

Do Not Put All Our Eggs in One Basket

A Protopian security gambit for distributed civic AI capability

Inquiry	Independent AUKUS Public Inquiry, Brisbane public hearing
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Introduction. My name is Luke Nathan Hayes. I am a private citizen from Minjerribah and the operator of [Strange but True: Tech, Art and Ideas That'll Help](#). I am developing Ready S.E.T. Co, meaning Sustainable Employment and Training, as a proposed cooperative, and I nominate [Ballow Road in Dunwich](#) as one possible community compute, learning and disaster-resilience pilot. This is my personal strategic perspective, not a claim of endorsement by government, council or Traditional Owners.

The question I ask this Inquiry

- AUKUS is presented as a multi-decade investment in security, sovereignty, advanced technology, skills and deterrence.
- What comparable positive-sum security options were considered for distributed intelligence, education, scientific capability, climate and disaster resilience, and peaceful regional cooperation?
- Australia should not place its strategic future in one submarine program, one alliance, one vendor ecosystem or one definition of security.

1. Opportunity cost is part of national security

The Parliamentary Library records a public estimate of A\$268 billion to A\$368 billion for the nuclear-powered submarine program, with the Parliamentary Budget Office estimating A\$367.6 billion in out-turned dollars, including contingency. The AUKUS Public Inquiry specifically asks about cost, jobs, sovereignty, advanced capabilities, education and alternatives. [1]-[2]

My submission does not pretend that submarines and civic AI infrastructure perform the same task. It asks whether the opportunity-cost comparison has been ambitious enough. Security also includes whether communities can communicate during disasters, whether Australia can operate critical AI without permission from an overseas company, whether young people understand the systems shaping their future, whether First Nations retain authority over data, whether regional partners can collaborate without extraction, and whether the country can recover when a network, grid, cloud or supplier fails.

I call the alternative a Protopian Gambit. Protopia means continual improvement rather than a perfect final society. A gambit is a deliberate opening move that creates larger options later. The aim is to solve practical problems now while compounding skills, infrastructure and relationships into a stronger future.

2. The alternative security architecture

Australia should build a federated sovereign AI architecture consisting of personal devices, neighbourhood edge systems, serious community-scale compute, state and national systems, commercial hyperscale facilities, research supercomputers, quantum systems and future orbital capability. None of these layers should become an unavoidable point of dependency.

The missing middle sits between the phone and the giant data centre. I propose approximately one serious local node per 10,000 people as a starting planning ratio, adapted to geography, Country, population density, universities, hospitals, industry, energy and disaster exposure. Nodes should be vendor-neutral and

generation-flexible, using current frontier racks where justified and previous-generation or alternative hardware where it better matches the workload and budget.

The Commonwealth already recognises the basis of this argument. The National AI Plan identifies compute and resilient connectivity as critical infrastructure and recognises distributed processing. The Government Data Centre Expectations require national interest, skills, research, energy, water and community benefits from large developments, while excluding small-scale edge systems from their scope. CSIRO Vetra at Pullenvale demonstrates sovereign, trusted AI computing close to robots and sensors as part of an edge-core-cloud architecture. [3]-[5]

The security value of local nodes is dual-use in the broad civic sense. Everyday uses include education, health research, local software, digital twins, environmental sensing, creative production, small business and public planning. During cyclone, bushfire, flood, cyberattack, grid failure or communications disruption, the same node can preserve maps, models, identity, local resource information and trusted communications.

3. A national learning network, not another silo

The first cohort should be recruited through local government associations, chambers of commerce, high schools, TAFEs, universities, hospitals, libraries, Indigenous developer pathways, girls-in-code networks, maker communities, creative industries and research institutions. These are networks that can find capable early adopters and teach others.

I propose three or four varied sites in each state and territory. Each site should receive a serious rack or equivalent cluster, professional power and cooling, secure networking, a visible community laboratory, a digital twin of the system, and just-in-time XR training. While cohort one learns, cohort two prepares. The cycle is identify, qualify, train, install, experiment, document, and teach the next cohort.

