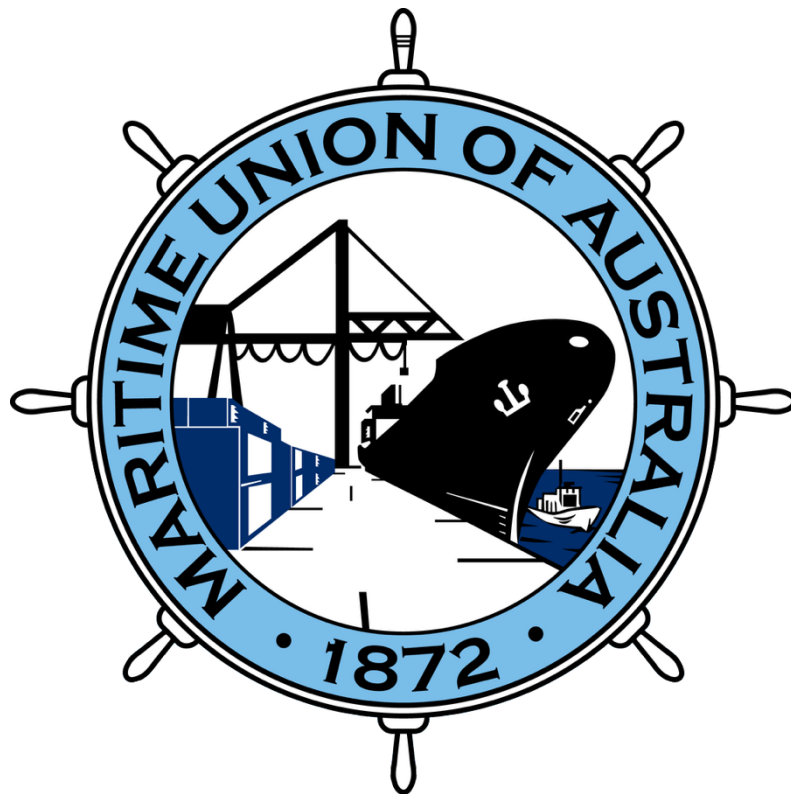


Public Inquiry on AUKUS



**Submission from the Maritime Union of
Australia**
(for inclusion in the joint union submission)

Introduction

This submission has been prepared by Maritime Union of Australia (MUA).

The MUA is a Division of the 120,000-member CFMEU and an affiliate of the 20-million-member International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF). The MUA plays a leadership role in the ITF's Dockers Section, Offshore Task Force, and its Offshore Wind Sub-group.

The MUA represents approximately 13,000 workers in the stevedoring, shipping, offshore oil and gas, port services and commercial diving sectors of the Australian maritime industry.

The stevedoring industry includes container terminal operations located in the major ports of Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Fremantle and Bulk and General (B&G) operations encompassing most other cargoes including containers, steel, motor vehicles, timber and bulk cargoes.

MUA members work as seafarers and crane operators across the coastal and international trade and Australian offshore oil and gas industry, including construction and decommissioning of all offshore structures, and operational supply.

In a future offshore renewables industry, MUA members would work on offshore renewables construction and operations as seafarers and crane operators. MUA members are currently doing feasibility work for a number of offshore renewables projects.

MUA input to the union submission to the public AUKUS inquiry

Joint union submission – opposition to AUKUS and its impact on the maritime industry

Submitted by: Maritime Union of Australia (MUA)

Date: June 2026

The AUKUS pact is a massive misdirection of public money that will make Australia less safe, less equal and less secure, especially for workers on the waterfront and in coastal communities. It pours hundreds of billions into nuclear submarines while doing nothing to tackle the real crises workers face: unsafe jobs, rising costs of living, intensifying climate impacts and an increasingly fragile health and education system.

The MUA opposes AUKUS nationally and internationally, and specifically rejects the proposal to turn Port Kembla into a nuclear submarine base. This submission speaks to the consequences for maritime workers, port communities and the industry as a whole, and supports the positions put forward by South Coast Labour Council and the broad Illawarra coalition that has declared Port Kembla “no place for a nuclear base.”

1. Economic direction: submarines versus useful work

AUKUS is sold as a jobs program, but at an estimated \$380 billion for roughly 20,000 jobs over three decades it amounts to around \$19 million per job. That money will largely be locked into highly specialised defence supply chains, concentrated in a few sites, and tied to US and UK strategic priorities.

By contrast, investment in public services, strategic Australian shipping, port infrastructure, manufacturing and clean energy can create tens of thousands of unionised jobs across the country in work that actually meets social needs. Building an Australian-controlled fleet, upgrading commercial ports and restoring coastal shipping would strengthen national resilience far more than buying nuclear submarines whose main role is to pull Australia deeper into other people’s wars.

2. Impact on the maritime industry and Port Kembla

Port Kembla as a nuclear base: direct threat to wharfies, seafarers, port workers and communities

Port Kembla is already a major industrial hub: steel, manufacturing, rail, road freight and intense maritime operations all rely on its harbour. Turning it into a nuclear submarine base would mean handing over a huge part of the harbour and surrounding land to defence, crowding out commercial operations and changing what work is done on the waterfront.

