

68th Regular Session of the IAEA General Conference Australia's National Statement

**Delivered by H.E Ambassador Ian Biggs, Head of Delegation and Resident
Representative of Australia to the IAEA
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President,

It is a great privilege for me to address this General Conference today.

May I first extend our sympathies to Austria, Poland, Czechia and other countries in the region, who have been affected by the recent adverse weather.

We would like to congratulate Cook Islands and Somalia on becoming members of the IAEA. We are proud to welcome another member from the Pacific region to share in the benefits of nuclear science and technology for peaceful purposes.

President,

In Australia, nuclear science and technology is used to drive real world outcomes in nuclear medicine and cancer care, health, food and environmental research, and to benefit and grow our industries. We recognise that some countries may choose to use nuclear energy, depending on national circumstances. In Australia, we have chosen not to deploy nuclear energy for electricity generation. Our abundance of renewable energy resources makes nuclear power, including nuclear power through small modular reactors, an unviable option for inclusion in our energy mix for decarbonisation efforts. In countries without an existing nuclear power industry – such as Australia – factors such as affordability, long deployment times, supply chain and workforce challenges may mean that nuclear power is not appropriate on the path to Net Zero, or securing reliable and affordable energy for consumers.

Nevertheless, Australia recognises the broader benefits that the peaceful uses of nuclear science and technology can bring to our communities, our nations, and our environment. We deploy our own leading nuclear science and technology expertise and world-class nuclear science infrastructure to address global challenges. Australia's nuclear agencies – all of which are represented here today – continue to provide support in-kind to the IAEA across the full remit of its activities.

I am pleased to announce today that Australia will contribute a further \$8 million this year to support the IAEA's technical cooperation and nuclear applications work, with a focus on our region, the Indo-Pacific.

This funding will help to combat food insecurity in the Pacific through the Atoms for Food Initiative, and we are pleased to announce that we will also join the Group of Friends of Food Security.

Through a contribution to NUTEC Plastics and the Global Water Analysis Laboratory (GLoWAL), our funding will support the Agency's work in assisting member states to monitor plastics pollution and manage water resources.

It will support technical cooperation in Asia and the Pacific through the Regional Cooperative Agreement (RCA) and the further development of cancer care and radiotherapy capabilities in our region through Rays of Hope.

And we are pleased to provide further support to the Agency's efforts to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women in the nuclear sector, with a contribution to the Lise Meitner Program. Women are among the great innovators, engineers and scientists in the nuclear and radiological fields, but continue to be under-represented in the sector. We are proud to help address this through our extrabudgetary support, and we encourage the Agency to continue its efforts to build an inclusive workplace that supports individuals in all their diversity.

President,

Harnessing the benefits of nuclear science and technology is not possible without the concerted efforts that go into making that technology safe and secure. We recognise and support the Agency in this work. Australia remains fully committed to improving nuclear safety and radiation protection worldwide, and delivering on the objectives of the Convention on Nuclear Safety and the Joint Convention.

We were also proud to play our part this year by co-presiding with Kazakhstan over the 2024 International Conference on Nuclear Security (ICONS), and helping to drive forward the international community's vital work to strengthen the global nuclear security architecture.

President,

Ensuring nuclear material is safe, secure and safeguarded can be the most difficult – and at times hazardous – work of the Agency. Australia commends the IAEA's commitment to monitoring the situation at Ukraine's nuclear facilities, including at Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, despite the challenging circumstances.

Australia continues to condemn in the strongest terms Russia's illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine and we reiterate our call on Russia to immediately, completely, and unconditionally withdraw all its forces from within the internationally recognised borders of Ukraine. We look forward to supporting the resolution on Ukraine being proposed by Canada and Finland at this Conference.

President,

We remain deeply concerned by the Islamic Republic of Iran's failure to resolve outstanding safeguards issues in a full and technically credible manner. The steady growth of Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium has no credible civilian justification.

Australia calls on Iran to cease its escalatory actions, to reverse all steps away from the JCPOA and recommit to full compliance with its nuclear-related commitments, including implementation of the Additional Protocol. Australia commends the Agency for its efforts to revive the Joint Statement. We welcome the Director General's call for dialogue with President Pezeshkian and call on Iran to accept this offer.

President,

Australia continues to condemn in the strongest terms the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's ongoing pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems, in flagrant violation of its obligations under multiple UN Security Council resolutions. This poses a grave threat to international peace and security, as does the continued transfer of weapons from the DPRK to Russia.

We are deeply concerned by indications that the DPRK likely remains ready to conduct a nuclear test at the Punggye-ri site.

Australia appreciates the Agency's preparedness to play an essential role in verifying the DPRK's nuclear programme and commends the IAEA's activities to enhance and maintain this capability.

We will again co-sponsor the resolution on the DPRK at this Conference, and call on all Member States of the IAEA to do so as well.

President,

The full benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear technology can only be realised when the world is guarded against the misuse of nuclear material or technology. We welcome the IAEA's continued progress, in cooperation with Member States, on measures to strengthen the effectiveness and improve the efficiency of IAEA safeguards.

President,

Australia continues to progress work with the IAEA to support Australia's pathway to acquire conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines under the AUKUS partnership. Bilateral technical consultations between Australia and the IAEA on a robust safeguards and verification approach are ongoing. AUKUS partners are confident this approach will enable the IAEA to continue to meet its technical safeguards objectives for Australia at all stages of the program. We remain committed to keeping the international community updated on relevant developments.

On 5 August 2024, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States signed the treaty-level AUKUS Agreement for Cooperation Related to Naval Nuclear Propulsion. This Agreement will facilitate the continued exchange of naval nuclear propulsion information between AUKUS partners and enable the transfer of nuclear material and equipment from the United Kingdom and the United States to Australia. It reaffirms, and is consistent with, AUKUS partners' non-proliferation obligations and commitment to setting the highest non-proliferation standard. It also makes legally binding the key principles underlying our strong non-proliferation approach, including that Australia will not enrich uranium, produce nuclear fuel or reprocess spent fuel for naval nuclear propulsion.

We welcomed the 15 August 2024 statement by the IAEA Director General, which outlined the key features of this Agreement and confirmed that Australia had provided the Agency with notification of this development via declarations under its Additional Protocol.

President,

To conclude, I reiterate Australia's unwavering support for the independence, mandate and technical authority of the IAEA. Under the leadership of Director General Grossi, the Agency's staff work diligently, professionally and impartially. You have our full confidence and support.

Thank you, President.