IPAN is a network of organisations and individuals from across Australia, united by a commitment to a truly independent and peaceful foreign policy. IPAN values the opportunity to contribute to this community consultation and commends the ANU for this important initiative to broaden the national conversation on security.

This submission argues that Australia's national security has been narrowly and dangerously defined through a militaristic lens, overly dependent on the US alliance. This approach has not made Australia safer; it has entangled us in foreign conflicts, undermined our sovereignty, and diverted vast resources from addressing the real security challenges of our time. True national security, we contend, must be redefined around the principles of human security, common security, and a self-reliant, non-aligned foreign policy that prioritises peace and diplomacy.

Section 1: Redefining National Security

The consultation paper asks, "What does Australia's national security mean to you?" For IPAN, the concept of "freedom from care" or "no worries" extends far beyond military defence. It encompasses the security of individuals and communities to live free from the threats of poverty, inequality, environmental collapse, and violence. We advocate for a shift from the traditional state-centric model of national security to one of **human security**, which prioritises the well-being of people, and **common security**, which recognises that lasting security can only be achieved through cooperation and mutual respect, not through military dominance.

A militarised approach to security, driven by our alliance commitments, has failed to provide this freedom from care. Instead, it has generated a state of perpetual anxiety, locking Australia into a cycle of military buildup and increasing the risk of catastrophic conflict. Evidence demonstrates that peace-building approaches are not only more ethical but more effective and economically sound. Research shows that peace-building interventions demonstrate a **60-70% success rate** when implemented early, compared to only **30-40%** for military interventions, with conflict recurrence rates of just **15%** with sustained peace-building versus **40-50%** after military action [4]. Further, peace building initiatives lead to minimal civilian casualties compared to the significant losses that occur in military approaches [5]

A Self-Reliant Defence Posture

Australia needs a defence force capable of defending our territory and maritime approaches, not one designed for 'interoperability' in US-led offensive operations. This means a shift to a non-aligned, non-offensive defence posture that does not threaten our neighbours. Such a posture would enhance our genuine security while reducing the risk of being drawn into conflicts that do not serve Australian interests.

Section 2: Challenges and Opportunities: A Critical Reassessment

The ANU paper identifies "strong alliances and partnerships (US, UK, Five Eyes, AUKUS)" as one of Australia's key strengths. We fundamentally challenge this assessment. The US alliance, and its most recent and dangerous manifestation in AUKUS, is not a strength but a profound vulnerability. It compromises our sovereignty, making us a strategic target in any US-led conflict, and prevents us from pursuing an independent foreign policy that serves Australia's genuine interests.

The AUKUS Agreement: A Case Study in Misplaced Priorities

The AUKUS agreement exemplifies this vulnerability. Australia has committed **$368 billion** to acquire nuclear-powered submarines [2], an expenditure that cannot be justified whilst so many Australians are homeless or in housing insecurity, struggle to access affordable health and medical treatment, and whilst hospitals are at crisis point due to underfunding and our education system remains grossly underfunded. This represents a catastrophic misallocation of resources that could transform lives if invested in genuine security needs.

For context, every dollar invested in conflict prevention saves an average of **$7 in reconstruction costs**, with peace-building delivering a **16:1 return on investment** [4]. Conflict prevention typically costs between **$1-11 billion**, while post-conflict reconstruction ranges from **$7-77 billion**. representing a **7:1 cost ratio** [4]. The economic case for prioritising peace over militarisation is overwhelming.

Moreover, the AUKUS agreement appears fundamentally one-sided. Despite Australia paying billions to both US and UK shipyards, there are no watertight arrangements to ensure Australia obtains the nuclear fuel or reactors outlined in the agreement, nor any guarantee that Australia will be able to construct nuclear-powered submarines. Under Article IV E of the agreement, Australia must indemnify the United States and United Kingdom against any liability, loss, costs, damage or injury arising from nuclear risks, while bearing all responsibility for management, storage, and disposal of spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste [2].

