

Marrickville Peace Group

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Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties

on the matter of

Exchange of Naval Nuclear Propulsion Information Agreement (ENNPIA)

1. Background

Marrickville Peace Group (MPG) finds itself in general opposition to the recent agreements and arrangements between Australia, the USA and the UK, commonly referred to as AUKUS.

From the point of view of MPG, the AUKUS arrangements, in their totality, will increase existing tensions in the S.E.Asia region, making it clear that Australia now regards China as a potential, military adversary. In other words, so far from preserving peace in our region, the militate against it.

With recent comments from the Minister for Defence, the arrangements suggest that Australia has abandoned the pursuit of peace and is, instead, getting prepared to go to war, should the USA decide to interfere, military, in the dispute between the government of China and the province of Taiwan.

Assurances from the Minister that Australia is not seeking nuclear weapons lack credibility, so long as Australia refuses to endorse the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). The Nobel Peace Prize winner, the Australian-based International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) has repeatedly urged governments to sign the TPNW. Refer to <https://icanw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Brief-nuclear-submarines-Oct-2021.pdf>

2. The agreement to exchange information on naval nuclear propulsion (ENNPIA)

The announcement of an agreement was made on Monday November 22 and the period for making submission to the Treaties Committee closes on Friday November 26.

This is an extraordinarily short period time to allow for any serious consideration of the agreement – whether by members of the public, the parliament or the press. It is an objectionably tight timeframe, showing contempt for the electorate in general and actively concerned citizens in particular.

It is impossible to escape the conclusion that the government wishes to avoid public scrutiny of what is, in fact, a most crucial step in the 18-month AUKUS process.

This, alone, is a sufficient reason for the Treaties Committee to delay reaching any decision about it.

3. Argument

The acquisition of nuclear-propelled submarines, which are better suited to attack than defence, is an outstanding feature of AUKUS, and reflect Australia's willingness to engage in warfare.

Therefore, the announcement of the agreement to share naval nuclear-propulsion information, the first, and a crucial, step in this whole, regrettable process, is emphatically opposed.

Article II of the ENNPIA states:

Each Party may communicate to or exchange with the other Parties naval nuclear propulsion information as is determined to be necessary to research, develop, design, manufacture, operate, regulate, and dispose of military reactors, and may provide support to facilitate such communication or exchange, to the extent and by such means as may be mutually agreed.

This Article could open the door to a nuclear industry in Australia. Indeed, certain proponents of such a development have said as much. In the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's "The Strategist", Marcus Hellyer has written:

We'll also need an independent and highly skilled workforce that can establish and enforce the rigorous safety regime that is absolutely critical to the operation of a nuclear fleet. That regulatory workforce will need to be built almost from scratch and will need to be in place well before the first boat arrives.

It may be possible to develop that workforce without a civil nuclear sector, but it's misleading to say we won't have a nuclear industry.

Source: <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australias-nuclear-submarine-decision-leaves-more-questions-than-answers/>

By agreeing to receive information about developing, building, operating and disposing of military (nuclear) reactors, the government is making a clear and definite move towards a nuclear industry for Australia.

Establishment of a nuclear industry is an option that has been consistently rejected by the Australian people over many years. We do not need one. The common consensus is that it would pose unacceptable risks.

We note, with considerable alarm and objection, that Article II suggests that the question of disposal is a matter that can be resolved between the tripartite membership of the agreement. It suggests that decisions about disposal may be made outside Australian democratic processes.

However, for Australia the issue of disposal is unresolved and contentious. It rests primarily within the domain of the Australian electorate – and, in historical reality, within the Land Rights domain of First Nations people.

MPG wishes the Committee to record its firm opposition to the agreement, on the grounds that:-

- Australia has no need for a nuclear industry;
- this is the first step in a process that is a threat to peace in our region;
- it is an essential step in acquiring nuclear-propelled submarines;
- nuclear-propelled submarines are intended for offensive, rather than defensive purposes;
- as such, they do nothing to improve Australia's National Security interests, instead serving the military interests of the USA;
- their acquisition sets a precedent for the proliferation of such technology elsewhere in the region;
- the huge expense of the entire AUKUS project is a massive injustice when national security is threatened by pandemics and climate change, and there is only a very remote chance of any military attack on Australia.

The Committee is urged to delay making any decision on the Exchange of Naval Nuclear Propulsion Information Agreement (ENNPIA) – at least until there has been sufficient time for its' many contested aspects to be thoroughly debated.

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November 25, 2021