dependent capabilities, contribute to treating the risks to Defence's prioritised missions and tasks, based on Government's strategic objectives, articulated through the 2024 NDS;
- How delivery of a defined minimum viable capability for each project can be accomplished in conjunction with delivery schedules of interdependent projects to optimise delivery of integrated capabilities for Defence with the 2024 IIP budget for each year; and
- The extent to which a project aligns with key Defence policies and objectives, including the focus to bring priority warfighting capabilities into service as quickly as possible, and the links to the DIDS.

Defence has commenced work, including across government, to support the development of the Australian Government's 2026 NDS.

Australian International Defence Cooperation and Competition

The 2024 NDS recognises increasing strategic competition is a primary feature in Australia's security environment and will likely have the greatest impact on the regional strategic balance. While this has global implications, competition is particularly consequential in the Indo-Pacific. In this complex environment, strong global partnerships are critical to protect Australia's economic connection to the world and support the global rules-based order.

Through the conduct of bilateral and multilateral engagement, Defence international cooperation aims to promote regional and global security and stability to support a framework for strategic balance in our region.

Increasing strategic competition between the US and China is playing out in military and non-military spheres, including economic and diplomatic. Australia's alliance with the US remains fundamental to our national security. Defence will continue to deepen and expand its cooperation with the US, including by pursuing greater scientific, technological and industrial cooperation, as well as enhancing cooperation under force posture initiatives.

Since the February 2025 Submission Defence stepped up its international cooperation to deliver outcomes on regional security and stability and to strengthen deterrence, as directed by the 2024 NDS, including:

United States Alliance

AUSMIN is Australia's principal forum for consultation with the US, reinforcing the alliance and deepening foreign security and defence cooperation. Australia is working at pace with the US to progress priorities agreed at AUSMIN 2024, including:

- progression of upgrades at key Australian bases, including RAAF Bases Darwin and Tindal, and site surveys for potential upgrades at RAAF Bases Curtin, Learmonth, and Scherger;
- conduct of US rotations of fighter aircraft in July 2024, bombers in August 2024, and maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft in March 2025;
- enhancement to the complexity and duration of US Army watercraft rotations to Australia in July 2024;
- welcome of the 14th Marine Rotational Force – Darwin rotation in April 2025, which trained and exercised in Australia and the region, including with the Philippines; and
- during Exercise TALISMAN SABRE 2025 in July 2025, integration of new capabilities and testing of new operating assumptions, including through amphibious training activities at the Shoalwater Bay Training Area in Queensland.

China

It is in the interests of both Australia and China for the bilateral relationship to stabilise. Australia continues to engage in defence dialogue with China. Australia–China defence dialogue occurs principally between ministers, respective defence attachés, Australian defence officials and the People’s Liberation Army Office for International Military Cooperation. Recent engagements with China have included:

- In June 2024, the Deputy Prime Minister met his Chinese counterpart – the Minister for National Defence, Admiral Dong Jun – at the Shangri-La Dialogue;
- On 17 October 2024, Australia and China held the Defence Coordination Dialogue in Beijing, at the First Assistant Secretary level;
- On 17 February 2025, the Vice Chief of the Defence Force and Deputy Secretary Strategy, Policy and Industry led the Australian delegation for the 23rd Defence Strategic Dialogue in Beijing, China;
- On 13 August 2025, the Chief of the Defence Force Admiral Johnston AC RAN met the Chief of Staff of the Joint Staff Department, General Liu Zhenli, in Beijing, China; and
- During the period 17 to 19 September 2025, a Defence Official represented Australia at the 2025 Beijing Xiangshan Forum – a China-hosted international security dialogue.

Australia continues to engage alongside the People’s Liberation Army in select multilateral fora.

The Pacific

In the Pacific, Defence further deepened security partnerships, through which Defence builds capability, promote interoperability and enable Pacific-led responses to Pacific security challenges. The 2023–24 Defence Cooperation Program budget for the Pacific region, which marked its 50th anniversary in 2023, grew to \$248.261 million, an increase of \$72.821 million since 2022–23. It continued to enable a suite of activities such as education, training, personnel exchanges, capacity building, military secondments, strategic dialogues, visits, infrastructure, maritime asset sustainment support, and exercises and operations.

