



THE FAWCETT FLYER

MAY/JUNE 2023



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It has been a busy two months. Since my last update, we have seen significant developments in relation to religious freedom and the nuclear energy debate. In May, I introduced a private senator's bill on defence capability assurance and oversight, and the government released its federal budget—following which, senators returned to Canberra for two weeks of Budget Estimates.

Since its release in late April, there has been a great deal of commentary around the government's response to the Defence Strategic Review.

I think the weeks and months following the Review have vindicated my initial assessment—namely, that Labor has overpromised and underdelivered. During Estimates, I scrutinised the government's post-DSR plans and the impacts of defence sustainment cuts to key defence projects. Find links to videos of these exchanges on page 5.

In early May, the government released its second budget—marking Labor's first full year in office. As Peter Dutton highlighted in his budget reply speech, many millions of Australians have every right to be disappointed with the result. People are hurting with high costs, yet the government has delivered a big spending, higher tax budget that many economists predict will only increase inflation—fuelling the current cost-of-living crisis.

Australian households and businesses are facing crippling electricity prices, which only continue to rise. Simultaneously, surveys show that voters overwhelmingly support exploring next-generation, low-emissions nuclear energy to put downward pressure on electricity prices. In this edition of the Fawcett Flyer, I provide another update on the world of nuclear power—something to which, sadly, the Albanese government seems to remain ideologically opposed. Read more on page 7.

I have also been deeply concerned by several recent developments on the religious freedom front—with the ACT Labor government's compulsory acquisition of the Catholic-run Calvary Hospital in Canberra and the ALRC's consultation paper on anti-discrimination reform in relation to religious schools. You can read my full religious freedom report on page 6.

In May, we also celebrated the Royal Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III, King of Australia, at Westminster Abbey, London. Given the long reign of Queen Elizabeth II, many Australians have never witnessed a Royal Coronation.

Australia was founded as—and continues to be—a Constitutional Monarchy. Accordingly, the Monarch remains an important part of Australia's cultural and political heritage. Long live the King!

Kind regards,

**SENATOR THE HON
DAVID FAWCETT**



DEFENCE CAPABILITY ASSURANCE AND OVERSIGHT BILL 2023

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On 10 May, I introduced my private senator's bill—the *Defence Capability Assurance and Oversight Bill 2023*—to the Senate.

The Bill has since been referred to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade legislation committee for public scrutiny via an inquiry.

Australia cannot afford to waste time and money on defence projects that fail to deliver the necessary war-fighting capability.

The *Defence Strategic Review 2023*—which builds on the *Defence Strategic Update 2020*—provides an assessment of our developing strategic context which highlights that timely, effective, and risk-informed decisions are required.

Assessing, reporting and managing procurement risk, however, is the very thing ANAO and parliamentary reports have highlighted that Defence has not consistently done well.

My Bill addresses the reported systemic deficiencies in how Defence deals with procurement risk.

Submissions from the public and interested stakeholders are currently being accepted, and the Committee is due to report back on 7 September (although the date could be extended).

2022-2023

9690

The Parliament of the
Commonwealth of Australia

THE SENATE

Presented and read a first time

Defence Capability Assurance and Oversight Bill 2023

No. , 2023

(Senator Fawcett)

A Bill for an Act to establish the Defence Capability Assurance Agency, the Inspector-General of Defence Capability Assurance and the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Defence, and for related purposes

On my website, you can find the links to see my Second Reading Speech, view the Inquiry page or make a submission.