> *'Australia's involvement in world affairs at the behest and under the diktats of the US is not consistent with popular Australian views on the role of a peaceful participant cooperating in the consensual solution of world problems. For too long this country has facilitated US hegemony – absolute power over the rest of the world – and engaged in an alliance*

> *'deeply rooted in US self-interest.' We have thus forsaken our independence. Australia is fighting in and invariably losing wars in which we have no direct interest, and for which there is little popular support and even less moral justification. This has been at huge personal and financial costs that are detrimental to the interests of the Australian people.' [1]*

The Real Security Challenges

The real challenge to Australia's security is not primarily military. It is the existential threat of climate disruption and ecosystem collapse. Also looming large is the threat of nuclear war, which the current defence posture exacerbates rather than mitigates. Global military activities produce **1.2 billion tonnes of CO2 annually**, representing **5.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions** [4]. The global arms trade alone accounts for **400 million tonnes of CO2**. The environmental costs of militarisation include resource diversion from climate action, ecosystem destruction through conflict, and the creation of a vicious cycle where environmental degradation and resource scarcity drive further conflicts.

Research demonstrates a strong correlation between peace and environmental performance: **the top 20 peaceful countries average 40% better environmental performance, are 3x more likely to meet climate targets**, while conflict zones show 60% more environmental degradation [4]. The pursuit of nuclear-powered submarines under AUKUS increases regional tensions, fuels an arms race, and undermines global non-proliferation efforts.
The AUKUS agreement also introduces significant risks related to highly enriched uranium and radioactive waste, with a notable lack of public consultation on these dangers, which is a profound democratic deficit. Australia has a poor history with radioactive waste management and lacks a guaranteed long-term storage solution.

Section 3: Principles and Goals: An Independent Path

IPAN agrees with the ANU paper that preserving our 'independence of decision-making" is a core national interest. However, this interest is fundamentally undermined by the US alliance. Key decisions about war, peace, and foreign policy are made in Washington, not Canberra, with little to no public or parliamentary debate. The AUKUS agreement is a prime example of this democratic deficit, with communities facing the prospect of living and working in nuclear zones without any consultation [2].

True security requires aligning our actions with our values of democracy, equality, and a "fair go." This is impossible when we are allied with a global power that frequently acts in violation of international law. The immense financial cost of our military alliance represents a critical trade-off. Global military spending stands at **$2.4 trillion annually**, with a military-to-peace spending ratio of **16:1** [4]. The hundreds of billions of dollars allocated to AUKUS and other defence projects are resources that could address urgent domestic needs such as healthcare, education, housing, and climate action, which are the true foundations of a secure and resilient society.

The Economic Case for Peace

Countries with higher peace indices demonstrate consistently better economic performance across multiple indicators [4]:

- **2x higher GDP per capita** in peaceful countries
- **3x more foreign direct investment**
- **50% higher trade volumes**
- **25% lower unemployment rates**

By prioritising peace, Australia could realise significant economic benefits, including:

- **15-25% increase in Asia-Pacific trade**
- Positioning as a stable regional hub for investment
- Development of peace-building expertise as an export opportunity
- Enhanced tourism through reputation as a peaceful nation

The economic returns from peace are substantial, including reduced costs from violence, increased productivity, greater investment, and enhanced trade, alongside benefits like human capital development and innovation.

Section 4: Building Blocks for a Peaceful Future – Institutionalising Peace

To build a genuinely secure Australia, we must invest in non-military building blocks and institutionalise peace as the central organising principle of our foreign policy. Drawing on the Make Peace a Priority campaign [4] and IPAN's extensive consultation with civil society, we propose the following building blocks:

Democratic Resilience and Transparency

We must end the culture of secrecy surrounding defence and foreign policy. This requires strengthening parliamentary oversight, protecting whistleblowers, and ensuring that decisions of war and peace are subject to full public debate and a parliamentary vote. The lack of public consultation on AUKUS, despite the very real potential for harm to communities

living and working in nuclear zones, demonstrates the urgent need for reform. Australia has a poor history with radioactive waste management and does not have a facility that can guarantee safe storage and disposal of spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste for the thousands of years required [2].

