

Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN)

AGM 2023

This annual report covers the period 1 July 2022 – 30 June 2023, during which time IPAN focused on advocating for foreign policy change and creating dialogue with broad sections of the Australian community.

One of the clear highlights of the year was the publication of the “People’s Inquiry” final report, ‘Charting Our Own Course: Questioning Australia’s involvement in US-led wars and the United States alliance’. The Report was officially launched in Canberra in November 2022. A related conference was held at the same time. The inquiry process and report production involved a mammoth effort on the part of both the IPAN Coordinating committee and many volunteers. The document is an excellent springboard for initiating broader discussion amongst the IPAN membership base and the wider community also.

Key recommendations and focus areas of the report include calls for:

- Adequate, appropriate and meaningful consultation with First Nations peoples
- Increased diplomatic efforts over military responses
- Australian becoming a signatory to and ratifying the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)
- War Powers Reform to ensure that any dispatch of Australian Armed Forces troops to overseas conflict zones occurs only with parliamentary approval
- A Shift to Self Defence as the priority military strategy for Australia
- Urgently prioritising funds to tackle climate change over military expenditure

IPAN members have worked with many volunteers to roll out the report across the country. Two key methods have been meetings with federal parliamentarians and engagement with community groups. The Inquiry provided an extremely valuable opportunity to engage with other Australians and to encourage informed questioning of the alliance with the United States. This, in turn, has helped to grow the peace movement by encouraging new volunteers with a wide range of backgrounds to support IPAN’s work.

A year and a half of Labor Government has resulted in one or two encouraging developments. IPAN has been buoyed by efforts to engage internationally, particularly in terms of re-setting the relationship with China.

It is more than disheartening, however, to see that there has been little if any widening of the mere hair’s breadth that separates Labor and Coalition policies in matters of defence and so-called national security. IPAN urges the ALP to consider the ethical and electoral implications of this ‘in-tandem’ approach.

Particularly concerning is the fact that the increasing militarization of Australia that has occurred over the 70 past years or so has been effectively super-charged by the recent AUKUS arrangements. Although realistic about the challenges involved, IPAN is part of a growing movement seeking positive change for peace and we remain optimistic regarding those outcomes.

IPAN continues to be deeply disappointed at the obsequious support for US military ambitions demonstrated by the current Minister for Defence Richard Marles. This support has been evident in relation to the war in Ukraine and continuing preparations for war against China. Alarming, rather than backing away from and showing caution towards all aspects of the AUKUS military pact between Australia UK and the USA, the current government demonstrates enthusiasm only. The future stationing of six B52s at Tindall RAAF Air Base will further exacerbate the huge risks involved in the AUKUS military pact.

IPAN has taken on-going actions to protest the AUKUS agreement. In September 2021, we initiated a change.org petition, titled ‘No Nuclear-Submarines; End U.S. dominance; Healthcare not Warfare.’ In September 2022, the petition with 25,000 signatures was tabled in the Senate by Senator Jordon Steele-John. It is now close to 35,000.

Rallies and webinars in opposition to AUKUS have been held in most states. A number of IPAN Coordinating Committee members have been closely involved in the Australian Anti AUKUS Coalition (AAAC). IPAN also responded to the 18-month assessment review of AUKUS (released in March 2023) by declaring that, despite there being no military threat to Australia, the nuclear submarines deal was destined to be the greatest waste of taxpayers money in Australia’s history.

In addition to campaigning against AUKUS, IPAN continues to devote time to current issues and new developments. These have included the war in Ukraine and rising tensions in the Asia Pacific. The Coordinating Committee has actively responded to the ongoing persecution of Julian Assange with media releases and letter writing. I believe that these actions have raised the profile and importance of IPAN as an established national peace organisation within Australia and internationally.

During the year, the IPAN Coordinating Committee has prepared several discussion papers on topics of importance to the group's campaigns. One paper addresses Alternative National Security and Foreign Policy for an Independent Australia. A series of webinars were also held on this topic. This dovetails with IPAN work protesting the Force Posture Agreement and the stationing of US marines in Darwin. We have also consulted with IPAN affiliates and members to develop a policy position paper on China.

IPAN has been a member of the International Peace Bureau (IPB) for six years, and for the past year or so I myself have been the IPAN representative on the IPB Board.

IPAN continues to play an active leadership role in the Pacific Peace Network, established to work on RIMPAC, held in Hawaiian waters, and Talisman Sabre, held in Australia – primarily in the Shoalwater Bay Military Reserve. These are the two most significant US led military exercises in the region. Working in conjunction with affiliates and volunteers, IPAN sponsored a Pacific Peace Speaking Tour in August 2023. Representatives working as members of the Pacific Peace Network over the past five years have come from South Korea, Japan, Guahan, Philippines, Hawaii, New Zealand, Australia, Northern Marianas, Fiji, Vanuatu and the United States.

