

Non-paper on Nuclear Propulsion Cooperation Under AUKUS
November 2021

As the leaders of our three countries announced on September 15, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States have committed to a shared ambition to support Australia in acquiring nuclear-powered submarines for the Royal Australian Navy. These would be *conventionally* armed submarines that would be powered by nuclear reactors. Australia remains a non-nuclear weapon state party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and does not, and will not, seek nuclear weapons.

This nuclear-powered submarine effort is currently in the early stages of an 18-month consultative period that will define the full suite of requirements that underpin nuclear stewardship, with a specific focus on safety, design, construction, operation, maintenance, disposal, regulation, training, environmental protection, installations and infrastructure, industrial base capacity, workforce, force structure, and acquisition.

Many of the program specifics have yet to be determined. Many of these factors are beyond the scope of the Board's purview and would be inappropriate for the Board's agenda at any time. There are aspects that may be relevant to the implementation of respective safeguards obligations, but the implications of these aspects cannot at this stage be identified. Thus, a Board agenda item to address safeguards issues is extremely premature.

Since the announcement of this effort, we have emphasized our willingness and intent to proceed transparently, especially in regard to issues of nuclear material, facilities, and activities relevant to the IAEA. We recognize that some aspects of the envisaged cooperation will be of direct interest to the IAEA. For this reason, our Governments have formed a trilateral working group on nonproliferation and safeguards issues. The purpose of this working group is to consider the kinds of questions that will be of interest to IAEA Member States, and as work progresses, we will continue to provide updates at the IAEA and elsewhere as appropriate.

It is because of our steadfast commitment to transparency and the nonproliferation regime that our three Governments have engaged the Secretariat from the day AUKUS was announced. We are committed to open dialogue with the IAEA and, as we have said previously, that dialogue will continue. We encourage the DG to update the Board as appropriate, while noting again that we are very early in the consultation process.

While a separate Board agenda item on AUKUS-related safeguards issues is premature given the lack of any significant updates to present at this stage, we understand and welcome the legitimate interest of our colleagues and will gladly present updates under the Board's Any Other Business agenda item at Board meetings in the future.

At the same time, there have been some mischaracterizations of our efforts that we would like to take the opportunity to clarify:

- The NPT does not prohibit naval nuclear propulsion. Indeed, there are multiple Member States in various stages of pursuit of such programs. Australia is a non-nuclear-weapon State Party to the NPT with an impeccable non-proliferation record and has made clear repeatedly it will not seek nuclear weapons. The United Kingdom and the United States are not providing—and will not provide—Australia with any assistance in contravention to their obligations under the NPT.
- We are well-aware of the commitments, obligations, and authorities under our respective safeguards agreements, including our Additional Protocols. Australia—and the IAEA—cannot be asked now to specify a verification approach for a cooperation that has not yet been defined. We have been clear that we will undertake this effort in a way that reflects our longstanding leadership in global non-proliferation and rigorous verification standards, in close consultation with the IAEA. We will comply fully with our respective non-proliferation obligations and commitments, and we intend to implement the strongest possible non-proliferation standards to maintain the strength and integrity of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.
- With the basic structure of our cooperation yet to be defined, no decisions have been made about the construction of new nuclear facilities. Australia will implement fully any relevant safeguards obligations, including under Modified Code 3.1. The announcement made by our Governments in September of this year, and the consultations already held with the IAEA Secretariat—even before key decisions about the activity have been made—is reflective of our commitment to engagement and our intention to keep the IAEA informed in a timely manner.
- Mindful of the history of this topic and discussions held between many Member States and the IAEA Secretariat over the course of the last 50 years, it is too soon to speak to the specifics of the possible cooperation and related verification measures, or the specific role the IAEA Board may play. Maintaining the integrity of the nuclear non-proliferation regime will be a core objective for our three Governments during the consultation process, as will be maintaining the integrity of IAEA safeguards. As we have noted, we will update the Board in general terms as events develop, and of course, at the appropriate time, bring any specific aspects to the Board’s attention as needed.
- Other comments about regional security implications of various military capabilities are clearly beyond the scope of this Board’s mandate, and we will not take them up here.

We will continue to approach this subject from a spirit of transparency and openness. We welcome the interest and questions of fellow Member States, and will continue to engage them through the appropriate channels and mechanisms.