**Peter Garrett – Address at National Press Club – 4th November 2026**

Launch of the AUKUS public inquiry report, *Surrendering Australia: The AUKUS Deception, hosted by Greg Jennett*.

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Thanks very much Greg [Jennett] and a big welcome to everyone here.

While I acknowledge the Ngambri and Ngunnawal traditional custodians in the Canberra region, while I acknowledge Chris [Barrie] and my fellow commissioners, Carmen Lawrence, former Western Australian Premier and Federal Parliamentary colleague, Karina Lester, Yankunytjatjara leader from South Australia - it's wonderful that you're here - and Leanne Mitchell, co-CEO of the Australia Institute, and of course Chris Barrie, who will address us shortly.

I'm thanking everyone involved in a remarkable enterprise involving members of the Australian Peace and Security Forum, the Inquiry Secretariat, the many people who volunteered their time and skills, enabling us to undertake the rarest of all projects - a community-driven, comprehensive, across the nation, open to all, public inquiry - on a matter that goes to the heart of the kind of country we are and hope to be in the years ahead.

The AUKUS public inquiry shows when people roll up their sleeves and bring genuine conviction to think about, inquire and judge a matter of national importance, then things can happen.

A big shout out to everyone involved in the hearings and who submitted to our inquiry. We witnessed the best expression of love and concern that we could have hoped for, and I note in passing, all done without drawing down on the public purse at all. This alone marked AUKUS and the public inquiry as a substantial achievement.

Why was the inquiry undertaken? How did it play out? And what have we found?

It came about because it is the biggest ever defence deal in our modern history with two key features.

The first feature, the vast amounts involved, an initial figure of some $368 billion. That's $33 million a day for the next 30 years spent by Australia, which blows out to around $500 billion by our estimate, when some $180 extra billion for radioactive waste management and burial is included.

And secondly, the lockstep embrace with the military interests of another nation, the United States, that is the central feature of AUKUS.

Yet, despite this, AUKUS was never fully debated, let alone seriously considered by the National Parliament. As Greg [Jennett] has pointed out, the agreement was authored 5

years ago by then Prime Minister Scott Morrison, referred to by US President Biden as, and I quote, "that fella down under," on announcement day, and agreed to immediately by Anthony Albanese.

Since coming to power, Labor has failed to conduct a thorough review of this most significant of defence agreements. Conceived in secret, AUKUS has spurned established defence and parliamentary oversight practices, hence the title of this report, *Surrendering Australia, the AUKUS Deception*.

Pillar 1 of AUKUS commits Australia to establish Submarine Rotational Force West near Stirling, Western Australia, from 2027.

Secondly, the purchase of 3 second-hand nuclear-powered submarines from America.

And thirdly, building up to 5 new, yet-to-be-designed and tested giant nuclear-powered attack submarines, the AUKUS SSN, in partnership with the UK.

It is extremely ambitious, very expensive, and carries great risk.

Pillar 2, less well understood, concerns joint development and sharing of various new defence technologies like undersea robotics and AI applications.

Announced with fanfare but no scrutiny, AUKUS was simply presented as a *fait accompli* to the Australian public. Throughout, voters were literally kept in the dark, a pattern that has continued to the present day.

So, if the [Federal] Parliament wouldn't do its job properly, the job of rigorously examining the agreement, that left it to the community to roll up its sleeves, investigate and report on the deal, and that is what we have done.

We travelled widely. We heard from:

- military experts and former senior defence officials, including the former head of the Royal Australian Navy Submarine Squadron, retired Rear Admiral Peter Briggs,
- a former Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull,
- 3 former Defence Ministers,
- 2 former Foreign Ministers,
- First Nations communities,
- academics
- former military officers
- former senior public servants
- community groups
- unions, and most importantly,
- a very concerned and thoughtful public.

The inquiry received numerous written submissions and considered carefully the material and views that were presented to us, and with the exception of former Defence Ministers Beazley, Pyne and Reynolds, along with a handful of others, the vast majority presented compelling arguments to the inquiry that AUKUS was seriously flawed and unlikely to deliver future security to Australia.

Our findings cohere with these majority and expert views, and we concluded, and I quote, that "AUKUS is the worst, most costly and riskiest defence decision ever made by an Australian government, and without adequate scrutiny."

This echoes the verdict of another former Prime Minister, Paul Keating, who, like Malcolm Turnbull, has argued that AUKUS is, and I quote, the "worst deal ever. "

We additionally found AUKUS represents a massive cost for submarines whose usefulness is debatable, which may never arrive, and that the deal undermines our sovereignty, risks our prosperity, distorts the defence budget, and fails to promote regional peace and security.

Under AUKUS, Australia subsidises construction facilities in the UK and the US to the tune of a preliminary budget approaching $9 billion initially for the construction of their own fleets. Despite both countries being way behind in schedule, there is next to no hope of the AUKUS submarines ever being delivered on time.

Meanwhile, Australia hosts visits of nuclear-powered and, in the future, possibly nuclear-armed submarines from the US here in Australia into the port of Stirling in WA. Stirling is fast becoming a *de facto* US base, with over 2,000 US troops to be housed at Australia's expense, by the way, as part of America's containment of China policy.

This makes suburbs like Rockingham and Fremantle near the port likely targets. Yet governments so far have failed to prepare or even consider how to manage such a calamitous possibility.

There are no refunds, no enforceable obligations on partner countries, and no recourse if things go wrong. In fact, Australia indemnifies the US and the UK against any claims concerning nuclear risks.

By any measure, AUKUS is a terrible one-sided deal. We therefore recommend that notice be given immediately to scrap AUKUS before more money is wasted, and the many risks inherent in the project allowed to escalate.

And Chris [Barrie] will address key matters from these and other findings shortly. But one stands out. This is the absence of costing or any thorough plan for the safe disposal, including specifying the location of the high-level radioactive weapons-grade nuclear waste produced by the AUKUS submarines that Australia has agreed to take and store indefinitely.

For First Nations peoples, in particular, with a history of suffering the impact of British nuclear testing in South Australia, this omission is galling. But this is AUKUS, pushing on under the cover of darkness while ignoring the fact that after decades, and with more resources and nuclear expertise than Australia, neither the United Kingdom nor the United States has yet managed to construct a permanent high-level radioactive waste storage facility at all.

We also find:

- there's a significant conflict of interest dimension to AUKUS with the rapid transition of senior ministers and defence officials from government to the arms industry.
- that the education sector is being increasingly penetrated by the military-industrial complex associated with AUKUS.
- that existing legislation with environmental protections and consent expectations is being overridden by AUKUS legislation.
- that the employment benefits of AUKUS are exaggerated, and crucially, that there are practical alternatives to the Pillar 1 nuclear-powered submarines.

In all of this, we know there is no social or political license for AUKUS at all. Certainly no deep public understanding, let alone acceptance of the abrogation of Australia's sovereign capacity in defence that is implied in the AUKUS agreement.

At a time of dwindling trust in our democracy and its institutions, especially politics and the media, this is a key finding which should not be discounted, nor we urge ignored.

Now I will hand over to Chris [Barrie] and I'll come back a little bit later to conclude our presentation.

Thank you.