I would like to make the following submission to the Defence White Paper 2015. There is a wide range of issues to be covered by the White Paper, however I would like to request that the White Paper process gives an **unbiased, objective and comprehensive** comparison of all of the options for replacing the Collins class submarines.

This issue, has appeared to the public, to be mired in confusion, pork barrelling and partisan politics. The White Paper provides an opportunity to assess and compare the replacement submarine options available including their respective cost benefit analyses. This would help allow the government and the public to understand the options in a more informed way, which may allow a clearer choice.

The recent media discussion regarding the Soryu class gives the issue an air of desperation in which the Government and Defence Department seem to be clutching for an answer to the dilemma on the best option to replace the Collins class. As this will probably be Australia’s biggest so far Defence purchase, can the White Paper please help to shed light on all the facts and options some of which somehow never seem to be discussed. For example; The Collins class is, on the one hand, promoted as an excellent Australian built long range conventional submarine, while on the other hand, it is said to have cost a fortune to build and operate, is terribly unreliable and is an expensive failure by any objective comparison with other conventional submarines. Which story does one believe?

One glaring omission in the debate is the near complete absence of any discussion of the Virginia class nuclear submarine as an option ( or even if it would be available as an option). The Virginia class submarines appear to tick all the boxes for a Collins replacement; they are twice the size of the conventional options, have unlimited range, travel at over three times the speed and generate 5-6 times the power of a conventional submarine. Furthermore they can; generate their own oxygen from water, carry much more weaponry and personnel if necessary and are designed to operate in shallow water with a wide array of sensors. And they cost $US1.7 billion each to construct (based on the recent US Navy contract for ten signed earlier this year) and reportedly $US50 million/year each to operate. And yet the media talks of spending up to $A30-40 billion on a conventionally powered Collins replacement. But are the Virginia class a viable option for Australia which has no real nuclear industry? Would the US sell or lease them to us? Will the public accept a nuclear powered option when presented with the facts. Are they too expensive compared to the benefit? And how many submarines do we need? On paper the Virginia class seems to be an excellent solution but it never seems to be discussed.

And if the Virginia class is not to be an option, can the White Paper please tell us why? They clearly outperform any type of conventional submarine available including the Soryu class.

And then there is the question of building a replacement in Australia. The Collins class appears to have been less than a success but maybe there are benefits. I believe that the Australian Defence Force should have the absolute best equipment available for the tasks it is asked to perform. And this means the navy should have the absolute best submarines possible. I can remember how the nuclear powered HMS Conqueror dominated the Falklands war in 1982, not by sinking the Belgrano, but by being able to transit from...
Gibraltar to the South Atlantic in 5 days at full speed and then, after sinking the Belgrano, completely bottling up the Argentinian Fleet in port for the rest of the war.

I believe the most serious long term threat to Australia could involve threats to our sea trade routes through Asia. I believe Australia needs an excellent submarine service to protect our trade routes and our mainland. And yet we seem to be having great difficulty in logically deciding on a suitable replacement submarine option. I am asking that the Defence White Paper 2015 clears the air on a replacement for the Collins class, thoroughly assesses all the options for a replacement submarine, including the Virginia class submarine and does so informatively and objectively.

Thank you for reading my submission.

Yours faithfully,

Tony Bernard

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