

DEFENCE INDUSTRY — DRY-DOCKING FACILITIES

774. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Defence Industry:

When will the minister's government show a real commitment to a dry-docking facility at Henderson, which is critical for our AUKUS arrangements?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is critical!

The SPEAKER: Pipe down, please.

Mr P. PAPALIA replied:

The member is a little out of his depth. He knows nothing about military matters, and he really knows nothing about dry docks, naval shipping or submarine requirements for that infrastructure. Had he paid any attention to the subject of the defence industry in the last six years, he would have noticed that, when the Morrison government was in power, I was advocating for a dry dock because the sole dry dock in Australia, and the only one that takes naval shipping in Australia, is the Captain Cook Graving Dock in Sydney. That is not nuclear rated, but it is a dry dock. It is going out of service in 2026 for long-term maintenance. I was advocating years ago—no, I will not be nasty. When the federal Minister for Defence was Senator Linda Reynolds, I began advocating at that point for a dry dock. Before the fake announcement by the Morrison government that put a contingent liability in the budget for a dry dock, I had advocated for it. That is where it got the idea. What needs to happen now is the federal government needs to understand and acknowledge—it does because I have talked to Hon Richard Marles about it—that if we are going to build a dry dock, it needs to be nuclear rated, and it needs to be done in a time frame that meets the requirements for our acquisition of nuclear submarine capability. It knows more about that time frame than I do. We know that we are going to buy a United States Virginia-class submarine in the early 2030s, but it will come having gone through its mid-cycle docking, so there is an extended period after that before which we will need to undertake deep maintenance. There will be a time frame within which they can build a dry dock. Really, I agree that a decision needs to be made and there needs to be work started on planning, designing and then constructing a dry dock, because it will take years, and it is a big project. I, for one, wholeheartedly support any advocacy because I thought of it and we started it. Members opposite should back it in. They should have backed it in when the previous government was there and made its fake commitment, and they should back it in now. I will welcome them to the party.