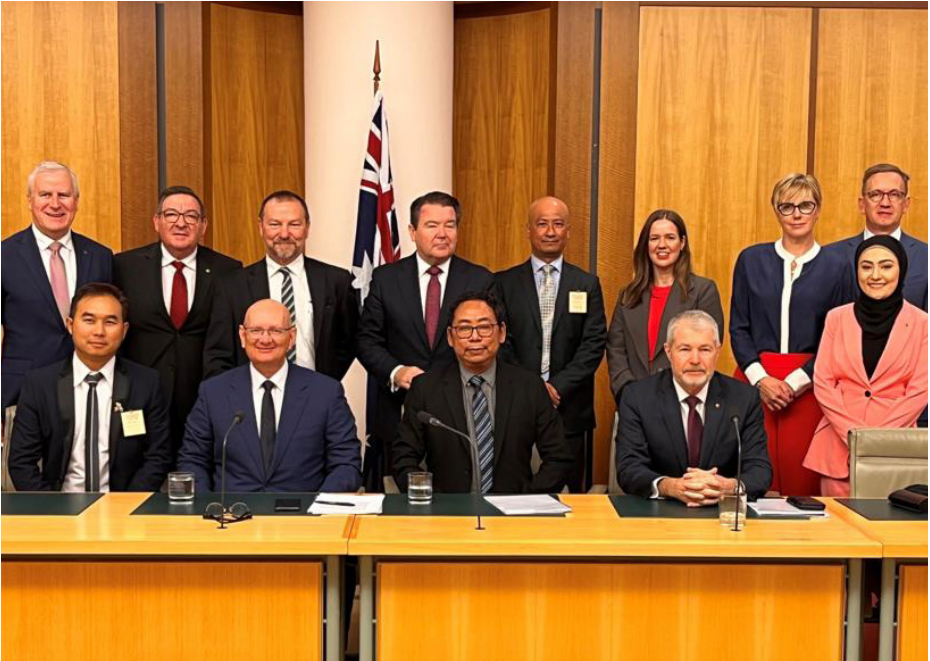
My Bill will ensure that comprehensive risk assessment—one of the basic principles of systems engineering and an existing part of defence materiel policy—is conducted by people who have the necessary qualifications and experience to do so.

Such risk assessments would provide information—critical to Australia's effective and efficient acquisition of defence capabilities—in a timely, unbiased, and transparent manner.

Find more on my website.



MY COMMITTEE WORK



Alongside my usual committee responsibilities as the Deputy Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT), and a member of the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (SSCFADT), I returned to Canberra post-budget for two weeks of Budget Estimates.

I took the opportunity to question the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Department of Defence on a range of issues—including the AUKUS partnership, defence procurement, defence industry, and the war in Ukraine.

You can find links to many of these exchanges in my Budget Estimates update on page 5.

As a part of my regular committee responsibilities, I met with a number of foreign delegations and ambassadors, including from the National Unity Government of Myanmar as well as the governments of Romania, Japan, and Morocco.

On 15 June, I met with the ambassadors of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to mark the date of the Soviet occupation and annexation

of the three countries back in 1940. The 50 years of occupation these nations endured should give us cause to reflect on the brutality of totalitarian rule and the necessary role that free democracies play in collectively resisting such regimes.

Throughout the months of May and June, the JSCFADT had hearings for inquiries into Australia's tourism and international education sectors; supporting democracy in our region, and the rights of women and children.

You can follow my Facebook page for ongoing updates on my committee work.



In May, the SSCFADT references committee tabled the report from our inquiry into “Adaptive sport programs for Australian Defence Force veterans”.

This is an inquiry I initiated in November 2022 via a motion in the Senate. Its aim was to examine the role of sports programs for ADF veterans in addressing their transition from service and recovery from PTSD.

These were both issues identified by the ongoing Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

The Committee heard from a range of stakeholders during multiple hearings in March and April.

In the published report, the Committee ultimately made several important recommendations to ensure better outcomes for veterans through inclusive sports programs.

The report affirmed the key role that veterans sports can play in rehabilitation and supporting the transition of defence personnel from service.

It recommended that rehabilitation should be central to programs that span a veteran's experience from service to civilian life.

Moreover, it noted that a commitment to veteran well-being should underpin criteria for selection of staff to support high profile programs—for example, the Invictus Games.

The Committee's report also suggested that policies from the Department of Defence and Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) need to better facilitate programs that support the transition of ADF members from service into civilian life.

It further advocated for better recognition of veterans' sports program in grant guidelines from the DVA.

You can read the full report on the Parliamentary website:



BUDGET ESTIMATES UPDATE



During Estimates, I asked the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Defence a series of questions on a range of topics—mostly related to foreign policy, defence, and defence industry.

Most of these exchanges can be found on my YouTube channel. You can watch each video by scanning the respective QR Code.

Questions to the Department of Defence regarding the sustainment and funding of the Collins-class life of type extension (LOTE):



Questions to Defence concerning the Albanese government's review of Defence Industry Policy following the Defence Strategic Review:



Questions to Defence on capability procurement reform in light of the recommendations of the Defence Strategic Review:



Questions to the DFAT on the AUKUS partnership and how Australia can best engage with the United States in the context of the agreement:



Questions to DFAT regarding possible US domestic concerns in relation to AUKUS and how Australia can best work to alleviate such concerns:



Under questioning, DFAT also revealed that they had \$12.9 million uncommitted funds in their Emergency Humanitarian Fund just weeks out from the end of the financial year. I encouraged the government to contribute that money to provide de-mining equipment and training to Ukraine as well.



