



Submarine Rotational Force – West

Environmental assessment and approval

The Australian Government is committed to establishing a conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarine capability. Submarine Rotational Force – West (SRF-West) involves a rotating presence of one UK and up to four US, nuclear-powered submarines at HMAS *Stirling* (Garden Island, WA), from as early as 2027.

Defence is responsible for delivering critical infrastructure at HMAS *Stirling* to accommodate SRF-West, through the SRF-West Infrastructure Project. The project is being delivered in coordination with other upgrades already underway at HMAS *Stirling*. Most of SRF-West Infrastructure Project will be completed within the existing footprint of HMAS *Stirling*.



Aerial image of HMAS *Stirling* looking south over the main operational precinct of the base

Planning and approval process at HMAS *Stirling*

Following Commonwealth Government approval in late 2023, some early work is already in progress at HMAS *Stirling*. We expect to start construction on the remaining work in 2025, subject to approvals.

As part of our environmental assessment process, we are preparing technical studies to better understand the potential environmental, social and economic impacts of the proposed infrastructure to Garden Island, Cockburn Sound and the wider region.

We have consulted the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) and agreed on a process so that our proposed project planning and approval pathway meets requirements of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Commonwealth) (EPBC Act). As a result, different elements of the Project will follow different environmental assessment pathways, based on the level of potential environmental impact of each type of work.

We are also engaging with the relevant agencies in Western Australia to ensure that our environmental assessment process also covers state specific matters.



Environmental assessment and approvals

Given HMAS *Stirling* is an already established site, there is already a lot of existing information relating to Defence's activities and impact on the environment. Where possible, we will use existing data to support the approvals process. A number of additional studies are being completed to support the environmental assessment and approvals.

Work to be approved through self-assessment

Where proposed work is not likely to have a significant environmental impact—for example, refurbishing existing buildings or work completed on existing sites—we will assess the work through Defence's established self-assessment and approvals process.

The self-assessment is undertaken in accordance with the EPBC Act. The assessment will identify environmental values and potential impacts as well as ways to avoid or reduce impacts and will be supported by relevant technical studies. An Environmental Report will be prepared to document the assessment, with management plans and other required documentation to support construction developed.

Work to be assessed by DCCEEW

Some proposed work has potential environmental impacts that require assessment and approval by referral to DCCEEW under the EPBC Act. Referral documentation will be made public through a public exhibition period facilitated by DCCEEW as part of their assessment process.

Once the referrals are published, the Minister for the Environment will make a decision on the referrals within 20 business days.

We are preparing to submit two referrals under the EPBC Act to DCCEEW in mid-2024 for:

- **Maritime Infrastructure Upgrades:** The first referral will assess proposed upgrades to existing maritime structures occurring within the marine environment, including dredging and piling.
- **Controlled Industrial Facility (CIF):** The second referral is focused on a purpose built facility for managing and storing very low-level and low-level radioactive waste from the submarines.

Study	Maritime	CIF
Targeted terrestrial flora and fauna surveys and assessment		✓
Listed threatened, marine and migratory bird surveys and assessment	✓	✓
Seagrass and benthic habitat surveys and assessment	✓	
Ongoing Little Penguin monitoring and assessment	✓	✓
Marine fauna assessment	✓	
Targeted terrestrial and marine contamination assessments	✓	✓
First Nations Peoples and Communities engagement	✓	✓
Baseline radiological monitoring (marine and terrestrial environments)	✓	✓
Heritage impact assessments (Indigenous, historic and natural)	✓	✓
Noise and vibration modelling and assessment	✓	
Transport, traffic and access assessment	✓	✓
Social and economic assessment	✓	✓
Water and groundwater assessment	✓	✓

The studies are being completed by consultants with expertise in those fields, and form part of the environmental impact assessment (EIA) documentation. The studies are already helping to inform ways the design, construction and operation of the infrastructure can avoid and minimise impacts to environmental values present within the Project area. The EIA will assess the impacts of the proposed works and the effectiveness of avoidance, minimisation and/or mitigation measures identified to reduce the overall impacts. The outcomes of the studies will become publicly available with the referral when it is released for public comment by DCCEEW.



