

What is AUKUS?

On 15 September 2021, Australia, the UK and the US signed the military deal known as AUKUS. “Pillar I” of the pact focuses on Australia’s acquisition of nuclear-propelled submarines. “Pillar II” revolves around partner states’ collaboration on advanced cyber technologies, AI, and undersea capabilities (unmanned underwater vehicles). The pact has since extended to include hypersonic weapons – weapons which can carry nuclear warheads.

In March 2023, NZ’s defence minister Andrew Little announced that the government was considering joining ‘Pillar II’ — the ‘non-nuclear’ component of the AUKUS pact.

How does AUKUS affect us, as people living in the Pacific?

1. AUKUS is not a pact of security and stability. It makes our world *more* dangerous.

Joining AUKUS erodes the work New Zealand has done to champion disarmament and non-proliferation efforts. Even under Pillar II, AUKUS undermines our progress and would have long-term consequences on our relations with our Pacific partners, many of whom are opposed to further militarisation in the region.

Joining Pillar II also means collaborating on US-led strategic priorities, focused on the containment of China. As one [anti-AUKUS campaign](#) puts it, “The pact enables the transference of weapons-grade enriched uranium to power war-fighting submarines undertaking provocative actions in potential conflict in the Indo-Pacific region”. This is far from a peaceful pact and will instead exacerbate regional instability and escalate tensions between the US and China. War between superpowers would result in devastating casualties, and would have dire consequences for the environment, human rights, the economy, essential supply chains, and global peace and stability. New Zealand should not compromise our commitment to multilateralism in pursuit of security alliances with Western powers.

2. AUKUS was considered with no public consultation or input

State leaders sign military partnerships like AUKUS in the shadows, with no prior consultation from the people these pacts would impact most. This goes against democratic decision making processes, transparency and accountability that New Zealand is obligated to uphold in our foreign policy decision-making. This is particularly egregious given how AUKUS has far-reaching impacts on economic and diplomatic relations, human rights, the environment and the future security of New Zealand and the Pacific.

3. AUKUS accelerates climate catastrophes and climate injustices.

Climate mitigation in the Pacific is becoming an exceedingly urgent responsibility that states should throw their weight behind. Prioritising AUKUS would siphon off resources and finances that governments need to halt climate catastrophe. Military pacts like AUKUS create friction between states who must cooperate to reduce global carbon emissions.

Joining AUKUS contributes to huge environmental costs and consequences on an already fragile ecosystem, in a region already commonly experiencing the devastating effects of climate catastrophe including sea level rise, and extreme weather events.

4. AUKUS violates our treaties and local and regional commitments

Joining AUKUS would be a breach of New Zealand's long-held nuclear-free stance and our obligations under formal international agreements. These are:

- Te Tiriti o Waitangi, which the NZ government has to honour by upholding the rights of tangata whenua to make decisions on issues that have consequences for Māori people, lands, waterways, oceans and taonga
- the Treaty of Rarotonga, which bans the stationing of nuclear weapons within the treaty zone
- the Boe and Bikitawa Declarations, which commit signatories to centre Pacific priorities such as climate mitigation, human rights in the region, and finding peaceful resolutions to conflict in the region
- the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, given that AUKUS involves Australia, a non-nuclear weapons state, obtaining nuclear-propelled submarines and requiring Australia to increase its nuclear capabilities.

5. AUKUS erodes regional efforts to decolonise Te Moana nui a Kiwa

AUKUS is another instrument of imperial violence that increases militarism in Māori territories and the ancestral homelands of tangata Moana. It is detrimental to relationships with other Pacific nations which are of great significance to Māori. For instance, climate catastrophe is a major consequence of historical and neo-colonial capitalism, which already disproportionately affects populations which are poor, vulnerable, Indigenous and often part of the Global South. While Western nations with imperialist agendas join forces in preparation for nuclear conflict, they cast the Pacific as just another backdrop for potential violence. But it is the people across Te Moana nui a Kiwa – who are already battling the grim reality of neocolonialism, whether through the ongoing impacts of nuclear testing, chemical warfare, climate change, or economic suffering – who will bear the brunt of it.

We are voices of the Pacific. We say No.

We urge the New Zealand government and subsequent governments to resolutely set its sights on a demilitarised, liberated Pacific. We want New Zealand's foreign policy to recentre the Pacific, as it is obligated to.

This means saying no to participation in arms races, no to collaboration with nuclear power, no to war exercises in the Pacific, and no to AUKUS.

We call on Pacific regional solidarity to protect our environments and peace in our region. We will not be part of planning for a war in the Pacific that would only see untold human and ecosystem suffering and death.

Sign and share this petition - join us as we stand alongside those who have resisted and struggled against Western imperialism in Te Moana nui a Kiwa in the past, and those who continue to do so. We've done it before – we can do it again.

Upcoming events

Attend a MATIKA HAWAII event near you. We are embarking on a speaking tour across several cities in Aotearoa calling for Pacific regional solidarity to protect our environments and peace in our region, kicking off in Pōneke on 6 July. Follow Te Kuaka on [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#) to keep updated.