



## A message from the Secretary of the Department of Defence and the Chief of the Defence Force

14 March 2023

Colleagues,

Today marks a significant day in Defence's history.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak of the United Kingdom (UK) and President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. of the United States (US) [have today announced](#) the Optimal Pathway for Australia to acquire a conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarine (SSN) capability as soon as the early 2030s.

This is a significant moment for Australia's Defence capability. Through the Optimal Pathway Australia will transform our strategic posture, bolstering security and stability in the Indo-Pacific for decades to come.

AUKUS partners will pursue the following approach to this endeavour:

- **Embedded Personnel and Port Visits.** Beginning in 2023, Australian military and civilian personnel will embed with the UK Royal Navy, the US Navy and, subject to any necessary arrangements, within the UK and US submarine industrial bases. This will accelerate the training and development of Australian personnel to ensure our ability to work together and for Australians to take on the responsibilities associated with these programs. The US plans to increase SSN port visits to Australia from 2023, with Australian sailors joining US crews for training and development; the UK will increase visits to Australia from 2026.
- **Submarine Forward Presence.** As early as 2027, the UK and the US plan to establish a rotational presence of one UK Astute class submarine and up to four US Virginia class submarines at HMAS *Stirling* near Perth, Western Australia – this initiative will be known as 'Submarine Rotational Force-West' (SRF-West). This rotational presence will comply fully with Australia's longstanding position of no foreign bases on its territory. It will put our nations shoulder to shoulder as Australia builds the necessary operational capabilities and skills to steward and operate its own fleet of nuclear-powered submarines. Australia is launching an ambitious national effort to grow its defence and industrial workforce to support this plan.
- **Sale of US Virginia Class Submarines.** Beginning in the early 2030s, pending approval from US Congress, the US intends to sell Australia three Virginia class submarines, with the potential to sell up to two more if needed. This action is critical to continue growing Australia's ability to own and operate a fleet of SSNs, and to provide Australia with a sovereign capability at the earliest

possible date. It also ensures Australia sustains its undersea capabilities until SSN-AUKUS is ready, given the planned retirement of Australia's current fleet of submarines.

- **Build of SSN-AUKUS.** SSN-AUKUS will be the future attack submarine for both Australia and the UK. SSN-AUKUS will be based upon the UK's next-generation SSN design while incorporating cutting edge US submarine technologies, and will be built and deployed by both Australia and the UK. Australia and the UK intend to start building SSN-AUKUS in their domestic shipyards before the end of this decade. The UK intends to deliver its first SSN-AUKUS to the UK Royal Navy in the late 2030s. Australia plans to deliver the first Australian-built SSN-AUKUS to the Royal Australian Navy in the early 2040s.

Today's announcement follows an 18 month consultation period to define the Optimal Pathway for Australia to acquire this capability, while setting the highest international nuclear non-proliferation standards. Australia does not seek and will not acquire nuclear weapons. We will work with the UK and US to implement the highest standards of nuclear safety and security.

The Optimal Pathway delivers significant long-term strategic benefits for all three AUKUS partners. Importantly, we are building Australia's ability to safely own, operate, maintain and regulate a sovereign conventionally-armed SSN capability.

The Collins class submarine remains one of the most operationally capable diesel-electric submarine classes in the world and will continue to be critical to our ADF deterrence and defence capability in the coming decades as we transition to the nuclear-powered submarines.

We are getting access to this technology because we have demonstrated that we are a capable and competent Defence organisation. In particular, we acknowledge the efforts of Vice Admiral Jonathan Mead, AO RAN and the Nuclear Powered Submarine Taskforce, who have worked tirelessly in collaboration with colleagues in Defence, across Government and their UK and US counterparts to develop this Optimal Pathway.

We will continue to update you on the progress of this remarkable endeavour. In the meantime, we encourage you to familiarise yourself with this historic announcement and read the [Public Report](#).

We recognise and value the hard work of everyone across the Defence enterprise in achieving our mission. Thank you for your contribution and ongoing commitment.

Greg Moriarty  
**Secretary**  
**Department of Defence**

Angus J Campbell, AO, DSC  
**General**  
**Chief of the Defence Force**