Social Cohesion and Justice

A just, equitable, and inclusive society is a secure society. We must address the root causes of insecurity, such as poverty, inequality, and social marginalisation, and invest in community-led initiatives that build trust and mutual respect. This significant expenditure could instead address pressing domestic needs like housing, healthcare, and education.

Economic Security Through Peace

We must transition from a militarised economy, dependent on the global arms trade, to one based on peaceful and sustainable industries. This includes investing in renewable energy, advanced manufacturing for civilian purposes, and a just transition for workers in the fossil fuel sector. The economic opportunity is substantial (see above).

The workforce opportunity cost of an armaments focus is particularly acute at a time when workers are in short supply for construction, healthcare, aged care, and renewable energy industries. Skilled workers diverted to defence manufacturing represent a critical misallocation of human capital when Australia faces severe labour shortages in sectors essential to genuine security and prosperity.

Recent analysis demonstrates that renewable energy is significantly more cost-effective than nuclear power. The CSIRO GenCost Report 2024 shows nuclear power to be at least 50% more expensive than wind and solar backed by batteries, with nuclear options costing between $155-641 per megawatt-hour compared to $100-140 per megawatt-hour for wind and solar with storage [3]. Onshore wind and solar PV are the lowest cost generation technologies by a significant margin, yet the pursuit of nuclear submarines under AUKUS risks slowing Australia's transition to renewable energy.

Institutionalising Peace in Government Structure

Australia should adopt concrete structural reforms to make peace a priority in our foreign policy architecture. The Make Peace a Priority campaign proposes four initial reforms:

1. Expand the Minister for International Development role to include Peacebuilding

This expanded role would promote Australia's peace-building efforts and provide clear focus to engage with countries of the Indo-Pacific and with international frameworks for peace and development, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This structural change would signal Australia's commitment to addressing the root causes of conflict through development and peace-building.

3. Consolidate all areas working on peace under one Deputy Secretary

Currently, three different Deputy Secretaries manage peace-related areas: the Conflict Prevention and Strategy Branch, the Humanitarian Division, and the International Security Division. Consolidating these under one Deputy Secretary would ensure peace is given appropriate focus and simplify coordination across government.

4. Increase resourcing for conflict prevention and peace-building

As international tensions rise, additional funding is needed for research bodies, to increase resources to the UN Peacebuilding Commission, and to expand resources for diplomacy and meetings to pursue a peace agenda in the Indo-Pacific. This makes peace-building a highly cost-effective investment in genuine security.

Section 5: A True Whole-of-Nation Approach

A genuine whole-of-nation approach to security must include the voices of all Australians, not just the defence and security establishment. In particular, consultations with First Nations peoples is paramount (Some valuable lessons are provided by Larissa Behrendt in her recent Boyer Lecture[i]). Civil society organisations, trade unions, faith groups, and the peace movement also have a vital role to play in holding government accountable, providing alternative perspectives, and building a culture of peace.

IPAN's People's Inquiry is a testament to the desire of ordinary Australians to be involved in these critical decisions. The inquiry involved extensive public consultations with several thousands of people through questionnaire responses, public meetings, group discussions, and webinars from a wide range of civil society organisations [1]. The findings of our inquiry, and the recommendations in our report, provide a roadmap for a more democratic, independent, and peaceful approach to national security.

The Australia Remade movement, developed from hundreds of conversations with Australians, includes in its nine pillars the vision that ‘We stand on our own two feet as we develop a fair and just approach to working with other countries. We do not blindly follow others, no matter how powerful’ [2]. This vision resonates with the findings of IPAN's People's Inquiry and reflects a widespread desire among Australians for genuine independence in foreign policy.

