

IPAN AGM 2022 Chairperson Report

This annual report covers the period July 1 2021 - June 30 2022

I think its fair to say the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN) during this time period has been very much focused on advocating for foreign policy changes, and on creating a dialogue with broad sections of the Australian community through the People's Inquiry into the Costs and Consequences of Australia's engagement in US led Wars, which includes a questioning of the US Australia alliance.

The change of Federal government in May this year presents a new opportunity for IPAN to advocate for change in foreign policy and defence policy. But we are realistic in terms of what we are facing, due to the increasing militarisation of Australia that has been taking place over the past 70+ years. While being realistic about the challenges that lie ahead, we remain hopeful of being part of positive change for peace.

Whilst it is encouraging to see changes to domestic policies such as child care, and some very recent movement in terms of efforts to engage internationally, in particular with regard to re-setting the relationship with China, it still seems that the hair's breadth separating the Coalition from Labor on defence policies has barely moved. IPAN has been discouraged by the current deputy leader Richard Marles continue the obsequious unchallenged support for US military ambitions borne out in relation to the war in Ukraine and continuing preparations for war against China. In addition, there has been no backing away from any aspects of the AUKUS military pact between Australia UK and the US – in fact things will be worse if 6 B52s based are based at Tindall in the future.

IPAN was greatly concerned when the announcement of AUKUS was made in September last year with no community or parliamentary consultation. The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties held hearings on the 29th November 2021 – but less than one week's advance notice was given for submissions, however, remarkably this led to almost 100 submissions received mostly from peace and anti-war organisations. Despite the calls from peace organisations for Australia to resist nuclear propelled submarines, the committee approved the transfer of nuclear technology required to proceed with acquiring these submarines. This has been the limit of a community 'review'.

Post the May 2022 election, at the very least, we would have expected a comprehensive review of the pact by the new government including the elected members of parliament.

The AUKUS announcement created an outburst of opposition from the peace movement and many academics diplomats, politicians both current and former. The online meeting held soon after was a packed house and led to the formation of the Australian Anti-Aukus Coalition (AAAC) with branches in most states. A change.org petition was set up, titled 'No Nuclear-Submarines; End U.S. dominance; Healthcare not Warfare' which very quickly led to 25,000 signatures and continues to attract more support now at 27,500. In September the petition was tabled in the Senate by Senator Jordon Steele-John.

Rallies and webinars in opposition to AUKUS have been held in most states. Most recently a campaign was initiated to have endorsement of a 'Call for Peace' which was signed by over 1000 people and organisations. Donations allowed the statement to be published in The Saturday Paper and the Weekend Australian. IPAN Coordinating Committee members have been closely involved in the AAAC.

IPAN needs prepare itself to respond when the Minister for Defence will report on the 18-month assessment review of AUKUS early next year.

The People's Inquiry: Exploring the Case for an Independent and Peaceful Australia. What are the costs and consequences of Australia's involvement in US-led wars and the US-Alliance? What are the alternatives?

The People's Inquiry has been an amazing opportunity to engage with Australians and encourage informed questioning of the alliance. Over course of the period of the People's Inquiry (Nov 2020 – Nov 2021) many thousands of people participated in forums, presentations and meetings focused on one or all of the 8 areas of impact. The Inquiry Report compiled by the Chair Kellie Tranter and community leaders Peter Catt, Alison Broinowski, Vince Scappatura, Chad Satterlee, Jeannie Rea, Terry Mason, Greg Barnes and Ian Lowe has now been published. This required a lot more time than initially anticipated in the process of presenting a polished and professional final report and report's introduction covers off on this in greater detail. We are indebted to the Chair and the eight Panel Leaders for their time and expertise. The IPAN Coordinating Committee would like to explore with each of the panel leaders an invitation to consider taking on an advisory role for IPAN.

Other areas of activity over the past year include holding online meetings almost weekly, holding a webinar series on the 8 Inquiry areas, and developing the series of webinars on Australian Alternative Defence Policy. Discussions around the role of corporate power in influencing government led to an additional IPAN aim of "Promote public ownership of Australia's strategic industries, resources and infrastructure". This was unanimously endorsed at our last year's AGM

Responding to current affairs and new developments such as the war in Ukraine, rising tensions in the Asia Pacific, the ongoing persecution of Julian Assange and the election of a Labor Government has meant the Coordinating Committee has been active with media releases and letter writing which I believe has raised the profile and importance of IPAN as an established national peace organisation within Australia and internationally.

Our coordinating committee has worked on developing discussion papers on topics of importance to the IPAN campaign, such as one on *Alternative Defence* and another on *IPAN policy on China*, and consulted with IPAN's affiliates and members during that process.

IPAN has been a member of the International Peace Bureau (IPB) for six years. We were recently asked to have representation on the Board (and the IPAN CC was happy to support me in taking on this role). The Common Security Report released this year was an initiative of the IPB in collaboration with the Olaf Palme International Centre and the International Trade Union Congress. This report along with the Inquiry report offer opportunities for IPAN to work with political representatives, the media and the broader community.

Through the initiative arising out of the 2019 Darwin conference the Pacific Peace Network was established to work on the two most significant US led military exercises, RIMPAC held in Hawaiian waters and Talisman Sabre held in Australia (primarily in the Shoalwater Bay Military Reserve. Over the 3 year period we now have representation from South Korea, Japan, Guahan, Philippines, Hawaii, New Zealand, Australia, Northern Marianas, Fiji, Vanuatu and the United States.

Communications to members, supporters and the broader public and media are a vital part of our work. The role of the VOICE publication edited by Bevan Ramsden is incredibly important and we thank Bevan for this time and expertise in getting this monthly newsletter out to thousands of people.

IPAN is a network which seeks to coordinate and take initiatives to engage members around the country in working for peace. The majority of political advocacy is done in each locality by the organisations and their members. IPAN membership continues to grow with more Unions joining as well as an increasing number of individuals. Communications and engagement with our members is a big task and I feel there is much room to improve in this area. This needs to be addressed in IPAN'S upcoming future planning work.

The Coordinating Committee have worked really hard as a committed group demonstrating respect for each other and for differences. They have been supported by a number people who have contributed significantly to the work of IPAN and attending many of the Inquiry as well as coordinating Committee meetings, these include Bernadette McPhee, Rita Camilleri, Barbara Hartley and Cameron Leckie. We all grieved the death of Stephen Darley (SA) in April this year. Over the course of the year new members joined the CC including Harriet Binet (Tas) Fayeza Khan (WA) and Peter Harpas (SA).

Although IPAN has seven important aims and objectives, our overarching objective is to build a broad enough public dialogue around independent and peaceful foreign policy that political parties and ultimately government are forced to take this into account.

The publication of the "People's Inquiry" report will be the springboard for us to help initiate a much broader discussion amongst the wider population – through trade unions, faith groups and community organisations. It is a big task, but we are far from alone – there are a growing chorus of prominent voices, as well as many everyday people, echoing our concerns. History is on our side!

Annette Brownlie

22 November 2023