

Transfer of the nuclear materials in the context of AUKUS and its safeguards in all aspects under the NPT - Statement to the IAEA Board of Governors, March 2026

6.3.2026 - Sonia Farrey | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Right of Reply on behalf of AUKUS partners.

Chair,

I take the floor on behalf of Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States to respond to false narratives about Australia's acquisition of conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarines through the AUKUS partnership. Once again, we have heard unsubstantiated claims which purposefully mischaracterise a legal and legitimate use of nuclear power, foreseen by the drafters of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and taking place within the safeguards framework.

I reiterate that Australia's cooperation with the UK and US on this matter is being undertaken in full compliance with our respective international obligations under the NPT, South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty and its protocols, and Australia's safeguards agreements with the IAEA.

The repeated attempts by China to add the current item to this meeting's agenda falsely imply an active compliance problem where none exists and make plain its intent to manipulate the Board's agenda solely for political purposes. To be clear, this unnecessary item has not been adopted as a standing agenda item by this Board and has never enjoyed consensus support.

Recognising the many other pressing concerns requiring the Board's attention, it is disappointing that valuable time continues to be taken up by the need to respond to this agenda item – an item which shows a grave lack of respect for the Director General's exercise of his independent, technical mandate in relation to Australia's Naval Nuclear Propulsion program. It may soon be time to seriously consider the utility of this politically motivated agenda item.

Chair,

Under this item, the Board has repeatedly heard unfounded allegations that ignore or misrepresent the information we have provided in good faith, and assertions that disregard the statements made by the IAEA Director General, including his most recent report published last November. As you will recall, the report indicated that Australia has continued to fulfil all reporting requirements under its CSA, Additional Protocol and Subsidiary Arrangements.

In response to some of the points we have heard today, I would also like to remind the Board that:

- The IAEA has the clear authority under its Statute to negotiate directly and in-confidence with individual Member States on the establishment and application of safeguards and verification arrangements. Attempted interference should be a cause of concern to the entire Board.

- Naval nuclear propulsion was foreseen by the drafters of the NPT, as the IAEA Director General has repeatedly confirmed. Article 14 of the IAEA's model CSA (INFCIRC/153) – on which Australia's CSA is based – is the specific provision enabling CSA States to use nuclear material in NNP, within the legal framework for safeguards implementation. Under Australia's Article 14 arrangement, the IAEA will be enabled to continue meeting its technical objectives at all stages of the submarines' lifecycle.
- Once the Article 14 arrangement is agreed between Australia and the IAEA Secretariat, and as he has repeatedly stated, the Director General will transmit it to the Board for 'appropriate action', which AUKUS partners fully support. To suggest that the Board will somehow be bypassed is completely false.
- The NPT permits the transfer of nuclear material at any enrichment level provided the transfer is carried out in a manner consistent with any relevant safeguards obligations. Australia's conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine program will be subject to a robust package of verification measures, consistent with its longstanding non-proliferation obligations.
- The UK's Submarine Maintenance Period in Australia was also raised. I would like to put on the record the fact that it has been the case, and will remain the case, that all activities under AUKUS are fully in line with all three partners' respective international obligations. These include, where applicable, those under the Treaty of Rarotonga.

Chair,

Our three countries continue to oppose any proposal for this item to be a standing agenda item or any deliberate attempts to undermine and politicise the technical mandate of the IAEA.

Consistent with our approach to maintaining open and transparent engagement, we will provide an update to the Board under 'Any Other Business' and welcome the Director General's continued commitment to provide updates on naval nuclear propulsion, as and when he deems appropriate.

Thank you, Chair.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/transfer-of-the-nuclear-materials-in-the-context-of-aukus-and-its-safeguards-in-all-aspects-under-the-npt-statement-to-the-iaea-board-of-governors>