

Sub Guide: What is AUKUS? & have your say in the Public Inquiry!

AUKUS is a security agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States announced on 15 September 2021. Under the deal Australia is set to acquire eight nuclear-powered submarines at an estimated cost of at least \$368 billion over 30+ years, and share technologies and information between the UK, US. ***It is the largest spend on defence acquisition in Australia's history.***

This agreement is a military alliance for building nuclear submarines and stationing nuclear submarines here on the coastline for military influence in the Pacific and Asia.

- US and UK submarines to rotate off the Australian Coast¹ with the Western Australian placements planned at HMAS Stirling, Perth
- Australia to buy 3 second-hand Virginia class submarines from the US in early 2030, and build 5 new SNN-AUKUS submarines in the shipyard in Osborne, Adelaide.
- Australia to store all nuclear waste from the agreement.

Due to the secrecy of the AUKUS deal, and the lack of independent or parliamentary review - a public inquiry has been established. The scope is broad covering cost, sovereignty, and nuclear non-proliferation.

[Make a Submission here](#). Submissions close on Tuesday 1st September Midnight AEST The inquiry accepts Audio, Video, and written submissions - It can be as short as you like.

What to include in your submission?

1. Introduce yourself and where you are from
2. List your concerns of the AUKUS deal:
 - This can include the direct impacts on the Arid Lands as expanded below
 - Opportunity costs - where this money could be better spent
 - Or responses to key issues [here](#).

Why do we want to participate in this inquiry?

The Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC) was established in Alice Springs in 1980 and has a long and ongoing history in supporting peace and anti-militarist movements, resisting nuclear expansion and speaking up for environmental and social justice.

ALEC is concerned about the local, regional, social and environmental impacts of the AUKUS deal. ALEC is concerned with 2 key points that have material, direct, and adverse impacts on the arid lands:

¹ <https://www.asa.gov.au/aucus/submarine-rotational-force-west>

1. The size of the AUKUS spend \$368B+² positions war as increasingly a primary driver³ for the economy.
2. Under AUKUS, Australia must store all the nuclear waste generated by AUKUS in perpetuity, forever. This includes Low Level to High Level nuclear waste.

What are the direct impacts to the Central Deserts and Arid Lands?

1. AUKUS fuels an economy of war, and a colonial logic of the arid lands as sacrifice zones. The Arid Lands and First Nations people whose country it is, have repeatedly and violently been designated as sacrifice zones for every link in the nuclear supply chain, and an economy driven by global war.

These are some past and present examples:

- 1956 British bomb testing at Maralinga APY Lands - that are still contaminated today.⁴
- The building and ongoing work of the US spy-base Pine Gap without consent on Central Arrernte country.
- Uranium mining at Roxby Downs SA at the expense of Lake Eyre, the Mound Springs and Arabunna country.
- Critical minerals mining for US trade relationship and defence manufacturing, such as the Nolans Bore neodymium-praseodymium minerals project, on Anmatjerre Country⁵⁶
- Previous proposed nuclear waste dumps, in Muckaty NT, Waramungu country, the Arid Gold Date Farm proposal on Arrernte Country scrapped in 2014, and 2016
- Currently, Tellus's Chandler proposal just outside Titjikala on Arrernte Country.

2. Under AUKUS, Australia must store high level and low level nuclear waste forever. There is no plan where to store the waste. For many years communities across the arid lands have resisted being turned into nuclear waste dumps. Whenever people have said No to dumps on their Country or near their community they have stopped them.