IPAN is a network which seeks to take initiatives to engage and coordinate members around the country in working for peace. Most political advocacy occurs at the level of local organisations and their members. Membership continues to grow. In addition to individual membership, more and more Labor Unions are affiliating with IPAN. Communications and engagement with members can be challenging and we are always seeking new ways to maximise communication with existing and new supporters. This is a key matter for IPAN'S upcoming planning meeting.

The Co-ordinating Committee have worked hard as a committed group demonstrating respect for each other and for differences. The Committee is supported by various people outside of the committee, who have contributed significantly to IPAN's work and who attend many Co-ordinating Committee and Working Group meetings. The assistance necessary to conduct the People's Inquiry submission process and produce the final report came from a large group of volunteers outside of the committee that included Bernadette McPhee, Barbara Hartley, Rita Camilleri, Margaret Clark, Justin Tutty and Bevan Ramsden

In terms of governance, organisational and meeting efficiencies have been implemented over the past year. There are now six Co-ordinating Committee meetings annually (held every second month), with Governance Sub-Committee meetings taking place outside of these.

In addition, we have begun holding combined Co-ordinating Committee and members' meetings to ensure regular opportunity for consultation with and feedback from members in helping to steer the work of IPAN. Over the past year a range of IPAN Working Groups have met regularly which are all listed below.

On a very sad note, we all grieved the death of Bernadette McPhee (a tireless volunteer from Victoria) in April of this year. Bernadette's enthusiasm for and contribution to the People's Inquiry was extraordinary. She leaves a legacy of warmth, compassion and commitment that is an inspiration to all.

Although IPAN has seven important aims and objectives, our overarching objective is to build broad and powerful public dialogue around independent and peaceful foreign policy that political parties and government must ultimately take into account when developing policy.

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!

Other activities that took place over the past year

IPAN involvement in speaking Events

- Dave Sweeney, International Peace Bureau (IPB) Triennial Congress, October 2022
- Nick Deane and Erik Paul, International Peace Studies Conference, Armidale, December 2022
- Annette (via zoom), 'International Summit for Peace in Ukraine' June 2023, Vienna (organised by IPB and organising partners)
- Richard Tanter and Hannah Middleton (via zoom), April 2023, 'Massachusetts Peace Campaign' webinar, Challenging AUKUS: The imperative of diplomacy with China
- Fayeza Khan, Ross Gwyther, Bevan Ramsden and Kathryn Kelly (via Zoom), Veterans for Peace conference (USA)
- International Trade Union Confederation in Melbourne Nov, Bevan Ramsden and others provided a pre-recorded one-hour presentation during the 'ADF for Territorial Defence' session

IPAN Working Groups

Working groups have either been established or strengthened over the past year, and sit under a broad 'Call to Peace' campaign.

- Addressing Intelligence and Security/Narrow Defence Advice Working Group
- Force Posture Agreement Working Group
- Regional Peace Agreement Working Group
- Alternative Defence Policy to be re-established
- ANY OTHERS TO ADD

Support from University Students for IPAN's work

- Macquarie University ARTS3000 Students – Semester 2 2022, Vince Scappatura lecturer – Barbara Hartley provided IPAN support

Submissions/Consultations contributed to

- Submission to the Inquiry into Environment and Other Legislation Amendment (Removing Nuclear Energy Prohibitions) Bill 2022 (brought about by Matt Canavan)
- Submission to the Inquiry into International Armed Conflict Decision Making (War Powers Reform)
- Submission re "Reforming Defence Legislation to meet Australia's Strategic needs"
- Defence Strategic Review Submission process (Vince Scappatura drafted on IPAN's behalf)
- Griffith Uni/ANU Consultation re the Australia-USA alliance

Advocacy for Whistleblowers (including support for Australian Against Political Prosecutions)

- Bernard Collaery - congratulations extended to Kathryn Kelly and Susan Connelly for all the advocacy work
- Free Julian Assange campaign
- Richard Boyle
- David McBryde

AUKUS

- National action to mark the 1-year announcement of AUKUS – activities across various cities
- Open Letter from Academics/Scholars– driven by Vince Scappatura and published in The Guardian
- AUKUS Campaign Update Statement

Engagement with Federal Politicians

- Regular letter writing to politicians – re Ukraine, RAAF patrols in the South China Sea, submarine port issue
- Volunteers across the country meeting with Federal (and state) politicians regarding the People's Inquiry

Other

- IPAN Call Out for Action by all peace supporters 'Peace, not war escalation, in Ukraine'
- National Day of Action 24 May – Anti Quad and anti-Lombrum Naval Base various cities across the country
- Screenings of David Bradbury's film 'Road to War' throughout the country
- Involvement in actions in opposition to Nuclear Submarine Ports

- 20th anniversary of the mass protests against the war on Iraq (Peace, Climate Justice, Healthcare: Not Welfare - No AUKUS Victoria Coalition and IPAN)
- IPAN involvement in actions against a number of military expos around the country

Recruitment of Volunteer to assist IPAN

- Membership Secretary Role – Rita Camilleri
- Assistant Secretary Role – Ingrid Schreiner
- Recruitment of more volunteers to IPAN Working Groups

**Annette Brownlie
Chairperson, November 2023**