The planned Defence Cooperation Program Pacific expenditure in 2025-26 is \$335 million, increased from the actual expenditure of \$314.7 million in 2024-25. This primarily consists of increases to the budget for maintenance and sustainment of both the Guardian Class patrol boats (GPBs) (\$65 million) and gifted infrastructure (\$30 million).

On 6 October 2025, Prime Minister, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP and the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Prime Minister, the Hon James Marape formally signed the 'Puk Puk' Mutual Defence Treaty – Australia's first new alliance in more than 70 years. The core principles of the Treaty include:

- a mutual defence Alliance which recognises an armed attack on Australia or PNG would be a danger to the peace and security of both countries;
- the expansion and modernisation of our defence relationship, including by setting out our shared ambition to establish a recruitment pathway for PNG citizens into the ADF;
- enhancing our forces capability, interoperability and integration;
- ensuring any activities, agreements or arrangements with third parties would not compromise the ability of either of the Parties to implement the Treaty; and
- reaffirming both countries' absolute respect for our neighbours sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Tonga again participated in Exercise TALISMAN SABRE 2025 in July and August. A rotational company from Fiji embedded with the ADF as part of Exercise TALISMAN SABRE 2025 for five weeks during the period May to June 2025. The extended duration was a pilot program for possible future rotations from Fiji. Further afield, Australia delivered 14 Protected Mobility Vehicles to Fiji in June 2024 in support of its peacekeeping operations in the Middle East.

Defence continues to play a key role in disaster response. In July 2023, Defence deployed a RAAF C-27J Spartan aircraft under the Defence Pacific Air Program to deliver humanitarian assistance and disaster relief supplies to Bougainville in PNG following the Mount Bagana eruption. This assisted more than 8,000 displaced people in affected communities. In May 2024, the ADF also provided logistical support in response to the landslide in Enga Province, transporting emergency personnel and delivering over 115 tonnes of relief supplies.

Defence also continued to lead Operation LILIA, the ADF's contribution to the Solomons International Assistance Force (SIAF). This involved support for the peaceful delivery of the Pacific Games in November and December 2023 and Solomon Islands' elections in April 2024. Beginning in November 2021, ADF personnel deployed alongside colleagues from the Australian Federal Police, New Zealand Police, New Zealand Defence Force, Fiji Police Force, Republic of Fiji Military Forces and the Royal PNG Constabulary to support the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF). The SIAF, which ceased in August 2024, was an exemplar of the Pacific managing its own security.

In December 2024, Australia and Solomon Islands jointly announced Australia's support for the Solomon Islands to expand and enhance its sovereign policing capability. In the margins of the Pacific Island Leaders' Forum in September 2025, Prime Minister Albanese and Prime Minister Manele agreed to progress construction of a new Police Academy, a significant infrastructure project to be delivered by Defence to bolster RSIPF recruitment and training as part of the RSIPF Expansion Agreement. Defence has been working closely with the Solomon Islands Government to understand their requirements before proceeding with design works.

Also in December 2024, the updated Joint Statement on Closer Defence Relations signed at the Australia-New Zealand Ministerial Consultations (ANZMIN) strengthened Australia's longstanding defence alliance with New Zealand. Ministers committed to an increasingly integrated Anzac force, including through common capability, exchanges of senior military officers and increased participation in warfighting exercises.

At the South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting (SPDMM) in New Zealand in October 2024, Ministers endorsed the detailed concept for the Pacific Response Group (PRG) and called for it to be established immediately, at Gallipoli Barracks in Brisbane. Since its establishment and over the 2024-25 high-risk weather season, PRG personnel from six countries have undertaken joint training, deployed to Vanuatu following the earthquake in December 2024 and to regional exercises.

Australia continues to invest in regional maritime security through our \$5.9 billion, 30-year commitment to the Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP), delivering sovereign maritime capability, through-life maintenance and sustainment, training, regional coordination, aerial surveillance and infrastructure to partner nations. As at 31 August 2025, Defence has delivered 22 GPBs to Pacific maritime forces, with the remaining GPB for the Pacific to be delivered to the Republic of the Marshall Islands in January 2026.

