

## Malika Reece — Wollongong Public Hearing AUKUS Public Inquiry | 12 August 2026

### **Previous Citizen of the Year**

*Note: This document is drawn from the Wollongong hearing transcript. Please excuse errors.*

My name is Malika. I was Citizen of the Year, advocate for women and children. And I live in Port Kembla, so this is all very personal to me. I'm a peace advocate, and I think that AUKUS makes us less safe, not more safe. Port Kembla is the government's preferred site for the East Coast submarine base, their own documents admit that hosting nuclear reactors there would make us a target, not protect us.

And then there's the cost. We're talking \$368 billion, and Defence itself has refused to stand behind that figure in Parliament, for submarines that aren't guaranteed to arrive, on a deal signed by a government that's gone without a vote or a proper inquiry. Every one of those billions is a billion not spent on housing, health, or climate resilience — the things that actually keep communities safe. I'm very big on community. Peace isn't passive — it takes courage to ask hard questions about a deal, especially a deal this size. And that's what I'm asking for — a proper review before anything goes any further.

Now, AUKUS was signed in the final days of the Morrison government, without a parliamentary vote, without a review, without public consultation. The UK Parliament has since run a full inquiry and raised serious criticisms. Australia's delivery depends entirely on US and UK industrial decisions that we don't control. A deal this size, this binding, for this long — 30 years — deserves at least the scrutiny that the UK gave to it, and we have given none.

Port Kembla is the preferred site for the East Coast submarine base, and the government's own documents admit the risk. Residents are likely to see the base as a source of danger, because of onboard nuclear reactors, and because the base itself becomes a military target in any conflict. Also, we don't — I don't know if we're talking about the social problems, because when we have a military base, especially a US military base, the incidence of assault, both sexual and otherwise, goes up. So, for the women and children of our area, I also would not like to see 4,000 rotating

servicemen coming here who aren't connected to the community and who don't care about our wellbeing.

But also, having Port Kembla collide head-on with the town's identity and economy — we know that there isn't room for both a submarine base and the steelworks that the region is actually built on. We are a steelworks town, that's what it's known for. This isn't a submarine base in the abstract, it is my harbour, it is where I walk on the breakwall and look at the seals. It's our home. And the government's own paperwork says it would make us a target. We did not sign up for that.

And of course, the fact that AUKUS has ballooned by \$50 billion, I think it was originally said to be \$268 [billion], now \$368 billion, in 2023 the Australian Submarine Agency gave Parliament a 178-page briefing that left out the \$368 billion figure, saying that cost depends on a range of complex variables and delivery is not guaranteed. I mean, what a deal that ScoMo got us into. The first Virginia-class boats depend on the US Navy's own production rate being fast enough to spare us any, something the US itself is not certain of. The first Australian-built boat isn't expected until the early 2040s.

So, Australia has already paid billions into US and UK shipbuilding, funding jobs overseas, with no clawback mechanism if this deal falls through. We're paying upfront for a delivery that isn't guaranteed, on a timeline that keeps slipping, and Defence itself won't stand behind the headline price tag.

But this argument isn't just coming from a peace movement. Even Liberal MP Malcolm Turnbull himself has said that AUKUS represents a massive sacrifice of Australian sovereignty, because virtually everything we know about the deal's progress comes from US congressional testimony, not from our own Parliament and the US is in a bloody mess, I wouldn't trust any of them.

So, this isn't a fringe view. It is shared by people across the political spectrum, including a former Liberal PM. We've handed away our ability to know our own defence future, and that's not smart. My biggest thing is common sense and critical thinking, I feel like we're really falling down on that.

But also, as I said, I'm a peacemonger — I coined that term, apparently, because there are far too many warmongers in this world, and it's a business, we know it's a business. But modern conflict is increasingly fought with drones and cyber and autonomous systems — cheap, fast, deniable. So, three second-hand Virginia-class submarines arriving decades from now are a Cold War answer to a problem that's already moved on. We're spending \$368 billion for the last war, not the next one.

I mean, don't we teach our children to use their words and not their fists? I still just don't understand how the men ruling this world think that blowing people and the planet into smithereens is some emotionally mature answer. But I'm sure we're going to level up and grow up at some stage. So, yeah — that's kind of all I wanted to say. Security isn't just submarines. A community that's a target isn't more secure, it's less. And a fleet that might not arrive until 2040 doesn't help with any threat that's real today.

And also, as I say, the thought of having 4,000 American servicemen coming in who are not really part of our community, and not caring for our community — Port Kembla is a really strong, caring community, we really look after each other. I mean, with Jenny Brisco and our community projects, and everything the tender that's going on there — it's actually like one of the most community-focused suburbs that I've ever been privileged to live in.