



## Chief of Navy Australia Address

Order of Australia Association Military Division Oration 18 Apr2023

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### Introductory Comments

- Distinguished guests, Ladies, Gentlemen and fellow Members of the Order of Australia, it is an honour to be with you tonight and I am humbled by the opportunity to present the Order of Australia ADF Oration for 2023.
- I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Ngunnuwal people on whose traditional lands we meet today. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past and present, and to all First Nation's people who have served, and those who continue to serve, in The Australian Defence Force.
- I'd also like to thank MAJGEN Michael Crane for the invitation to address you this year.



- Tonight I would like to reflect on the qualities that to me epitomise the Order of Australia Association. The qualities of **excellence in leadership, a commitment to the needs of others above self, and dedication to advancing the interests of our Nation for all Australians.** Qualities that are going to be critical to Australia, and to the Navy as we face the challenges of the decades ahead.
- As I stand here before you I ask that you all take a moment to think of the 14 ships and submarines, and the 930 Australians who tonight are deployed at sea, away from their families, working hard with friends and allies, upholding these qualities and doing their bit to sustain the peace upon which our prosperity depends.

**Our world is changing, and Navy is changing with it**



- In 2016 one of my predecessors VADM Tim Barrett reflected, as he addressed this august gathering, that the Navy had been featuring more prominently in public commentary – a lot of that is to do with submarines – he said. As I stand here today, I think it would be fair to say I could relate to his sentiment, although I’m not sure Tim could have anticipated the media coverage that submarines are receiving at the moment.
- The AUKUS agreement which first flagged the intention to replace the Collins class with a nuclear powered submarine; the recently released optimal pathway to introduce that capability to the Australian Navy; and the imminent release of the Government response to the Defence Strategic Review are all reactions to a world which has changed. Today, Navy is being discussed in the public domain in a way not seen in generations. I reflect on William Creswell - regarded as the father of the Australian Navy - advocating so soon after Federation for an Australian Navy capable of defending our own sea commerce.



- What we are setting in motion with AUKUS and the DSR will continue to build on his achievements and deliver on his vision. He saw - as we do today - the reality that a potential adversary could strangle Australia's economy and destroy our national wellbeing, from the sea at a great distance from our shores. Indeed we derive our wealth, safety and security from the maritime domain.
- **These decisions reflect the rapidly changing strategic circumstances in which we find ourselves as a nation.** We stand at an inflection point in world affairs. These circumstances demand that we are able to generate national power capable of deterring coercion or violence against our vital national interests, and capable of defending them should deterrence fail. We live in a region of military modernisation and expansion, renewed great power competition, a global order buckling under pressure, and we observe military adventurism in Europe, our complacency smashed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.



- In our own neighbourhood, we find coercion, grey zone activity, contested maritime sovereignty and attempts to reinterpret international law. The risks that this entails are very real and sharpen our focus. I am particularly conscious that it is our ships and our people who find themselves at the forefront of these strategic discussions between nations every day. More and more, we depend on their individual leadership and dedication to service above self to make sure our ships and aircraft support our national diplomatic efforts with regional allies and partners.
- **It is timely to reflect that since WWII our access to the maritime domain has been assured by the Rules Based Order.** Universal, or near universal acceptance of the array of treaties, laws and norms that makes up the Rules Based Order has for a long time assured that maritime nations like ours have the access to the sea that their economies require. In a contested environment, this freedom of access – and the security and economic wellbeing of law abiding maritime



nations - is increasingly uncertain. In this context we must again look to the past for guidance.

- In 1902 Creswell advocated for a capable Australian Navy for many of the same reasons we seek to enhance our maritime capabilities today. He was concerned that our island's economy was vulnerable to denial of sea lines of communication, and that our great and powerful benefactor would struggle to assure our sea commerce in the event of challenges elsewhere. He too lamented the difficulty of attracting good people to naval life, and keeping them engaged in service. Nevertheless, Creswell's leadership and dedicated service to his adopted nation prevailed, and the motley collection of colonial naval forces was transformed into an Australian Navy in time for the First World War.