On 2 June 2025, the Deputy Prime Minister announced the delivery of a GPB to the Republic of Maldives' Government. This vessel is the last of the production line being built here in Australia. It is currently under construction and due for completion in April 2026.

Through the PMSP, Defence is also delivering fixed wing aerial surveillance services through the Forum Fisheries Agency. On 28 June 2022, the Minister for Defence Industry announced the Government would double funding for the aerial surveillance component of the PMSP from 2024-25. The fixed wing aerial surveillance services request for tender was released in late 2024. Shortlisting and tender review is currently underway and contract award is anticipated in 2026. In March 2024, Defence handed over the Australian-built wharf in Palau and completed repairs of damage done to Mala Base Wharf in Vanuatu following tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin.

Defence's Indo-Pacific Infrastructure Program continued to deliver security-related infrastructure for and in close consultation with Pacific partners. A key milestone was the handover of Cook Barracks to the Vanuatu Mobile Force in September 2024, a boost to its operational capacity. The 28 active infrastructure projects across the Indo-Pacific not only bolster partner capability but also provide significant investment in local economies, creating skilled employment opportunities. A dedicated maintenance and sustainment sub-program ensures the value of infrastructure assets are fully realised.

Southeast Asia

Defence's engagement in Southeast Asia is framed by broad, deep and longstanding defence partnerships, with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) at the centre, providing an essential stabilising influence on regional order. To mark the 50th anniversary of ASEAN–Australia Dialogue Relations, Defence launched the Defence Partnership for the Future Statement in November 2024. It commits Australia to a number of projects, including Australia's delivery of the inaugural ASEAN–Australia Maritime Security Symposium and ASEAN–Australia Senior Defence Dialogue. Defence also expanded existing ASEAN programs to Timor-Leste, in support of its future accession to ASEAN.

In August 2024, Australia and Indonesia signed the Australia–Indonesia Defence Cooperation Agreement – the first treaty-level defence agreement between the two countries. This agreement strengthens the capacity for our militaries to work together and reflects a shared commitment to upholding the rules-based order in the region. The Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon Richard Marles MP and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator the Hon Penny Wong hosted their counterparts for the Australia-Indonesia 2+2 Foreign and the annual Defence Ministers’ Meeting in Canberra on 28 August 2025. Discussions focused on deepening defence cooperation through increased education and training exchanges, more complex joint exercises and enhanced interoperability.

2025 marks the 60th Anniversary of Australia-Singapore Diplomatic Relations. On 8 October 2025, the two countries signed an ambitious update to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership as well as agreeing to upgrade our defence security partnership via a memorandum of understanding concerning enhanced defence cooperation, which includes provisions to increase reciprocal access to each other’s facilities. Previously, on 3 December 2024, at the Singapore-Australia Joint Ministerial Committee, the Deputy Prime Minister and Singapore’s former Defence Minister, Dr Ng Eng Hen, agreed to further strengthen the defence relationship through expanded access to facilities in each country and professional cooperation between the two countries’ militaries.

On 22 August 2025, the Deputy Prime Minister held the second Australia–Philippines Defence Ministers’ Meeting. The signed Statement of Intent on enhanced defence cooperation increases interoperability and preparedness between our armed forces, and strengthens our 1995 Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperative Defence Activities.

In addition to policy engagement with Southeast Asian partners, Defence focused on exercises building more robust partner networks and increasing interoperability. On 24 August 2025, the Deputy Prime Minister visited Australian and Philippine personnel training together under Exercise ALON, Australia’s largest overseas joint training activity this year, and observed a joint amphibious landing in Palawan, the Philippines.

For the first time in our proud history, Defence welcomed Vietnam’s participation in Exercise KAKADU in September 2024; the ADF deployed fifth-generation F-35A Lightning II aircraft to Singapore, and a Navy clearance diving team to Malaysia for the Five Power Defence Arrangements’ Exercise BERSAMA LIMA 2024.

