

PUBLIC STATEMENT ON AUKUS – Yearly Meeting 2023

DEFENCE AND FOREIGN POLICIES

Australian Quakers meeting at their national conference in July 2023, express deep concern at trends in Australia's defence policies now incorporating the Australia, United Kingdom, United States trilateral security agreement (AUKUS). The major threats facing humanity are environmental crises, pandemics, and nuclear armaments. Money spent on the AUKUS agreement could be better spent on responding to these major threats. The following areas are especially disturbing:

1. The expansion of production and export of weapons, increased participation in preparations for war (e.g., Pitch Black, Pacific Vanguard and Talisman Sabre), the commitment to offensive strategies such as the implementation of the AUKUS agreement, incorporating nuclear powered submarines, rather than territorial defence and strengthening diplomatic relationships.
2. The alarmist commentary by some public officials and media to confront China over Taiwan, despite public opinion being in favour of good relations with both the US and China.
3. The purpose of the AUKUS agreement is too closely linked to US global military strategy, limiting our sovereignty and reducing our capacity for independent approaches to resolving conflict.
4. Parliament has rejected the proposal for the decision to enter a war to be driven by Parliament rather than the Executive thus reducing our democratic rights.
5. These nuclear-powered submarines may well be outdated by the time we receive them. In any event we have no ability to respond to the need for nuclear waste disposal.

The trend towards greater war preparation is of great concern, with insufficient emphasis to continue building multilateral relationships for non-military initiatives to prevent war. War has disastrous impacts on populations and the environment whatever the outcome, requires decades to recover from, and should be avoided at all costs. Implementation of the AUKUS agreement is already a cost to Australia and its implementation will limit Australia's ability to reduce and counter many of the climate change threats, as well as domestic issues such as the housing crisis, as well providing health, aged care and education services.

Quakers have a strong tradition of opposing war and seeking to remove its causes. We will continue to work for non-violent approaches to conflict including through dialogue, people-to-people exchanges on language and culture. We re-affirm commitment to the United Nations system and its many conventions and treaties. In particular we urge the Australian Government to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in accordance with agreed Labor policy.