



Independent & Peaceful
Australia

Interim Report

***A People's Inquiry: Exploring the Case for an
Independent and Peaceful Australia***

*What are the costs and consequences of Australia's
involvement in US-led wars and the US-alliance*

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About the People's Inquiry

The People's Inquiry is a national public inquiry into the costs and consequences of the Australia-US Alliance for the Australian people.

Primary aim: To facilitate a deep conversation and engagement with the broader Australian community in order to determine a path forwards towards a genuinely independent and peaceful foreign policy for Australia; to ensure a more just allocation of Australian government resources.

Secondary aim: To produce and promote a public report which outlines the views of those Australians who hold concerns about the US Alliance and which details the steps to be taken to ensure a genuinely independent and peaceful foreign policy for Australia.

The Inquiry received 263 submissions from a variety of individuals and organisations between 26 November and October 2021. These submissions are in the process of being reviewed by leading experts in the relevant areas with a final report scheduled for February 2022.

The People's Inquiry was initiated by the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN) a network of organisations around Australia – community, faith and peace groups, trade unions and concerned individuals – aiming to build public dialogue and pressure for change to a truly independent foreign policy for Australia – one in which our government plays a positive role in solving international conflicts peacefully.

Terms of Reference: The People's Inquiry

Terms of reference of the People's Inquiry:

1. The costs and consequences of the Australia-US Alliance relating to:

Social, political, military/defence, economic and environmental impacts – including:

- a) The impact on First Nations Peoples
- b) The impact on all Australian people
- c) The impact on other countries and their people as a result of the US/Australian wars in the name of the Alliance

2. Recommendations about the future of the Australia-US Alliance, including in relation to:

- a) The priorities and future objectives of Australian foreign policy
- b) Proposed changes in relationships with other countries, including the United States
- c) The budgetary implications and opportunities of any proposed changes to the Alliance.
- d) Sustainable and humane alternatives to current defence industries' dependency on endless wars of aggression

Panelists

Chair

Kellie Tranter is a lawyer and human rights activist who stood as an independent candidate for the NSW Parliament. Kellie regularly contributes political and social commentary to public affairs websites like ABC's The Drum, Independent Australia, National Times and Online Opinion and has written for New Matilda and the Australia Institute.

Panelists

Terry Mason is from the land of the Awabakal language group and has worked advising on and delivering curriculum at Deakin University and lecturing/coordinating in the Badanami Centre, Western Sydney University.

Very Reverend Dr Peter Catt is currently Dean of St John's Anglican Cathedral, Brisbane. He is President of A Progressive Christian Voice (Australia), Chair of the Social Responsibilities Committee for The Anglican Church Southern Queensland.

Associate Professor Jeannie Rae chairs courses in International Community Development and in Planetary Health at Victoria University, Melbourne, and has been a peace and labour activist all her life. She was formerly president of the National Tertiary Education Union and a member of the ACTU Executive.

Greg Barns SC, is a democratic and human rights barrister. He's an advisor to Julian Assange Campaign. Past President Australian Republican Movement and Australian Lawyers Alliance.

Emeritus Professor Ian Lowe AO is emeritus professor of science, technology and society at Griffith University and an adjunct professor at two other universities. He has published extensively and filled a wide range of advisory roles for all levels of government, including chairing the advisory council that produced the first independent national report on the state of the environment in 1996.

Dr Vince Scappatura teaches Politics and International Relations at Macquarie University. His latest book is The US Lobby and Australian Defence Policy.

Dr Alison Broinowski A.M. is the author or editor of 14 books about Australia's dealings with the world, Asian countries in particular. Alison is Vice President, Australians for War Powers Reform.

Dr Chad Satterlee is an independent political economist. His main research interests concern the design of collective ownership. He has previously consulted for government and not-for-profit organisations on energy and labour relations issues.

Executive Summary – Kellie Tranter

While the panelists begin collating and analysing the 280 submissions we have received there are already recurring themes and consistent messages emerging. However, the assumption that is ubiquitous throughout the submissions, but bears repeating is that: war is a choice rather than an inevitability in defence and foreign policy decisions. This is evidenced by what we have seen play out in Afghanistan. Diplomacy was shelved there 20 years ago when we decided to follow the US going to war and the immense costs have significantly outweighed any benefit of doing so.

