

Annex A

WESTPORT: A RISK TO AUKUS?



A Maritime Union of Australia paper on the potential security risk of Westport's construction in Western Australia



Concerns surrounding Westport and its interplay with AUKUS

The relocation of Western Australia's main container terminal fundamentally changes the security environment for the tripartite security agreement between Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom, formally known as AUKUS.

The Western Australian State Government's proposal to relocate the port to around 20 kilometres (13 miles) south of its current positioning would bring foreign shipping traffic dangerously close to critical military assets, such as Garden Island (HMAS Stirling Naval Base) and the Henderson Shipyard, the proposed construction site for future nuclear submarines. Both of these locations are currently shared with the United States military.

This introduces new risks of weaponised merchant vessels, espionage, cyber threats, and sabotage that cannot be addressed without additional comprehensive maritime security upgrades (if at all). Australian governments at a State and Federal level must carefully evaluate these risks before committing to the port relocation or be prepared to significantly enhance naval security around Garden Island to mitigate the new threats posed by high-density commercial shipping.

What is Westport?

Westport is the State Government of Western Australia's \$7.2 billion (US\$4.6 billion) project to relocate the State's container terminal from its current position in Fremantle to around 20 kilometres due south in Kwinana.

The project's port facility is still the design and planning stage with the business case only being announced late in 2024, with further detailed planning stages to come. Construction works on the new port are scheduled to start in the next 1 - 3 years and the port is not expected to be fully operational until the late 2030s at the earliest.

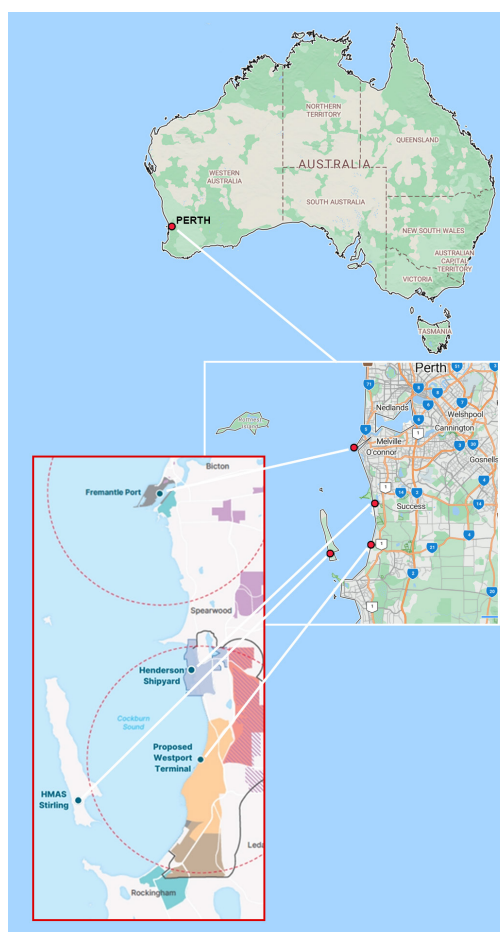
In addition to the port facilities, there will be required construction of a shipping channel, and an offshore breakwater as well as required upgrades to supporting road and rail.

Fremantle recorded more than 850,000 TEU movements in 2024 and this is projected to triple in 50 years' time.

How does Westport impact AUKUS?

With Westport's planned construction start and completion times aligning closely with the major developments surrounding AUKUS. These two major construction projects being in such close proximity to each other could result in impacted delivery deadlines due to competition around both building materials and skilled labour.

Construction of the port at the prospective site with the government's forecasted vessel movements would result in a high volume of foreign commercial ships moving within close proximity of the both the naval base HMAS Stirling which will house the AUKUS submarines, and the planned maintenance facilities based at Henderson Shipyard.



HMAS Stirling & Henderson Shipyard: How It Interacts With AUKUS

The Henderson Shipyard is being transformed into a Commonwealth-owned Defence Precinct to support Australia's naval shipbuilding and sustainment needs. It will focus on constructing general-purpose frigates and Army landing craft, while also providing depot-level maintenance and contingency docking for nuclear-powered submarines.

HMAS Stirling, located at Garden Island, will undergo AU\$8 billion in upgrades to support the Hunter-class frigates and nuclear-powered submarines.

It will host the Submarine Rotational Force-West (SRF-West) from 2027, accommodating up to four US and one UK nuclear-powered submarine.

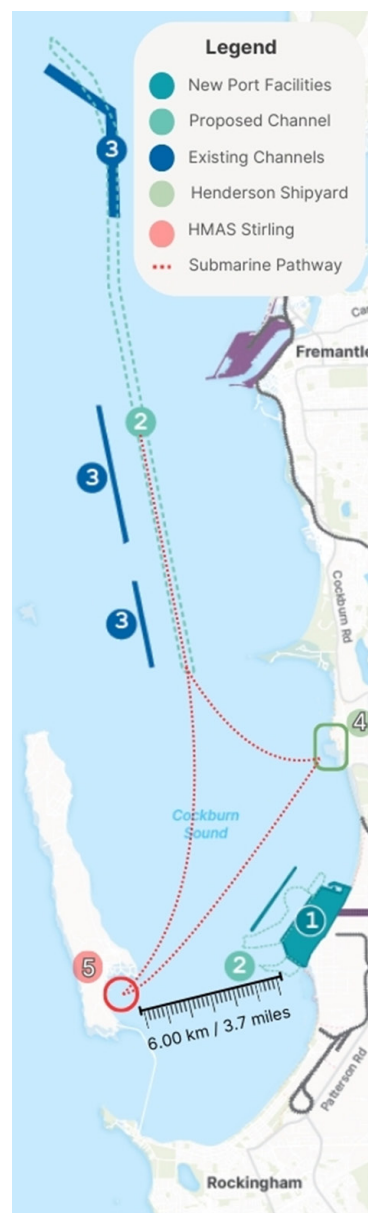
Infrastructure improvements include 400 meters of additional berth space, ensuring readiness for future Australian nuclear-powered submarines under AUKUS.

As part of AUKUS, Australia will acquire at least three Virginia-class submarines from the USA and co-develop next-generation SSN-AUKUS submarines with the UK.

Increased vessel traffic: Increased risk

The proposed site for Westport intersects with the route AUKUS submarines will take when going for routine maintenance and entering/exiting the naval base. This could potentially allow visiting vessels to covertly obtain the whereabouts and sensitive information surrounding Virginia-class and SSN-AUKUS submarines.

This elevated interaction between foreign commercial vessels and AUKUS submarines is intensified with the bottleneck of one point of entry and exit.



“ASIO has identified foreign services seeking to target AUKUS to position themselves to collect on the capabilities, how Australia intends to use them, and to undermine the confidence of our allies.
Mike Burgess - Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) director general
19 February 2025



Annex B

Commercial ships in close proximity to HMAS Stirling
Google Maps Imagery 2025