In November 2024, Australia and Indonesia participated in the largest ever joint exercise, Exercise KERIS WOOMERA, involving around 2,000 personnel. The exercise featured air, maritime, amphibious and land operations, as well as a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief evacuation scenario.

Japan

Japan is an indispensable partner for Australia to achieve regional peace and prosperity. In 2024–25, Defence strengthened strategic alignment and collaboration with Japan through key agreements, ministerial meetings and participation in regional exercises, including with the US. At the 5 September 2025 Australia-Japan 2+2 Meeting, Ministers affirmed their intention to elevate Australia and Japan's Special Strategic Partnership and re-define the direction of our cooperation for the next 50 years based on shared strategic goals.

The Australia–Japan Reciprocal Access Agreement is facilitating deeper and more sophisticated cooperation between the ADF and Japan Self-Defense Forces. The agreement underwrote 26 activities in 2024–25, including facilitating Japan’s participation in Exercises COPE NORTH and SOUTHERN JACKAROO, up from 12 activities in 2023–24.

The Australia–Japan–US trilateral partnership continued to grow and deepen cooperation. 2024–25 saw two Australia–Japan–US Trilateral Defence Ministers’ Meetings in November 2024 and May 2025. For the first time, F-35 Lightning II aircraft from Australia, Japan and the US conducted trilateral training together at Exercise COPE NORTH in February 2025, which included the first air-to-air refuelling between Japan Air Self-Defense Force KC-46As and Royal Australian Air Force F-35s. Japan also increased its participation in Australia–US force posture cooperation activities. In May 2025, 350 Japan Self-Defense Force personnel participated in Exercise SOUTHERN JACKAROO 25, up from 170 in 2024.

India and the Indian Ocean Region

India is a top-tier security partner for Australia, with the Government committed to practical and tangible cooperation that directly contributes to Indo-Pacific stability. In 2024–25, Defence achieved sustained progress with India under the defence and security pillar of our Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. At the second Australia–India Annual Leaders’ Summit in November 2024, Prime Minister Albanese and Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi expressed their intent to renew and strengthen our Joint Declaration on Defence in Security Cooperation in 2025. Significant defence engagements included: a visit to Australia by the Minister of State for Defence Shri Sanjay Seth, in September 2024, the first visit by a Defence portfolio minister in over a decade; a visit to Australia by the Indian Chief of Defence Staff, in March 2025; the Deputy Prime Minister’s visit to India in June 2025; and Indian Minister of Defence Shri Rajnath Singh’s visit to Australia in October 2025, the first by an Indian Defence Minister in 12 years, which included the signing of the two bilateral defence arrangements.

Defence enhanced cooperation on maritime domain awareness, interoperability and information sharing, to address shared maritime challenges. This included cooperation with the US and Japan through India’s hosting of Exercise MALABAR in October 2024.

To support the increasing scale and complexity of our defence activities, the Royal Australian Air Force and the Indian Armed Forces signed an air-to-air refuelling arrangement in November 2024 – India’s first with any partner. We also signed the first joint defence science and technology research project, focused on underwater towed array sonar technology.

The Northeast Indian Ocean is central to Australia’s security, straddling vital sea lines of communication. In 2024–25, Defence elevated its defence cooperation with Sri Lanka and Maldives, focused on addressing shared maritime challenges through increased training and education opportunities and gifting of sovereign capabilities. This included providing shallow-water hydrographic equipment to Sri Lanka and supporting whole-of-government efforts to gift aircraft and repair Navy vessels. In June 2025, the Deputy Prime Minister announced Australia’s commitment to gift Maldives a Guardian Class patrol vessel.

In June 2025, the Deputy Prime Minister conducted a landmark visit to Sri Lanka and Maldives. The visit to Maldives was the first by an Australian minister since the High Commission was established in Malé in 2023. Defence established annual Defence Policy Talks with Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Indo-Pacific Presence and Posture

The ADF has been maintaining its presence and posture in the Indo-Pacific, including by conducting several regional presence deployments. Indo-Pacific Endeavour is Australia's annual flagship regional engagement activity in the Southeast Asia and Northeast Indian Ocean regions. HMAS *Perth* visited Sihanoukville, Cambodia, as part of Indo-Pacific Endeavour in September 2024, Australia's first ship visit to Cambodia in three years. This visit reflects increased Navy engagement and collaboration on maritime security. Indo-Pacific Endeavour 2025 is engaging with all Association of Southeast Asian Nations (except Myanmar), plus Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste, between July 2025 and June 2026.