The submissions have highlighted that the Australian public has been sidelined from the debate relating to Australia's defence and foreign policy decisions, particularly in relation to its alliance with the United States. Our foreign policy is rarely publicly discussed, let alone democratically decided and this is despite the obvious interest in the area. The reluctance of politicians to offer new policy and the influence of lobbyists that are not pursuing Australia's interest is of great concern to the public. All these things leave a yawning gap between public attitudes and government policies.

However, the submissions to the Inquiry also offer alternative policies. While at this stage it is too early to present in-depth recommendations from the submissions, there are certainly common calls from the public. One example proposed is that the decision to go to war must be decided in Parliament, with evidence being tabled and the purpose, costs, benefits and consequences of military action openly debated.

Many people have contributed to this Inquiry, the first of its kind giving people a chance to have their say on the matter. The volume of submissions the Inquiry has received indicates that the findings of this Inquiry are representative of the views held by the majority of concerned Australians, and most recognise that Australia's current trajectory destines us to a future of conflict.

The Inquiry's findings, when published, will be of considerable historical significance, first as a historical reference point for those who in the future will assess the efficacy of our government's decisions and actions, and secondly as a clarion call for the use of reason, diplomacy and the common sense of the electorate and all of our elected representatives in making decisions about alliances and warfare in what really are Australia's best interests.

Impact on First Nations' Peoples – Terry Mason

A number of issues have been identified in the submissions related to the Impact on First Nations' peoples.

Frontier Wars and Dispossession have been mentioned in the submissions.

In addition, there has been a focus on a lack of adequate consultation, with specific areas covered in some detail including sites, Sovereignty, Pine Gap, access to land, the terms of self-determination and the details around use of land under Native Title terms.

Non-recognition of returned service people was raised in terms of respect and social/health support and dignity.

There were also issues raised in particular detail concerning US service personnel posing actual risk of covid infection, other health dangers and sexual assaults.

Pollution has been a concern in many forms. Water pollution from chemicals such as PFAS and on water, flora and people from fuel dumps and aerial dumping from planes. Radiation from nuclear sources and from communication/surveillance establishments have also been highlighted as areas of concern.

In addition, damage to sites, land, fauna and land clearing were regular comments as was the lack of guidance from custodians in contrast to 'decimation for greed'.

Several contributors elaborated on the diversion of funds from community need and resourcing as well as the waste of needed energy provision and material structures.

Although not a high priority for most submitters, the importance of addressing injustice by accepting the Uluru Statement and in particular, entering into meaningful treaties, was delineated in some instances clearly and inferred by many others. One writer mentioned the need for reconciliation.

Social and community - Very Rev Dr Peter Catt

There have been a number of areas canvassed by submissions related to the social and community area.

Some submissions highlighted the opportunities that have been lost due to the financial cost of war, including the opportunity to provide more public housing, better outcomes for first nations people, better education, mental health and general health care

The ongoing social effects of our involvement in war including the trauma experienced by veterans, their families and communities, and by refugees were also highlighted.

Concerns have been raised regarding the effect of Australia being constantly at war on our national self-understanding and our understanding of the 'outside' world and the way this is likely to affect our future prosperity, as exemplified by our hawkish attitude to China

There were also issues raised in relation to a loss of cultural interaction with our region and the dislocation of local communities by the military presence with specific examples including Talisman Sabre in Yeppoon and the presence of US personnel in Darwin.

Other issues highlighted by submissions include the effects of the increasing militarisation of our industrial base as well as the normalisation of conflict and violence as ways of negotiating in society.

In addition, the increasing polarisation of political discourse is also seen as a fruit of being so focused on the use of military power to resolve disputes.

A large number of submissions raise other issues that will be listed in the final report.

Unions and workers' rights - Associate Professor Jeannie Rea

The key themes of the submission that have addressed Unions and Workers' Rights substantially or in part include the fact that Trade unions in Australia have a proud history of organising in opposition to imperialist and unjust wars - from World War 1 to Iraq - and of supporting global peace and nuclear disarmament.

This opposition to imperialist and unjust wars has organised around critiques of global and local political ambitions and the consequential impacts of armed conflict upon people and their communities in terms of the wounded and killed (military and civilian), the terrorised, destruction of social and cultural lives, political structures and civil society, and economic and environmental devastation. Several submissions have also noted the disproportionate impacts upon First Nations, minority, persecuted and poor communities. Most submissions have pointed to the enormous financial cost of wars, the aftermath and the ongoing investment in 'defence' materials and systems. In addition, all submissions argued that taxes should be better spent on health and education; on addressing climate change and social and economic injustice – as well as alternative conflict resolution.