Regional Leadership for Peace

Australia's unique position in the Asia-Pacific region provides significant opportunities for peace-building leadership. The region faces challenges including territorial disputes (South China Sea, East China Sea), economic inequality, climate vulnerability affecting Pacific Island nations, and resource competition. However, the region also demonstrates successful peace-building models, including the ASEAN peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms, East Timor's successful independence and nation-building, Bougainville's peaceful resolution of separatist conflict, and Cambodia's post-conflict reconstruction.

Australia's geographic position, economic influence as a major trading partner, democratic institutions, and diplomatic experience provide a foundation for regional peace-building leadership. Rather than contributing to regional militarisation through AUKUS, Australia could leverage these strengths to promote peaceful conflict resolution and cooperative security arrangements.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of IPAN's 2022 Peoples' Inquiry, evidence-based research, and IPAN's extensive engagement with government inquiries, we put forward the following recommendations:

1. **Redefine National Security:** Officially adopt a national security framework based on the principles of human security and common security, prioritising the well-being of people and peaceful resolution of conflict over military approaches.
2. **Adopt an Independent Foreign Policy:** Formally declare a policy of independent, non-aligned foreign policy, and systematically review all existing treaties and agreements, including the ANZUS Treaty and AUKUS, to ensure they align with this new posture and serve genuine Australian interests.
3. **Withdraw from AUKUS:** Immediately withdraw from the AUKUS pact and cancel the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines, reallocating the $368 billion to pressing social and environmental needs including healthcare, education, housing, and renewable energy transition.
4. **Institutionalise Peace in Government:** Implement the following structural reforms:
    - Expand the Minister for International Development role to include Peacebuilding
    - Consolidate peace-related areas under one Deputy Secretary
    - Increase resourcing for conflict prevention and Australia's participation in the UN Peacebuilding Commission
5. **Prioritise Diplomacy and Peace-Building:** Significantly increase funding for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and invest in diplomatic and conflict resolution capabilities, recognising the success rate of peace-building compared to military intervention and the increased return on investment.
6. **Reallocate Military Spending:** Conduct a full cost-benefit analysis of current and projected military expenditure, and reallocate resources to address urgent social and environmental needs, recognising that every dollar invested in conflict prevention saves an average of $7 in reconstruction costs.
7. **Strengthen Democratic Accountability:** Introduce legislation requiring parliamentary approval for any overseas military deployment and entering into significant international security agreements, with mandatory public consultation, particularly where communities may be affected by nuclear materials or facilities.
8. **Invest in Renewable Energy, Not Nuclear:** Prioritise investment in renewable energy technologies, which are significantly more cost-effective than nuclear options and align with Australia's climate commitments, rather than pursuing nuclear submarines that increase regional tensions and proliferation risks.
9. **Ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW):** Sign and ratify the TPNW, thus demonstrating Australia's commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.
10. **Develop Regional Peace-Building Initiatives:** Leverage Australia's unique position in the Asia-Pacific to promote peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms, support climate adaptation for Pacific Island nations, and foster cooperative rather than competitive security arrangements.

Conclusion

Australia stands at a crossroads. We can continue down the path of militarisation and alliance dependency, with all its attendant risks and costs, or choose a new path of independence, peace, and genuine security. The evidence is clear: peace-building is more effective and economical than military intervention and is more aligned with Australian values.

The $368 billion committed to AUKUS represents a catastrophic misallocation of resources. This expenditure, made without public consultation and under a one-sided agreement, fails to serve genuine Australian interests while citizens struggle with housing insecurity, inadequate healthcare, and underfunded education.

IPAN and its supporters believe the Australian people are ready for change. We urge the ANU and Federal Government to heed this call and chart a new, independent course, one that institutionalises peace as the central organising principle of our foreign policy, reallocates resources from militarisation to genuine security needs and positions Australia as a leader for peace and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

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[i] *https://iview.abc.net.au/video/NS2536H005S00*