



**Senator the Hon David Fawcett**

Deputy Chair, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Senator for South Australia

---

**MEDIA RELEASE**

3 June 2024

**SECURITY RHETORIC UNDERMINED BY THE REALITY OF CUTS  
TO DEFENCE CAPABILITY**

Senate Estimates revealed today that despite the sweeping rhetoric of the Albanese Government's National Defence Strategy, the tip of the spear is not just blunt—it is missing.

In Senate Estimates examination of the Department of Foreign Affairs today, the Albanese Government confirmed that the new concept of National Defence means that Australia's front line is diplomacy, underpinned by military capability.

It sounds reassuringly like President Roosevelt's "big stick diplomacy". Unlike Roosevelt's approach, however, which started with the big stick, Australia has been left with words but not weapons.

The reality revealed by this budget is that when specific threats are analysed, the cuts to key military capability by the Albanese Government have left Australia vulnerable.

When the Deputy Prime Minister announced Australia's new National Defence Strategy, he noted that Australia is crucially reliant on maritime trade. Inadvertently, in doing so, he highlighted our exposure to measures such as the use of naval mines in ports or their approaches that connect our sea lines of communication.

Ironically, in releasing the Integrated Investment Plan at the same time, the Deputy Prime Minister simultaneously announced the cancellation of SEA 1905, a project initiated in 2019 to upgrade Australia's mine countermeasures capability.

Senate Estimates today highlighted that diplomacy had failed to deter the Russian use of naval mines to block Ukraine's ports in the Black Sea and that a joint NATO naval force was being deployed to deal with the threat.

Despite the Chinese Communist Party's People's Liberation Army-Navy having an estimated 50,000–100,000 maritime mines—five to ten times the number stockpiled by the United States Navy and the means to deploy them by air, ship or submarine—the Albanese Government now appears to be relying on diplomats rather than defence to protect our ports.

In addition to establishing SEA 1905, the Coalition Government funded the Transition Capability Assurance Program (TransCap) program to upgrade and extend the life of Australia's fleet of eight Anzac-class frigates to ensure capability up to 2030. The Albanese Government has scrapped the TransCap program and announced plans to retire two Anzac-class frigates by 2026.

The Coalition commissioned the construction of nine Hunter-class anti-submarine warfare frigates. The Albanese Government has reduced that fleet to just six. They've also cancelled the additional support ships required to keep a fleet at sea.

Labor's rhetoric is not matched by reality when it comes to defence investment. The Foreign Affairs department—the front line of Australia's Defence under the Albanese Government's new strategy—had no answer today as to the specific measures they would take to defend Australia against the specific threat of naval mines blocking our ports.

**-ENDS-**

**Media Contact:**

Cody Mitchell | 0422 937 719 | [cody.mitchell@aph.gov.au](mailto:cody.mitchell@aph.gov.au)