However organised labour has also been divided on these issues, with some submissions attributing this to ideological positioning (e.g. Cold War) and consequential ongoing support for the US Alliance; with others also pointing to the shameful legacies of colonisation and White Australia Policy still prevalent in attitudes and behaviour. Division continues today amongst workers and unions over participation in and promotion of weapons manufacturing. This has become very topical with the formation of AUKUS and the Australian LNP Government's commitment to supporting the US and UK war machines in the Indo-Pacific region, including purchasing nuclear-propelled submarines.

Several submissions highlighted the weakening of unions by successive governments – LNP and Labor – and the influence of US multinationals and think tanks upon the discourse and laws on workers' rights, including virulent anti-unionism. Several submissions (not just from unions) addressed the need to make unions strong again to take up the fight for social and economic change in favour of working people and communities. But other submissions were pessimistic of unions' capacity. One submission highlighted the need for alternative ways of creating jobs and economic independence pointing to member-owned cooperatives and the workers' money held in superannuation funds.

Political including democratic rights - Greg Barns SC

There are a number of major themes which emerge from a reading of submissions.

One issue highlighted has been the need for Australia to achieve real independence by becoming a republic and a greater engagement by civil society is argued in a number of submissions. This theme sits alongside another dominant recommendation, the urgent need for war powers reform.

Concern about the loss of liberties and freedoms in the context of the war on terror and the abuse of the criminal justice system manifest in the political prosecutions of Canberra lawyer Bernard Collaery and Witness K also emerge from the submissions. There needs to be greater independent scrutiny of intelligence and security agencies.

The interference and disruption of democracy via the means of US and other foreign powers influence of political parties, MPs and parliamentary committees are referred to in some submissions, and there are calls for bans or strict regulation of political donations and lobbying.

One interesting submission argues that US/Australian military installations and exercises should be subject to environmental assessment and the impact on Indigenous communities.

If there is an overall theme to be drawn from submissions it is that Australian democracy is broken and heading down an authoritarian path.

The Environment and Climate Change - Ian Lowe AO

Submissions in relation to environmental costs of warfare covered the measurable direct costs of military action, fuel use by the military in the context of climate change, nuclear issues, biosecurity risks and the “opportunity costs”, the other desirable activities that are precluded by our prioritisation of military spending.

Submissions detailed the direct costs of our involvement in wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq: deforestation, pollution of air and water, radiation from use of depleted uranium, loss of productive land and interference in bird migratory patterns.

Submissions have highlighted that the military uses prodigious amounts of fossil fuels, with the US military alone emitting greenhouse gases comparable to those from a middle-sized country like Denmark.

Other issues highlighted include the fact that putting nuclear reactors in warships risks radioactive pollution on a scale comparable with major accidents like Chernobyl or Fukushima, while the existence of some 13,000 nuclear weapons poses an existential threat to civilisation.

Concerns have also been raised regarding the involvement of the military in international joint exercises such as Talisman Sabre and the refusal of the US military to subject its vessels to scrutiny raises biosecurity risks.

Finally, many submissions pointed out that the prodigious expenditure on the military makes it impossible to address real threats such as climate change.

Military and defence - Dr Vince Scappatura

Many submissions sought to locate the US alliance within the broader context of Australia's colonial history, identifying the roots of Australia's defence policy and support for Empire in a history of genocide, dispossession, racism, irrational security anxieties and dependence on "great and powerful friends".

Others pointed to the links between the US alliance, increasing costs of defence and a growing militarist mindset in Australian security thinking, promoted by vested interests such as arms manufactures, hawkish think-tanks and other elements of the national security establishment. Relatedly, several submissions pointed to the impacts of the military-industrial complex driving draconian domestic national security laws and an ever closer and more militarised alliance with the United States.

By far the most popular concern expressed among submissions was that the US alliance has led Australia into costly wars in the past and is likely to again in the future, especially with China. Many criticised the new Cold War taking shape between the US and China and expressed concern about the consequences of Australia taking sides with the US to contain China.

