

Long-term benefits from submarine development

The federal government signed contracts last week with DCNS for the design of the future submarine, and with Lockheed Martin for the combat system integration.

Detailed planning for the infrastructure required to construct the submarines in Adelaide has also begun. Surprisingly, the critics of an Australian-built submarine are remarkably quiet.

This is in contrast to coverage given to the Productivity Commission report and a privately funded advertising campaign that questioned the decision to build conventional submarines in Australia.

I welcome debate around the future submarine program because Australia's national security is a serious issue that demands public scrutiny.

I'm disappointed, however, when commentators with little knowledge of defence or defence procurement seek to prompt such discourse on the back of factual inaccuracies and emotive claims.

Let's be clear on some key points. First, neither the design nor the local build of the Collins class submarines were the causes of poor availability in recent years. The Coles review identified shortfalls in supply chain capacity and co-ordination, which, now rectified, have increased availability to world benchmarks and decreased the cost of operations.

Second, the federal government has no intention of acquiring a nuclear submarine. The Collins class' remarkable effectiveness demonstrates that conventional submarines provide niche capability that complements the nuclear submarines of our allies. We're committed to procuring a regionally superior conventional submarine.

Third, because our operational requirements are unique, there are no "off the shelf" options. Australia must develop the sovereign design and manufacturing capability to support the maintenance, upgrade and repair of the future

submarines over coming decades. Maximising local industry involvement in the design and build process is the most efficient way of doing this.

For these reasons, the government established a competitive evaluation process for the selection of the design and build partner, and it is widely known that three nations put forward options to build 12 new submarines in partnership with Australia. Following the advice of Australian, British and US subject matter experts involved in the CEP, in April the government announced that the French DCNS option had been selected.

Consolidation to just two shipbuilding hubs — Henderson (WA) and Osborne (SA) — is consistent with overseas best practice and a prerequisite to achieving the aim of a continuous build program.

The government is taking a long-term view of assessment of value for money and futureproofing Australia's national security through strategic procurement programs.

Our future submarines will serve generations of Australians for many decades, and support Australian jobs and innovation today.

Senator David Fawcett is a member of the parliamentary committees responsible for defence and intelligence oversight. Before politics, Senator Fawcett commanded Defence's Aircraft Research and Development Unit.

This op-ed was published in *The Australian* on 7 October 2016.