

THE LORD COAKER  
MINISTER FOR THE HOUSE OF LORDS

MSU/4/8/1/4

16 December 2024

Dear Lord Goldsmith,

I am writing in response to the International Agreements Committee's (IAC) report on The AUKUS Naval Nuclear Cooperation Agreement. I wholeheartedly concur with the IAC that the agreement, known trilaterally as the AUKUS Naval Nuclear Propulsion Agreement, or ANNPA, is politically important. AUKUS is one of the most significant global security partnerships of the last 60 years, and the ANNPA is representative of the extraordinarily deep defence relationships we have with Australia and the United States.

I was glad to be able to represent the Government at the debate in Parliament on 23 October, which demonstrated the broad support that the AUKUS partnership has in the House, and welcomed that the Grand Committee moved to take note of this agreement.

You note in paragraph 17 of your report 'the significant progress that has been made in the delivery of Pillar 1 of the AUKUS Partnership.' I could not agree more and would like to reiterate the Government's complete commitment to the delivery of a conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine (SSN) capability to Australia through the phased approach known as the Optimal Pathway that was announced by the three countries in March 2023.

We are supporting Australia in the development of its workforce. Australian civilian and military personnel are embedded in the MOD and with the Royal Navy in order to support the delivery of our SSN programmes while learning vital skills that they will take back with them and Australian industry personnel are being trained in the UK's submarine industrial base.

The Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith KC  
Chair, International Agreements Committee  
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We are also delivering training in Australia. In a first for AUKUS, in September the Royal Navy provided training to 250 Australian defence personnel to give them a conceptual understanding of the design, operation, maintenance and safety of a nuclear-powered submarine and associated technology to increase the base level of knowledge across their enterprise. A follow-up course will be delivered in 2025.

The last stage of the Optimal Pathway is the construction of SSN-AUKUS, a trilateral submarine based on the UK's next generation design that both the UK and Australia will build and operate. In order to achieve the ambitious timelines for this programme, the UK is already progressing the design, and making initial purchases for the manufacturing of what will be the most advanced and most powerful SSNs ever operated by the Royal Navy. Since AUKUS was announced in September 2021, nearly £10bn has been committed to progressing the SSN-AUKUS programme and to improving the capability and capacity of the UK's submarine industrial base. This includes £2.4bn over ten years from Australia, primarily to support Rolls-Royce Submarines in the production of nuclear reactors for Australia's SSN-AUKUS platforms.

In September this year, the Secretary of State for Defence hosted his Australian and American counterparts here in London in order to discuss progress on the AUKUS endeavour. During that meeting, he announced the commencement of negotiations on a bilateral treaty with Australia. This instrument will set the framework for us to co-operate on the Optimal Pathway and represents a vital step in the progress of AUKUS.

Finally, I would like to restate that the Government's commitment to the nuclear non-proliferation regime remains steadfast. The ANNPA reaffirms the AUKUS partners' respective obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It also embeds key elements of the non-proliferation approach by which we will fulfil our trilateral commitment to set the highest non-proliferation standard. We will continue to engage openly and transparently with the International Atomic Energy Agency in support of that commitment.

I hope that this letter has provided useful additional context in response to your report.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vernon Coaker". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**THE LORD COAKER**