Several submissions pointed to the dangers of the American military build-up in the Indo-Pacific, particularly since the Obama administration's "Pivot to Asia", and in Australia specifically as a result of US Force Posture Initiatives, joint "war games" and the ongoing expansion of US bases Pine Gap and Northwest Cape. A few submissions expressed concern at the financial cost for Australia hosting American forces while others worried about crimes committed by US forces in Australia.

Many submissions commented that the US alliance, particularly in the context of this ongoing military build-up, makes Australia less safe and a target (including a nuclear target) of US adversaries, namely China. Several submissions highlighted the fact that the ANZUS Treaty does not guarantee US protection in the event Australia faced a military threat, but rather compels each country to "act" and "consult." One submission pointed to the folly of relying on a US superpower in decline and the dangers of supporting an American

empire undergoing collapse.

The likelihood of being dragged into another disastrous US-led war led many submissions to criticise Australia's lack of independence and sovereignty. Military, intelligence and corporate economic integration/dependence is viewed as tying Australia to fighting for US global strategic and economic interests.

A number of submissions linked Australia's growing military spending, emphasis on offensive capabilities and long-range missile systems to the dynamics of the US alliance, and worried about the implications of this fuelling a regional arms race.

While many submissions focussed on the costs to Australia, an equal number were concerned about the costs of supporting US empire and imperial policies that are contrary to Australia's professed values, involve frequent and egregious violations of international law and human rights, subverts democracy, undermines stability and makes Australia complicit in wars of aggression and other war crimes. Several submissions made the point that the alliance ties Australia to US nuclear war plans and Australia's commitment to extended nuclear deterrence effectively requires the US to commit genocide in our defence.

Alternative Visions/Possibilities

A number of submissions pointed to a substantial but narrow set of issues for reform in Australian defence policy and the US alliance, including calls for a public inquiry into the Iraq War, "war powers" reform, a review of Australia's participation in US drone strikes through Pine Gap, urgent action on climate change, neutrality in the coming Cold War between the US and China, extricating Australia from all participation in US nuclear war planning and joining the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Other submissions called for Australia to actively encourage demilitarisation, peacebuilding and confidence-building measures in the Indo-Pacific, including the creation of a new arms-control architecture.

Submissions that focussed on the US alliance ranged from proposals for more independence to breaking the alliance entirely, with specific suggestions including ending US Force Posture Initiatives, closing Pine Gap, ending joint “war games” and withdrawing all Australian military personnel embedded or attached to US military units.

There were several suggestions for specific alternative defence policies for Australia, including continental defence, self-reliance, “armed neutrality” and non-violent defence. Potential models referenced include New Zealand, Switzerland, Sweden, Vietnam and others, although other submissions pointed to the limits of these models for Australia. One proposal called for Australia to adopt an Area-Access/Area-Denial defence capability in pursuit of independent continental defence.

Rather than articulate specific alternative defence policies, some submissions argued for a set of ethical principles to guide Australian defence policy based on the pursuit of “common security” and that limits military force to “just wars” and lawful actions consistent with the UN Charter and International Humanitarian Law. Others went further to suggest Australia join with other like-minded countries to pursue radical reform of the international system and a United Nations that is more independent of the great powers.

Others still sought a wholesale reconceptualisation of Australian defence policy that broadened security needs beyond “national security” to include “human security”, pointing out the fundamental importance of addressing global inequalities, environmental threats and the preservation of the global commons. Some submissions called for significant investment in domestic peace education and non-violent conflict resolution studies.

Moving forward, one submission pointed to the need to reach and build a broad-based social movement to change the narrative on Australian defence and security and suggested the People’s Inquiry final report be used as a launching pad for this purpose.

Foreign Policy - Dr Alison Broinowski A.M.

'For all its enduring importance, adherence to ANZUS does not constitute a foreign policy' - EG Whitlam

Submissions were almost completely consistent in deploring Australia's lack of independence in foreign policy. They were almost unanimous in blaming bipartisan dependence on the US for the decline of Australia's diplomacy and influence, particularly in our region. Many observed Australia's loss of regard for multilateralism and international law, spoken of as the 'international rules-based order', but to which Australia subjects itself inconsistently.