- Writing in 1948, official WWI correspondent C.E.W. Bean, reflected on the historical abnormality that until 1914, “...British command of the sea had given us in Australia 126 years of freedom without fighting for it...” We took our prosperity, derived from the protection of the Royal Navy, for granted.
- Despite Creswell’s advocacy for a more capable Australian Navy, and the RAN’s obvious utility during the First World War, Australia became more dependent on the Royal Navy between wars, and the RAN started the Second World War smaller than it had the First – and without any submarines. Navy’s high rate of losses – including seven of the pre-war strength of only thirteen warships by 1942 - punctuated by the sinking of the Royal Navy’s mighty HMS *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* of Force Z off Singapore in December 1941, highlighted the inadequate capability of our Navy, and the failure of our strategy of reliance on a great and powerful benefactor.



- Yet since 1942, through the Cold War and its aftermath, we have relied on the might of the United States Navy to underwrite the Rules Based Order as guarantor of our free access to the sea. These lessons of history resonate for me in 2023 as we again navigate global challenges and continue to meaningfully contribute to the peace and prosperity of our region as a trusted and capable partner.
- And I reflect on the qualities that attract membership of the Order of Australia. We will need to draw on these qualities again as we build a Defence Force that is ready for our contemporary challenges. As foreign minister Senator the Honourable Penny Wong said yesterday, “...we are not hostages to history. We decide what to do with the present.”

**On that note, today our Strategic Environment is Changing Rapidly**





- **In 2023, the Rules Based Order is under challenge.** The almost universal acceptance of the complex array of treaties, laws, and norms which has underpinned our security and prosperity for the last 80 years, is being contested by powers who would seek their own advantage to the exclusion of others. We have seen this in the actions of nations seeking to coerce others in the South China Sea, and in the actions of nations who seek to negate the sovereignty of others through invasion and annexation.
- **The global strategic environment is changing.** The unipolar moment where we could rely on the strength of a single, friendly, great power to safeguard the Rules Based Order has been replaced by competition between major powers, with the risk that the interests of other nations may fall out of focus.



- **Global supply chains are vulnerable.** Sea lines of communication and undersea infrastructure, which have never been more important to our security and economic wellbeing, have been exposed as vulnerable to disruption. COVID, the blocking of the Suez Canal by Ever Given in 2021, and the war in the Ukraine have demonstrated the effects of interruption. The art of blockade at sea is being revived.
- **And this is important for our three ocean, island, trading nation.** We are more dependent than ever on overseas trade for our daily lives, but we are not so fortunate to have a land border with friendly, trading nations. The bulk of imports and exports arrive in Australia by sea. The bulk of the data which enables our connection to the international economy travels by submarine cables. These supply routes, these cables and infrastructure under the sea are therefore our vital interests as a nation, and our key terrain as a Navy and Defence Force.



- So, we seek to uphold continued freedom of access to the sea so that all maritime nations may determine their own security and economic wellbeing. The challenge ahead for our Navy is not insubstantial, and it will demand much of our people. We will need excellence in leadership, commitment to service, and dedication to Australian values to fulfil our obligation to the government and the nation.
- **And we will need strength to deter actions against our interests, especially in the maritime domain from which we draw our economic prosperity.** Conventionally armed submarines with nuclear propulsion possess unique advantages that will enhance our national deterrence. They possess superior stealth, speed and range over conventionally powered submarines. Most importantly, they are decoupled from the need to frequently return to periscope depth, where submarines will become increasingly vulnerable. They can hold at risk adversary forces that would seek to use armed violence or coercion to threaten Australia's interests, or to compel us to act against our interests.



- I understand and respect concerns about nuclear power, however, I am just as passionate about assuring that our Navy is up to the tasks that future Australian governments may ask of us. Submarines that are able to avoid periscope depth indefinitely will be a more survivable and lethal option for our crews in the operating environment of the future.
- Nuclear powered submarines, the advanced technologies that we will develop with our partners under AUKUS pillar 2, and the impactful power projection capabilities that the DSR will prioritise are necessary to help buttress the Rules Based Order with our allies and partners, and to assure our imports, exports and energy needs are able to continue freely navigating the global commons.
- To be clear – we are a peace loving middle power nation and we do not seek confrontation, but we must be capable of deterring threats against our vital interests, and defeating aggression if deterrence should fail.