For wharfies, seafarers and other port workers, the issue is not abstract. A nuclear-powered fleet would mean stevedores and waterside workers, port workers and seafarers working in close proximity to reactors and high-level radioactive

materials, under military rules and secrecy. Decisions about safety, exposure, evacuation and emergency response would be made by defence authorities, not workers or civilian regulators. The union cannot accept that kind of risk being imposed on members and communities.

The MUA has already made clear that it “condemns in any shape or form the proliferation of nuclear capability in any country, especially our own,” and opposes the development of nuclear-powered defence vessels in the Illawarra. This submission builds on that stance and fully backs the South Coast Labour Council’s call to keep Port Kembla free of nuclear submarines.

National maritime consequences

AUKUS naval spending will skew decisions about where and how public money is spent on ports and shipbuilding. Shipyards, berths and dry-docks that could support Australian-flagged commercial tonnage and offshore energy work risk being tied up servicing US and UK nuclear fleets.

Instead of reinforcing east-coast commercial ports, coastal shipping and national maritime skills, AUKUS prioritises defence projects in a handful of locations, leaving workers elsewhere to compete for scraps. For the MUA the priority is clear: investment must go into safe, civilian maritime jobs, not a nuclear military build-up.

3. Health and safety: workers near nuclear reactors

Nuclear-powered submarines carry highly enriched uranium in their reactors. Any incident – from a minor leak to a major accident – would pose serious risks to the health of waterside workers, seafarers, tug crews and port communities.

ARPANSA’s own accident scenarios for nuclear submarines outline concentric evacuation zones around a leak, with iodine tablets for thyroid protection, displacement of workers and residents, and radiation hazard extending kilometres downwind. Port Kembla is not an isolated naval base; it is a busy commercial harbour next to dense residential neighbourhoods. A serious incident would put thousands of workers and residents at risk.

The Australian Naval Nuclear Power Safety Bill allows military authorities to override normal civilian radiation limits in declared nuclear zones. That would leave wharves and other workers exposed to radiation levels far above standard safety thresholds in an emergency, and even in routine operations, on the say-so of defence officials rather than independent regulators. From a union safety perspective, that is unacceptable.

The union’s core duty is to protect members’ lives and health. Those obligations cannot be squared with daily maritime work alongside nuclear reactors, under a regime geared to operational secrecy rather than open, enforceable safety standards.

4. Community impacts and regional security

Port Kembla is part of a region that has already declared itself nuclear-free and has a strong history of peace and social-justice campaigning. Turning it into an AUKUS base would reverse decades of community decisions and make the Illawarra a potential military target in any future conflict.

Unions, community organisations, First Nations groups, health workers, faith communities and local ALP branches have signed the Port Kembla Declaration opposing the base; thousands have marched through the harbour streets on May Day to say “no place for a nuclear base.” This submission aligns with that community stance.

AUKUS also raises the risk of unnecessary conflict with China and entangles Australia deeper in US strategic planning. For workers who depend on peaceful trade, safe shipping lanes and stable regional relationships, that is a direct threat to jobs and security – not a guarantee of safety.

5. Offshore wind and the future of the harbour

Workers in the Illawarra see another possible future for Port Kembla: as a major hub for offshore wind and clean energy manufacturing, with union jobs in turbines, cabling, port construction, maintenance and shipping. There are already ambitious plans for offshore wind zones and associated industrial projects off the coast.

A nuclear base would undermine that potential. Military exclusion zones, security restrictions and competing demands for berths, lay-down areas and heavy-lift capacity would crowd out offshore wind staging at precisely the time Australia needs to accelerate the move towards renewable energy. The union’s position is that Port Kembla should be a centre for clean energy and strategic shipping – not a nuclear parking lot.

6. Recommendations

On the basis of worker safety, community health, maritime industry impacts and regional security, this submission recommends that the Inquiry:

- Rule out Port Kembla as a location for any AUKUS nuclear submarine base.
- Reject the nuclear submarine program and instead direct defence-related spending into an Australian strategic shipping fleet, commercial port upgrades and civilian maritime infrastructure that strengthens national resilience.
- Guarantee that no port workers, seafarers or coastal communities will be required to work in or live near nuclear-reactor facilities without full, enforceable civilian safety regulation and union oversight.
- Support public investment in offshore wind and other renewables at Port Kembla and along the coast, creating union jobs that are compatible with community safety and climate responsibility.

- Respect nuclear-free decisions made by local councils and communities, and reject any attempt to impose high-level radioactive waste facilities on unwilling regions.

Conclusion

The MUA's position is clear: "No to nuclear submarines – jobs and health, not nukes." AUKUS offers the worst of both worlds – huge cost, heightened nuclear risk, and deeper entanglement in foreign wars – while undermining the maritime industry and threatening the safety of maritime workers and port communities.

There is a different path. Instead of turning Port Kembla into a nuclear base, Australia should build up its civilian maritime capacity, invest in offshore wind and other clean industries, and put public money into housing, health, education and climate resilience – the things workers actually need.

This submission supports the South Coast Labour Council and the broad Illawarra community in demanding that Port Kembla be kept free of nuclear submarines and that AUKUS be rejected in favour of a peaceful, worker-centred future for the harbour and the country.