

No to Toxic Nuclear Submarines

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While the public has largely been kept in the dark about the AUKUS acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines, some new information has come to light around the Australian Naval Nuclear Power Safety Bill, 2023, which a Senate committee is now scrutinising.

This bill declares two areas as “nuclear zones”: Garden Island in Western Australia and Osborne Naval Shipyard in South Australia.

Garden Island is being upgraded to the tune of \$8 billion for British and United States nuclear submarines to port and receive maintenance. The Osborne shipyard is being prepared to be able to construct Australia’s nuclear-powered submarines.

The bill also enables a nuclear waste facility to be set up at Garden Island.

In preparation for nuclear-powered submarines being able to berth here, the Australia Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA) has analysed the dangers of a radiation leak, or accident, in a nuclear zone and the emergency responses required.

In what ARPANSA refers to as a “Scenario Reference Accident”, all persons in the first danger zone, 600 metres around the accident site, would be evacuated and given iodine tablets to reduce the likelihood of thyroid cancer.

In Zone 2, 2.8 kilometres around the accident site, all workers and local residents could be ordered to evacuate, with children being required to take iodine tablets. They could all be required to attend a decontamination centre for medical treatment.

Because wind can spread the toxic radiation, Zone 3 is defined as extending beyond 2.8 kilometres, possibly up to 15 kilometres, depending on wind strength and direction and in this zone. Residents could also face radiation hazards.

[Scientist Dr David Noonan](#)’s research has helped shine a light on these important matters.

ARPANSA sets the maximum radiation exposure for a civilian at 1 millisievert. Although under its accident scenario, the exposure can be legally increased to 50 millisieverts — 50 times more.

ARPANSA goes further, describing the scenario of a catastrophic accident in which volunteers would be asked to help control the disaster knowing that they could be exposed to a radiation intensity of 500 millisieverts — a serious risk to their health.

The Australian Naval Nuclear Power Safety Bill, 2023 declares Garden Island and Osborne to be “nuclear zones” — where even ARPANSA’s rulings on maximum and minimum radiation can be overridden a military safety authority.

It is far from clear whether this authority will apply the same radiation safety standards as ARPANSA, or opt for something less stringent.

The bill covers regulated activities in nuclear waste management storage and disposal at AUKUS facilities in these nuclear zones, with Garden Island designated as a nuclear waste management area for “low level” nuclear waste.

However, Greens Senator David Shoebridge has discovered that “intermediate level” nuclear waste could also be dumped there.

From 2027, British and US nuclear submarines will be regularly porting at Garden Island and discharging their nuclear waste there.

Since the US neither confirms or denies whether its vessels and aircraft carry nuclear weapons, we can assume that if war breaks out between the US and China, Australia will be a target.

Residents living near Garden Island and the Osborne Shipyard have not been advised of ARPANSA’s risk analysis and emergency responses in the event of a nuclear radiation leak, or accident. They have had no opportunity to ask questions, or raise opposition.

There is an opportunity, however, to raise your concern about AUKUS by making a [submission](#) to the Joint Committee on Treaties. Submissions end September 2.

Initially, the government proposed an East Coast AUKUS nuclear submarine port and maintenance facility and Port Kembla and Newcastle were listed as possibilities.

But a strong push-back from trade unionists and communities in both places seems to have had an impact.

Mobilise against AUKUS and War has initiated an [e-petition to the NSW Legislative Assembly](#), which is open for all NSW residents to sign until October 31.

[The petition](#) demands the NSW Legislative Assembly pass laws to ensure there are no nuclear submarine bases in NSW; no nuclear waste is stored or disposed of in NSW; and there are no visits of nuclear powered vessels, or nuclear weapons-capable vessels or aircraft, from any country, allowed in NSW ports or airfields.

[IPAN’s National Conference in Boorloo/Perth](#), from October 4-6, will discuss these and other campaign priorities.

Since the major parties show unquestioning subservience to the US, we need a united, broad-based and powerful movement to prevent this headlong rush to catastrophe.

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Featured image: Labor has declared Garden Island in Western Australia as one of two “nuclear zones” for US nuclear-powered and possibly armed submarines. Photo: Scott Palmer/Wikipedia (CC BY-SA 4.0)

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