These are some risks associated with nuclear waste:

Nuclear waste can make people and the land very sick if it gets into the air or water. Nuclear waste stays dangerous for 100 to 1000 to 100,000s of years. Transport and storing waste is very risky and currently illegal in the Northern Territory. No level of nuclear waste is safe.⁷

- Nuclear waste leaks during transport or during storage
- Groundwater contamination, and radioactive harm to plants and animals

² This is a conservative estimate as the pricing on waste disposal has not been included and mega projects always blow out <https://michaelwest.com.au/where-are-the-aukus-nuclear-waste-costings-let-alone-the-dump-sites/>

³ <https://www.commbank.com.au/articles/newsroom/2026/July/defence-investment-boom.html>

⁴ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-05-22/maralinga-nuclear-particles-more-reactive/100157478>

⁵ <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/2025/11/01/geopolitics-and-gina-rineharts-critical-minerals-tilt>

⁶ <https://ministers.treasury.gov.au/ministers/jim-chalmers-2022/media-releases/strategic-reserve-supporting-arafura-final-investment>

⁷ Prohibition on Nuclear Waste transport and storage

<https://legislation.nt.gov.au/Legislation/NUCLEAR-WASTE-TRANSPORT-STORAGE-AND-DISPOSAL-PROHIBITION-ACT-2004>

- Health impacts, radioactive poisoning
- Companies go bust or governments change then who is looking after this waste
- Nuclear waste facilitates an economy of war and nuclear proliferation

What is Tellus's Chandler Project and how does it relate to AUKUS?

The AUKUS problem will need low to high level waste storage. There are currently no high level nuclear waste storage options in Australia.

Tellus have been positioning themselves as a solution to international nuclear waste and the solution to the AUKUS problem of where to store the waste. Tellus does not have money to finance the Chandler waste dump near Titjikala and is trying to pitch for federal funds.

Tellus wants to build a nuclear waste dump called the Chandler Project within a salt deposit on Southern Arrernte Country, 25km south of Titjikala and not far from Chambers Pillars, Rainbow Valley and the Hugh and Finke Rivers.⁸

The designs for the Tellus Chandler project look like a high-level waste dump: Very deep underground 800- 850m and in a salt bed. The same as what is looked for in a high level waste dump globally, and expensive to build. Tellus already has a lowlevel nuclear waste dump called Sandy Ridge in WA.

Tellus haven't built anything at the Chandler site yet. There are a lot of things they need before they can build the waste dump: a lot more money than they have, changes in laws to allow storing/ transporting nuclear waste in the NT, and agreement with native title holders. They contracted a massive American nuclear waste and weapons company Amentum to do a strategic review of the Chandler Project. If Tellus secures federal buy-in we are concerned that the project will use defence legislation to override local laws, and Native Title.⁹

Tellus has been talking to both the American and Australian Governments as well as the international nuclear industry saying that they know how to get consent for nuclear projects from Aboriginal people.¹⁰¹¹¹²¹³

The company has confirmed they want to import international nuclear waste to Chandler.

The Tellus project illustrates the significant risk and colonial mentality the AUKUS deal poses for the arid lands and the central deserts - both in terms of war as an economic driver that enables funding of dangerous projects that do not serve our communities, and the sacrifice zones implicit in engaging with the nuclear supply chain.

⁸ What Tellus says about the Chandler Project <https://tellus.com.au/project/chandler/>

⁹ "Federal Labor is taking powers to impose AUKUS nuclear waste on SA, or on the NT, or on WA." Public Submission by Mr David Noonan B.Sc., M.Env.St, 12 July 2025

<https://nuclear.foe.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Noonan-AUKUS-N-sub-regulations-to-override-SA-laws-July-2025.pdf>

¹⁰ Hansard Parliamentary Inquiry into Nuclear Power Generation in Australia

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansard_Display?bid=committees%2Fcommrep%2F28610%2F&sid=0008

¹¹ <https://tellus.com.au/tellus-ceo-speaks-to-the-u-s-nuclear-regulatory-commission/>

¹² <https://conferences.iaea.org/event/330/> also cited in Jorgen Doyle article

<https://declassifiedaus.org/2025/07/08/disruption-pathway-to-nuclear-dump/>

¹³ Here they said they've secured the CLC and Native Title Holders

Agreement: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/nate-smith-41b93174_it-was-pretty-cool-to-be-invited-by-the-us-activity-7200802988469202945-9o4V/