



Australia: Public inquiry overdue for secretive, expensive AUKUS pact

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AUKUS Trilateral Defence Ministers Meeting, UK, Australia, US

The AUKUS war pact between the US, UK and Australia is expensive, secretive, and the “worst defence decision” since WWII. That’s according to a respected Australian expert, who says a proper inquiry is long overdue. Ian Lowe, an [emeritus professor](#) at Griffith University, Queensland, [published a recent critique](#) of the deal, saying it was:

Negotiated rapidly and in secret [and that] the AUKUS pact to produce new nuclear-powered submarines is among the most expensive, consequential and opaque deals in British and Australian military history.

Australia probes shadowy defence deal

Australians are holding a public inquiry, a [move that Lowe welcomes](#). The scholar pulled no punches, saying:

The trilateral security partnership between Australia, the UK and the USA was negotiated in secret in 2021 by the leaders of those three countries. Not one of those leaders is still in office [â?] given that this is by far the most costly defence project in Australian history, there has been no parliamentary scrutiny of the deal in Australia. It continues to be shrouded in secrecy, despite the high stakes and eye-watering projected cost.

He also [cited](#) a former Australian general, Michael Smith, who called the arrangement:

The worst defence decision since we relied on Britain to defend us in World War II.

AUKUS has been in the news for two days running. On 1 June, the *Canary* [reported](#) a joint announcement between US, UK and Australian defence chiefs unveiling an underwater drone programme. Underwater AI war drones appear at the heart of the new deal.

Lowe [pointed out](#) the public is very much out of the loop about the scale and scope of AUKUS. So much so that concerned citizens are investigating the pact themselves:

Now a group of former MPs, retired military and naval officers, leading strategists and academics, human rights lawyers and union leaders have joined together to hold a public inquiry. It is being funded by donations from unions, community organisations, faith groups and concerned citizens.

The inquiry [formally launched](#) on 2 June, explaining that it is:

coordinated by the Australian Peace and Security Forum (APSF) to ensure it is grounded in expertise, independent and evidence-based examination of the issues. The fundamental question being considered is: "AUKUS keep Australia safe" at what cost?

AUKUS risks, costs, and Britain

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Budgets will be [a major concern](#).

The Australian government has budgeted for spending some A\$368 billion (close to £200 billion) for eight submarines.

The boats will [supposedly](#) be delivered in the early 2030s:

Given those timescales and the fact that the submarines have not yet even been designed, there is understandable scepticism about the budgeted final costs.

And it isn't clear that the submarines would make Australia more secure. Lowe [said](#) he'd held a workshop with submariners. The sailors were split:

While they could operate away from base for longer periods and at greater depth than conventional submarines, their size would prevent them operating in the comparatively shallow waters around Australia's northern coastline, making them less useful for defending our territory.

And there are [worries](#) over Australia's nuclear non-proliferation obligations and the issue of toxic waste: the subs are nuclear powered:

The AUKUS agreement makes Australia responsible for waste management. That poses a huge problem.

Previous Australian attempts to store much lower-level toxic waste than the boats would produce have failed. And Aussie First Nations people have [opposed](#) the schemes energetically.

Low [said](#) Brits should pay attention to the pact. Because they are picking up the UK end of the bill. The boats are being built at Barrow-in-Furness in England's north-west:

As a former member of our parliament said, "So many questions, so few answers. The Australian public deserve more than Cold War rhetoric to justify the mind-boggling expenditure".

He [added](#)

British taxpayers, who are picking up the tab for the Barrow-in-Furness part of the operation, should be watching the equities with interest.

Low is right. The UK's role in AUKUS does need to be examined. PM Keir Starmer may not have started that particular project. But he has certainly lashed the country's fortunes to [he fantasy](#) of military spending bringing growth. The whole militarist edifice need to be examined. And where necessary pulled down.

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