Maritime Infrastructure Upgrades – Diamantina Pier

During this current planning phase, there are two proposed options for small craft wet berths to be assessed alongside proposed dredging and piling to Diamantina Pier, as part of our first EPBC Referral. The map below shows the proposed location of the maritime works around Diamantina Pier including potential temporary lay down areas adjacent to the main operational precinct of HMAS Stirling.



Maritime Infrastructure Upgrades – Diamantina Pier

Maritime Infrastructure Upgrades – Armament Wharf

In addition to the upgrades proposed around Diamantina Pier, dredging, piling and lay down areas are required to improve the Armament Wharf. This is also part of our first EPBC Referral. The map below shows the proposed maritime works around the Armament Wharf located in the north-east of Garden Island.



Maritime Infrastructure Upgrades – Armament Wharf

Controlled Industrial Facility

The Controlled Industrial Facility (CIF) will be a technical and engineering industrial workshop for servicing and repair of naval nuclear propulsion components and tools, and will receive, manage, treat, decontaminate and temporarily store the low-level, solid and liquid radioactive material generated from the submarines during their operations. This facility is subject to our second EPBC Referral. The map below shows the proposed location of the CIF.



Controlled Industrial Facility



Terminology

There are many technical words and phrases you might see during the environmental assessment process. We've summarised some of the key terms, and what they mean, legally, below.

Key term	Description
Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999	Australia's national environmental law is called the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> (the EPBC Act). The EPBC Act makes sure that 'nationally significant' animals, plants, habitats and places are identified, and any potential negative impacts on them are carefully considered before changes in land use or new developments are approved.
Significant impacts under the EPBC Act	Broadly, an impact that is important, notable or of consequence. The Significant Impact Guidelines ¹² provide overarching guidance on determining whether an action is likely to have a significant impact on a matter protected under the EPBC Act.
Referral	A written request for the Environment minister to decide whether the action you propose needs assessment and approval under the EPBC Act.
Self-assessment	The process of using DCCEEW's tools to check whether the project may need to refer an action to DCCEEW to assess under the EPBC Act.
Protected matter	A specific matter that a provision of Part 3 of the EPBC Act ³ protects. These include matters of national environmental significance, and protecting the environment from proposals involving the Commonwealth.
DCCEEW	Established on 1 July, 2022, DCCEEW is a part of the Australian Government. It was created to deliver on the climate and energy agenda as well as protect Australia's environment and water resources.
Direct impacts	An event or situation that is a direct consequence of an action.
Indirect impacts	An impact that is an indirect consequence of an action which may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Offsite impacts, including but not limited to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">i. downstream impacts orii. upstream impacts, andb. actions taken by third parties, where the third party action is facilitated to a major extent by the primary action and the impacts of the third party action were reasonably foreseeable.
Proposed action	A project, development, an undertaking, or other activity, or series of activities. Under the EPBC Act, an 'action' can also include a change to any of these things. The EPBC Act is generally concerned with actions that could have a significant impact on a protected matter.
Project area	The project area includes the direct and indirect disturbance footprint, avoidance areas and retention areas. The project areas include areas of permanent works as well as temporary works.
Avoidance area	Any area or habitat within the project area that is intended not to be cleared or disturbed during the course of the action. An avoidance area differs from a retention area in that the avoidance area may not be intended for conservation and protection under a conservation agreement.
Disturbance footprint	The area of direct impact by the project, including installation of permanent infrastructure, dredging and the removal and disposal of dredge material.

1 <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/epbc/publications/significant-impact-guidelines-11-matters-national-environmental-significance>

2 <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/epbc/publications/significant-impact-guidelines-12-actions-or-impacting-upon-commonwealth-land-and-actions>

3 <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2004A00485/latest/versions>

Give us your feedback

There will be an opportunity for interested stakeholders to review the Project's plans and provide feedback to DCCEEW as part of the assessment process.

Providing public comments on the referral and supporting documentation is welcomed. Once the referral is released for public comments you can provide your feedback via the 'Open for comments' tab on DCCEEW's EPBC Act Public Portal. Further information about DCCEEW's public consultation process, as well as information about how to make comment on a referral, can be found at www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/epbc/public-comments.

If you would like to provide feedback or ask questions before formal consultation starts, please send us an email at srf-west.infrastructureproject@defence.gov.au, or visit our website at www.defence.gov.au/submarine-rotational-force-west