- **But naval power is not just a matter for Navy.** It is not just a matter for government. Naval power has always been a national endeavour, as an element of our national power, and an international expression of our nation. Navy people are Australian citizens, Navy is supported by Australians, and Australian tax payers fund and build the Navy. The Navy reflects the values that unite us as Australians – we treasure freedom, we are dedicated to a fair go for all, we believe in looking out for our mates. For those of you in this room, dedication to Australian values have motivated you to exemplify the best qualities: a commitment to service and excellence in leadership. It will be these qualities we will need to emulate in order to deliver success in the acquisition of the most advanced naval propulsion systems available – nuclear power.
- Indeed, the seeds for our success are in our national character:



- Bean wrote again in 1948 that “... it was discipline – firmly based on the national habit of facing facts and going straight for the objective – that was responsible for the astonishing success which first gave to other nations confidence in Australia, and to the Australian nation confidence in itself”.
- It will again be our best qualities as a nation that will see us succeed, but they must first find a home in the ordinary Australians whose task it will be to undertake these challenges

**Building the future Australian Navy will be a National Endeavour**



- **Introducing into service, then building nuclear powered submarines in Australia, is the single biggest endeavour we have undertaken.** It will not only change the face of Defence, and Defence Industry, it will challenge the entire nation to resource, innovate and develop the sovereign capability to do a great many things that we do not currently do. Australia faces a choice to do hard things well, to dedicate our energies to a thing much larger than any individual, to place the defence of our nation at the forefront of our collective endeavour. We stand to gain not only collective defence as a nation, or as allies, but most importantly the national capacity to take on the hardest technological challenges and succeed. It will demand our best and we must rise to the challenge.



- **It will demand an entirely new mindset.** As I have been telling our Navy people, a nuclear safety mindset has a different view on quality, errors and personal responsibilities. It demands a different approach to culture, with a low tolerance of actions that fall short of perfection. An Australian nuclear Navy will only retain the trust of our international partners, Government and the Australian people by achieving an impeccable nuclear safety record akin to that of the United States Navy and the Royal Navy. Australians will demand confidence in our ability to build and operate these submarines, the most advanced technology our nation will possess, to the same exacting standards. It will be an outstanding achievement on every day we maintain this impeccable record. And we will need to do so, uninterrupted, day after day, for a great many days.





- **Our nation will need excellence in leadership, a commitment to service above self, and dedication to Australian values.**

Australians, some in uniform, but many more in civilian roles, will need to exemplify all of these qualities for us to succeed, but particularly service: The selflessness of character to place the security and interests of our nation and its people ahead of our own. These are qualities that you all have epitomised, and have been recognised for. However, this is not a time to rest on our laurels. Our nation has much to achieve, and the stakes are high. We must not fail in our endeavour to gain the sovereign capability to defend ourselves, as well as defend our allies and partners, against those who would seek to reshape the world around them with force and might.



## Our best qualities are a reflection of Leadership

- This coming decade is likely to be one of the most challenging for Australia and other democracies, as we seek to shape our future, rather than be shaped by it. Service, leadership and commitment to values and excellence are rarely spontaneous, they happen in cultures where people routinely rise to meet hard challenges selflessly, without thought of reward.
- Will Durant recently wrote that “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act but a habit”. People will naturally choose values, leadership excellence and service when it is normal to do so. For many, the inspiration to commit themselves to service will come when they observe other, everyday people dedicating themselves and making outstanding contributions. People like those I see before me tonight.



- As I reflect on all that we will need to achieve as a nation in the decades ahead, it is obvious to me that we will need to inspire many Australians to selflessly commit themselves to service of our nation, display excellence in leadership, dedicate themselves to Australian values, and to make their own outstanding contributions.
- Thank you for your time, your continued service, and outstanding achievements. Please continue to inspire others to follow in your footsteps.
- We will need many more to maintain our national security and economic wellbeing in a challenging world.