Most recognised that in transferring our dependence from Britain to the US, Australia had failed to build foreign policy experience. Our achievements were limited to when we took initiatives for international conventions and when we instituted the Colombo plan, the Cambodian election, the Solomon Islands and East Timor interventions. But in recent years such efforts have declined. Australia has failed to support the people of West Papua, Timor Leste and Palestine, has fallen behind on climate change policy, and has refused to sign the Treaty on Nuclear Weapons. Instead, Australia has several times supported untenable US positions and then backed down, achieving nothing.

Considering alternatives, contributors proposed ways of distancing Australia from the US, ranging from gentle persuasion to complete expulsion of US forces and abrogation of ANZUS. Some recommended a review of the treaty, and many wanted reform of the war powers. As substitutes for US defence, some advocated demilitarisation and more effective diplomacy, and others argued for armed neutrality. None proposed that conflict with China would be in Australia's interests.

These submissions were received before the announcement of AUKUS, which locks Australia into military arrangements that further diminish the chance of the recommendations above being realised.

Economic – Dr Chad Satterlee

I have received 58 submissions relevant to economics. These range from short statements to thoroughly researched papers. Submission categories: opportunity cost, trade, economic sovereignty, war, and economic democracy.

Opportunity Cost: Many submissions express the view that a sizeable fraction of Australia’s defence spending (now well over \$40 billion per year) would, on moral and/or economic grounds, probably be better spent on such things as housing, education, childcare, health, welfare, enhanced diplomatic capacity, and decarbonising our energy systems). One submission calculated that the 2021 defence budget could run 39,472 ICU beds, or pay for 611,613 teachers.

Trade: Numerous submissions note that China is Australia’s largest trading partner and that this beneficial relationship in terms of income and job generation is being needlessly harmed by Australia’s strategic alignment with the US against China. From this perspective, the recent AUKUS defence pact begs the question: why does Australia need submarines to defend its trade with China from China?

Economic sovereignty: A number of submissions voice concerns over Australia’s dependency on overseas, mainly the US, supply chains, and the implications of this for our economic sovereignty, including in times of emergency such as a pandemic or war. Many submissions also express concern over the undue influence these economic dependencies have on our domestic political systems.

War: Numerous submissions draw attention to the human and financial costs of our failed war efforts, as well as the damage inflicted on the environment during and in preparation for war. A good representative quote: “Australia’s military expedition [in Afghanistan] cost the lives of 41 of its soldiers, and inflicted many more physical and mental injuries, several of these resulting in suicides. It provoked a number of war crimes, and cost upwards of \$10 billion”. Another aspect of war dealt with in submissions considers whether the US and its allies would be able to defeat China in a war anyway. Two submissions astutely point out that, to a large extent, victory depends on a nation’s relative industrial capacity. In the context of AUKUS and the prospect of a naval

war, Australia's shipyard capacity is trivial, while US shipyard capacity (ten times smaller than that of China's) may have trouble replacing sunk vessels at a fast enough rate.

Economic democracy: A common viewpoint in submissions holds that the Australian political system is not a substantive democracy since the current defence policy is bipartisan, even though polls show that most Australians oppose going to war against China. Various submissions also argue that our major political parties have been in some sense captured by the defence sector.

Some submissions canvass alternatives to the status quo. These basically propose imposing public ownership and control over the productive assets used by defence so that democratic principles govern their use. As one submission put it: "I believe that military armament manufacturing needs to be closely monitored in a nationalised fashion and only for self-defence and not export profitability". Another submission argues that to pursue genuine economic sovereignty, we should go further, by defining and nationalising all strategic sectors such as energy, telecommunications, transportation, pharmaceuticals, mineral resources, chemical, manufacturing, and financial, as well as re-establishing an Australian shipping line under Federal government control.

Still another submission asks us to imagine a system of "direct plebiscites on incremental changes to the defence budget ... held every 2-5 years, with debate to guide voters in their decision making. This would give Australian voters a direct say in how much of their taxpayer money is spent on defence".

Acknowledgements

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In addition, we wish to acknowledge the vital support provided by Independent Australia who partnered with IPAN on the launch of the People's Inquiry and who have continued to promote the Inquiry through the publication of articles and advertisements through their online publication. Thanks also go to Pearls and Irritations for their promotion of the Inquiry through the publication of articles.

In addition, there has been a People's Inquiry Working Group working tirelessly behind the scenes for the best part of two years, to establish the structure for and ongoing promotion of the Inquiry

The Working Group includes members of the IPAN national coordinating committee as well as a – number of IPAN volunteers.

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