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Cockburn Council approves City-driven marine and defence innovation hub to leverage local jobs and projects from historic AUKUS submarine pathway

A landmark City of Cockburn-driven marine and defence innovation hub in the Henderson shipbuilding precinct is set to capitalise on the thousands of jobs and investments resulting from the historic \$6b AUKUS submarine announcement.

In a first for local government in Western Australia, the innovative City of Cockburn-driven accelerator hub will connect up to 40 blue economy-focused businesses with major maritime and defence organisations under one roof.

The Cockburn Blue Innovation Hub is an advanced research and innovation facility that will foster local supply chain capability and capacity, while providing solutions for an estimated shortage of 1,000 workers and a critical deficit of specific trades and technical skills in Cockburn.

While it will be industry-led and primarily industry-funded, attracting founding partners and multiple sub-lessees, the City of Cockburn's Business and Economic team has spearheaded the project to capitalise on the area's role as a leader in defence and marine industries in WA.

City of Cockburn Mayor Logan Howlett said Cockburn was poised to become a major national and global centre for blue economy industries, especially shipbuilding and maritime defence following the Prime Minister's AUKUS nuclear-powered submarine pathway announcement in March.

AUKUS will result in Garden Island's HMAS Stirling navy base – adjacent to Henderson shipbuilding precinct in Cockburn Sound – hosting increased port visits and rotational presence of US and UK nuclear-powered submarines (SSNs), and Australia's first sovereign SSNs, the US Virginia class submarines from the early 2030s.

At its peak, building and sustaining SSNs will create up to 8,500 direct jobs in the industrial workforce. An additional 500 direct jobs are expected to be created to sustain



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the rotational presence between 2027-2032 in WA.

Mayor Howlett said Henderson was entering a dynamic phase.

“To ensure our business community has a real stake in that, there is only one way to respond: by matching it with our own brand of dynamic planning, support and collaboration. The Hub will facilitate the right environment to help achieve that,” Mayor Howlett said.

“Even before the AUKUS announcement, by 2041 right here in Henderson we are expecting \$2.7b additional investment in shipbuilding infrastructure.

“We expect 70 defence vessels to be built or upgraded, along with \$45b in shipbuilding orders in WA by 2040 creating 4,500 additional ship construction jobs in WA by 2030.

“Importantly, the Hub will also be a space to test emerging maritime practices and technology like AI, robotics, subsea remotely operated vehicles and sustainable ocean practices including blue carbon storage and creating ocean-sourced solutions for common pollutants like methane and plastics.

“We also know there is a concerning worker shortage in the Cockburn area and uncorrected, this gap will blow out to over 5,000 direct employees, and as many as 13,000 if the economic multiplier is applied.

“Similarly, advanced manufacturing, technology and shipbuilding supply chains will need to be created within Cockburn’s thriving industrial precincts and the broader region to support the significant increase in shipbuilding and submarine maintenance and sustainment requirements.

“Although these shortages are part of a national problem, the City is seeking ways to connect researchers, prime defence contractors, investors and small to medium size enterprises in Cockburn to build the much-needed skills, supply chain and innovation needed to plug the gaps.”

At the 13 April Ordinary Council Meeting, the Council unanimously endorsed the City’s Acting CEO to enter into a lease for a 10,698sqm warehouse property at 1 Channel Close, Henderson.



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The lease agreement is subject to the City finalising founding partner commitments of \$1.35m over three years with options for a further two and five-year agreement.

Cockburn's Executive Corporate Affairs Victoria Green, responsible for economic development for the City, said Cockburn was uniquely positioned among local governments in Western Australia.

"Our City is home to WA's premier shipbuilding precinct and supports four other thriving commercial and industrial precincts, including Latitude 32, one of Australia's largest industrial zones," Ms Green said.

"As one of the first moves following the AUKUS announcement, our Council is cementing Cockburn's role in WA, the nation, and the region by facilitating our businesses to establish relationships with our major marine and defence organisations to create wealth in our community.

"This is how local government can help foster sustainable communities where people want to work, live and invest. It's great for our future."

Ms Green said the City would now look to finalise agreements with founding partners who would contribute seed funding and in-kind investment to support the start-up of the Hub.

"To date, discussions with industry and the local business sector have been fruitful, with several expressions of interest already received," Ms Green said.

"We anticipate Council's endorsement of a location for the Hub will allow these negotiations to mature into commitments."

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