The ADF undertakes routine port visits, maritime surveillance flights, cooperative activities with partners, and transits to and between Southeast and North Asia. ADF vessels and aircraft exercise Australia's rights under international law to freedom of navigation and overflight, including in the South China Sea. Australia has a substantial interest in the stability of the South China Sea and the norms and laws that govern it. Defence operations support these freedoms and underpin prosperity by ensuring waterways are open for trade.

In support of regional capacity and stability, the ADF conducted exercises of varying size and complexity. These exercises demonstrate regional capability and willingness to respond in support of upholding regional norms and standards. They also contribute to collective interoperability and preparedness for a full range of crises.

The 11th iteration of Exercise TALISMAN SABRE officially concluded on 4 August 2025 at a closing ceremony in Lae, Papua New Guinea. Exercise TALISMAN SABRE 2025 involved more than 40,000 military personnel from 19 participating nations and 2 observer nations, over three weeks of intensive training and high-end warfighting scenarios across Australia, and complex training exercises in Papua New Guinea. Marking the first time that an Exercise TALISMAN SABRE component has been held outside Australia, this activity was a powerful demonstration of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force's capabilities, and Australia and the US growing interoperability with Pacific partners.

Working with partners to support a global rules-based order

Defence continues to work with key partners outside of the Indo-Pacific to focus their attention on the Indo-Pacific, support our shared global interests, advance capability and defence industry bases, and strengthen capability and interoperability.

Defence advanced cooperation with the United Kingdom through regular high-level engagement, including AUKMIN in December 2024, and a range of exercises and activities in the Indo-Pacific. Defence advanced defence cooperation with Canada, including through the Deputy Prime Minister's visit in August 2024 and through deeper defence science, technology and industry cooperation, as announced by the Prime Minister of Canada, the Rt Hon Mark Carney on 18 March 2025. On 26 July 2025 the Deputy Prime Minister and the UK Secretary of State for Defence, the Rt Hon John Healey, signed the bilateral Nuclear-Powered Submarine Partnership and Collaboration Agreement (the Geelong Treaty) – a firm commitment to the next 50 years of bilateral cooperation under AUKUS Pillar 1. Defence took forward cooperation with France, including through our inaugural Indo-Pacific Strategic Dialogue and worked closely with Carrier Strike Group deployments to the region from both the United Kingdom and France. A number of European partners participated in key Australian exercises over the reporting period.

Defence deepened engagement with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) through support for Australia's participation in the Defence Ministers' Meeting in October 2024 and Leaders' Summit in June 2025. Alongside NATO's other Indo-Pacific partners Japan, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea Defence advanced a number of flagship projects that addressed shared challenges and deepened defence industry collaboration.

Globally, the ADF continued to support security and stability in the Middle East and Africa region through contributions to United Nations and partner-led operations, including peacekeeping and observer missions and the Combined Maritime Forces activity. Under Operation BEECH, the ADF contingent continued to provide the Government with additional capabilities to assist Australian citizens and approved foreign nationals in the event of further deterioration of the security environment in the region.

The Government continued its steadfast support for Ukraine. In 2024-25, the Government provided more than \$500 million of military assistance to Ukraine, bringing the total to \$1.3 billion since Russia's full-scale invasion. Defence remained engaged in the Drone Capability Coalition and in planning led by the UK and France in support of a possible ceasefire. The ADF continued to deliver on its commitment to train personnel from the Armed Forces of Ukraine under Operation KUDU. Over 2,900 Ukrainian personnel have graduated from ADF-delivered training and more than 59,000 Ukrainians have been trained as part of the wider multinational Operation INTERFLEX.

Together, these activities bolster Australia's credibility as a regional and global security partner.