

INQUIRY QUESTION

(Question No. 01)

The Hon. Ms Lisa Chesters MP asked the Australian Submarine Agency the following question, upon notice, on 02 October 2025:

I'm just going to ask a question to take on notice, and if we could get a response—it's just to follow up on what the member for Lyne has asked and in relation to the evidence given earlier today, just for the purposes of our committee and this report. I appreciate that you may not have been able to hear the witness earlier, a UK witness, who was suggesting that there have been high levels of nuclear waste from nuclear powered submarines leaking into oceans and that that is causing environmental damage and is getting into waterway systems and into cropping. I appreciate that, in the UK, they have a much more developed nuclear industry than we do in Australia. They have a lot more community engagement and awareness. They've also had their own history and experience with nuclear. So could you take on notice the evidence given by earlier witnesses and provide us with a clarification on how, in Australia under this agreement, we would manage concerns that are being raised and then how we would publicly respond to those. Would there be a parliamentary process involved? How would the public know, if concerns are being raised, that they are being addressed? What's the transparency piece? Could you take that on notice and respond to those specific examples and how we would address them if they were to be raised in the Australian context.

The Australian Submarine Agency provides the following answer:

The Government has committed to maintaining the highest levels of nuclear safety and stewardship, including a robust purpose-built regulatory framework.

Australia has a strong nuclear stewardship record of operating nuclear facilities, conducting nuclear science activities, and handling radioactive material safely and securely for 70 years. This includes Australia's radioactive waste, which has been stored safely and securely at more than 100 locations around the country. Further, AUKUS partners are committed to the highest standards of nuclear stewardship including nuclear safety and environmental protection. The US and the UK have a 60-year unblemished record of operating nuclear-powered submarines without a reactor accident or release of radioactivity that has harmed human health or the quality of the environment.

The safe operation of naval nuclear propulsion will require the application of appropriate safety standards. Due to the nature of naval nuclear propulsion, regulatory standards align with international best practice. In addition to any regulatory obligations, the Australian Submarine Agency (ASA) recognises that environmental compliance also demonstrates responsible stewardship. Environmental monitoring will be in place to assure local communities that there are no adverse impacts to our people, the public and the environment, with the results to be published on a periodic basis.

Defence and the ASA are complying with its obligations under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, as well as other elements of applicable environmental legislation. This includes public consultation mechanisms.

Environmental protection and compliance will also be underpinned by a system of regulation calibrated to Australia's nuclear-powered submarine capability, including environmental protection aspects. This includes the regulatory frameworks and licencing regime established under the *Australian Naval Nuclear Power Safety (ANNPS) Act 2024*, and the *Australian Naval Nuclear Power Safety Regulations 2025*.

The Australian Naval Nuclear Powered Safety Regulator will be stood up on 1 November 2025. The Regulator will stand at the centre of the conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarine regulatory framework and operate within an existing system of broader regulation.