You can find more videos—including my parliamentary speeches—on my YouTube channel:





Image: With Shadow Attorney-General, Michaelia Cash, and Mark Spencer, Christian Schools Australia

We have seen several intense debates around religious freedom this year so far.

Firstly, there was the Australian Law Reform Commission’s preliminary anti-discrimination law recommendations.

In 2022, the Albanese government directed the ALRC to recommend reforms to anti-discrimination legislation that would apply to faith-based schools.

If accepted by the government, these recommendations would severely restrict faith-based schools’ ability to preserve their distinctive identities and curtail their freedom to employ likeminded staff.

In response, I have published an op-ed highlighting the importance of schools being allowed to preference employment of staff who share their faith or affirm their values and the valuable role that faith-based schools play in Australia.

Read my full opinion editorial:



More recently, the ACT Labor government passed legislation to forcibly acquire the Catholic-run Calvary Hospital. This is deeply concerning in a nation that has

long been governed by the rule of law.

While laws have existed in most jurisdictions that allow the resumption of land in certain situations, the ACT’s move to acquire Calvary in this manner is unprecedented.

- It was hastily legislated and allows the government to acquire the hospital’s property unilaterally and compulsorily—breaking the remaining 76 years of Calvary’s contract.
- The decision was reached and carried out without due process or adequate consultation.

The ACT government insists that the decision had nothing to do with religion, but public policy and law experts like professors Andrew Podger and Joanna Howe have suggested that it was, at least in part, because Calvary would not provide abortions.

The action shows a serious disregard for precedent of law concerning property rights and the rights of faith-based health providers to care for the sick while being true to their belief that all life should be valued.

NUCLEAR ENERGY IN AUSTRALIA

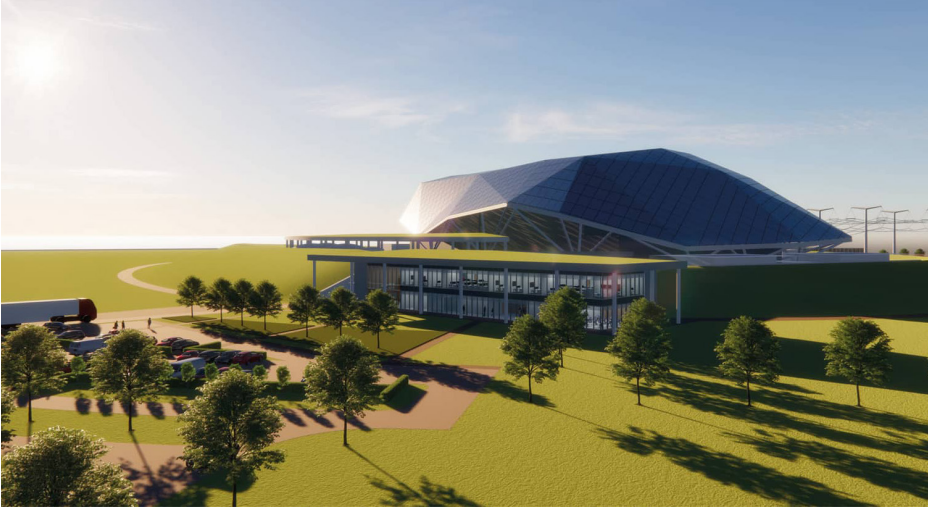


Image: A concept design for a Rolls-Royce small modular reactor (SMR) nuclear power plant

The national discussion around next-generation, low-emissions nuclear energy has certainly intensified over the last few months.

In his budget reply speech in mid-May, Opposition Leader Peter Dutton highlighted the role that small modular reactors could play in Australia's future energy mix, stating, "Next generation small modular nuclear technologies are safe, reliable, cost-effective, can be plugged into existing grids where we've turned off coal and emit zero emissions. In the 21st century, any sensible government must at least consider small modular nuclear as part of the energy mix."

As I stated in a recent speech to parliament, clean baseload power like next-generation, zero emissions nuclear technology is the only way to reach net zero without driving up energy prices.

View my speech on the cost of nuclear power:



In Finland, since the Olkiluoto 3 reactor—which produces 15% of the country's energy—was connected to the grid, electricity prices have fallen 75%.