A 32-site first cohort at a working all-in allowance of A\$6 million per frontier-class node is approximately A\$192 million. That is about 0.05 per cent of the A\$368 billion upper public estimate for the submarine program. A 100-site learning network at A\$600 million is about 0.16 per cent. The allowance includes compute, storage, power, cooling, networking, security, a public learning laboratory, XR training and initial support. It is a policy-planning unit, not a vendor quote.

The Ballow Road concept on Minjerribah is one possible edge testbed. An island location can test disconnected operation, local energy, backup communications, coastal and environmental models, skills transfer, public access and respectful First Nations data-governance pathways. Success would be measured by what people learn, what useful work is done, what fails, and how much easier the next site becomes.

4. The global peace and capability comparison

My supplied world-cities dataset contains approximately 41,549 places with a recorded population of at least 9,000. At the same A\$6 million planning allowance, a frontier-everywhere thought experiment is about A\$249.3 billion. A rounded 44,000-place estimate is A\$264 billion. This is roughly 68 to 72 per cent of the A\$368 billion upper submarine estimate.

This is the Protopian Gambit I want placed beside AUKUS in the public imagination: a global network of locally governed intelligence, education, citizen science, cultural understanding, disaster resilience, climate adaptation and human self-alignment. Australia would not fund it alone or control it. We could begin the pattern, invite Aotearoa New Zealand and Pacific neighbours to co-design on their own terms, and connect willing towns, universities, Native Nations and communities through open standards.

The strategic bet is that distributed civic capability creates peace before conflict becomes the only coordination mechanism left. It also produces technicians, developers, scientists, teachers, artists, health workers and local stewards who can contribute to any future national challenge. That is sovereign capability in a form spread through society rather than concentrated in one military-industrial pathway.

5. AI alignment and the kind of civilisation we are securing

AUKUS Pillar II includes AI, autonomy, quantum and other advanced technologies for military advantage. The Inquiry asks why technological advancement must be progressed primarily under the AUKUS banner. My answer is that it should not be. [6]

Australians should learn AI through civic, scientific, creative and community missions as well as defence applications. Local compute can help people reflect on lessons from the past, values needed now, virtues they hope to cultivate, and what Joyful Responsible Abundance means at different scales. This is AI alignment through human self-alignment, without forcing one national or corporate values vector onto everyone.

GAJRA Earth, the Global Association for Joyful Responsible Abundance, is my proposed voluntary connective layer. It is not intended as a global authority. It is an invitation for communities, cultures, language groups, scientists, artists and AI systems to share experiments while keeping their own sovereignty. Australia can invest in alliances without allowing integration to become ingestion.

Recommendations to the AUKUS Public Inquiry

- Require a formal opportunity-cost comparison between AUKUS and positive-sum security investments in civic compute, climate resilience, education, health, science and regional cooperation.
- Recommend an immediate 32-site federated sovereign AI pilot across all states and territories, funded at approximately A\$192 million.
- Require AUKUS Pillar II and other major technology partnerships to transfer civilian capability, open interfaces, Australian maintenance skills, research access and workload portability.
- Build advanced AI capability through a diverse national ecology rather than one alliance, one cloud, one accelerator vendor or one defence mission.
- Invite Pacific partners and First Nations to co-design sovereign local nodes that retain authority over data, language, culture and participation.
- Broaden national security assessment to include distributed intelligence, disaster continuity, scientific literacy, social trust and the ability to recover from technological dependency.

Do not put all our eggs in one basket. Build the interfaces between the baskets.

Selected sources

- [1] [AUKUS Public Inquiry: key issues, submissions and Terms of Reference](#)
- [2] [Parliamentary Library: cost and opportunity cost of nuclear-powered submarines](#)
- [3] [Australian Government National AI Plan](#)
- [4] [Expectations of data centres and AI infrastructure developers](#)
- [5] [CSIRO Vetra: sovereign, trusted AI computing at the edge](#)
- [6] [Defence: AUKUS advanced capabilities and Pillar II priorities](#)
- [7] [Strange but True](#)
- [8] [Ballow Road pilot concept](#)