Contrary to the rhetoric that nuclear is the most expensive energy option, expert analysis from the OECD shows that it puts downward pressure on energy systems costs—leading to lower consumer electricity prices.

This is borne out in the real world.

- In Finland, last year, electricity costed €245.98 per MWh. Following the opening of Olkiluoto 3, power prices have fallen to €60.55.

- Canada operates nineteen nuclear reactors and a significant amount of hydropower, but has limited wind and solar. The country also has the lowest electricity prices in the developed world.
- France, whose grid includes 70% nuclear energy, consistently enjoys high energy security and low electricity prices. The nation is also one of Europe's biggest net energy exporters.

The OECD, the IPCC, and the IEA all agree: nuclear must be a part of the clean energy transition.

A recent survey of public attitudes towards nuclear energy found that there is a high level of support for the technology. In fact, on average, five people back nuclear power for every one who opposes it.

A recent poll also found that 45% of Australians back nuclear power as a domestic energy source, while just 23% of respondents oppose it.

A majority of Australians also favour repealing our 1990s-era ban on a civil nuclear power industry. Only 19 per cent continue to support the ban.

Additionally, a recent survey in the north-eastern suburbs of Adelaide found that 55% of people are supportive of nuclear power for use in Australia. Around a quarter of people remain unsure, while just 18% oppose it.

In May, the Senate Environment and Communications legislation committee held an hearing on the *Environment and Other Legislation Amendment (Removing Nuclear Energy Prohibitions) Bill 2022*, which I co-signed with several of my Coalition colleagues.

Substantial evidence was presented by expert witnesses in support of removing Australia's 1990s-era prohibition on a civil nuclear energy industry. Many of the witnesses who spoke against lifting the ban held an ideological opposition to nuclear technology and also opposed Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines under the AUKUS agreement.

Before the hearing, the Albanese government's Energy Minister, Chris Bowen, posted a video explaining why he thinks next-generation, zero-emissions nuclear energy is a "dumb idea" for Australia.

Experts and environmentalists alike have been scathing in their response to Mr Bowen's video.

At the Senate hearing, Dr Adrian Paterson, former CEO of the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO)—someone who has had real-life experience running a nuclear reactor in Australia—said he was "gravely concerned" by the video.

Dr Paterson said he feared such "gamesmanship" could cause "deep damage" to Australia's global standing in nuclear technological research.

In addition, Zion Lights, a high-profile environmentalist and former Extinction Rebellion activist, and climate advocacy group RePlanet Australia both posted point-by-point responses debunking Mr Bowen's video.

Shadow Climate Change and Energy Minister, Ted O'Brien, also produced a helpful evidence-based response to Mr Bowen's problematic video.

You can watch that video here:



OUT AND ABOUT



Attending the commemorative service for the 80th Anniversary of the Dambusters Raid.

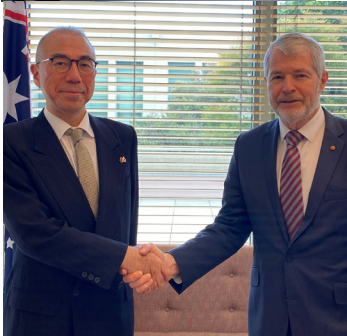
Right: with Ms Nikki King, daughter of Dambusters pilot, SQNLDR Dave Shannon, DSO & Bar, DFC & Bar.



Meeting with the Ambassadors of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—Their Excellencies Kersti Eesma, Margers Krams, and Darius Degutis (seated).



Introducing Shadow Minister for Defence Industry and Defence Personnel the Hon Luke Howarth to local defence industry leaders.



Left: His Excellency Mr Kazuhiro Suzuki, Japan's new Ambassador to Australia.

Right: I had several meetings with delegates from Romania (pictured here with His Excellency Ambassador Radu Gabriel Safta)





Speaking at various meetings on defence matters, nuclear power, and religious freedom.



I attended the launch of the EOS Slinger counter drone system. A cutting-edge Australian-made technology, the Slinger is a prime example of world-leading local defence innovation.



Left: Meeting with Carolyn and Fuzz Kitto from Be Slavery Free.

Right: Speaking about my private senator's bill at the Society of Experimental Test Pilots (SETP).



I attended the opening of Nova System's new headquarters in Adelaide CBD. Pictured here with Steve Robinson (Nova Systems Chief Operating Officer) and Colonel Tim Orders (Deputy Commander 9th Brigade).





Liberal Senator for South Australia

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

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