

VISITS BY ALLIED AND FRIENDLY NAVAL SHIPS

These issues of nuclear weapons, nuclear proliferation, and indeed the uranium industry are controversial issues in Australia. The Australian Government has indicated that it will not allow nuclear weapons in Australia. When HMS Invincible visited Australia in late 1983, it was found that she had need of drydocking facilities, but did not use these in Australia, but in Singapore. At the time of the visit, the Minister for Defence, the Hon. G. Scholes, announced in a statement on 13 December 1983 that the British Government was aware of this policy*. He also indicated that nuclear powers, including the UK, adopted a policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons on their ships or aircraft. The British withdrew a request for drydocking facilities; therefore no formal refusal was made by the Australian Government.

These events were a matter of considerable comment and debate. On 26 February 1984, the Minister made the following statement:-

- . as a result of the visit of HMS INVINCIBLE to Sydney last December the Government has reviewed the arrangements for visits by allied and friendly naval ships to Australian ports and in particular the question of possible access to Australian dry dock facilities;
- . the Australian Labor Party and this Government have gone on record as supporting the visits of naval ships of our ANZUS allies. This policy applies equally to our other friends and allies, particularly the British;
- . visits by allied warships are fully consistent with our responsibilities as a sovereign nation which must protect its fundamental security interests, as is the provision of necessary repair facilities;
- . as a matter of record, we wish to state that this Government does not require that allied Government reveal whether their ships carry nuclear weapons. Both the United States and British Governments have a policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons. We accept the reasons for that policy;
- . the United States and British Governments are aware of Australian concerns with respect to the storage of nuclear weapons on Australian territory;
- . consultations between Australian, United States and British officials over recent weeks addressed the question of an allied or friendly warship possibly needing to drydock in an Australian port in the future. It was agreed that each request would have to be considered on its own merits taking into account technical and safety factors, and the strategic and operational circumstances obtaining at the time. As Ministers have stated, Australia would not in any way endanger the safety of any allied or friendly ship or crew in need of access to Australian facilities; and
- . as befits the relations between friends and allies, we will continue to have close consultations on all matters that affect our joint efforts to provide for our mutual defence.

* A copy of the Minister's Statement of 13 December, 1984 follows.

TUESDAY, 13 DECEMBER, 1983

NO. 197/83

HMS INVINCIBLE

Strict conditions existed for visits by nuclear powered war-ships to Australian ports, the Minister for Defence, Mr G. Scholes, said today.

He said the Government adhered to the same requirements and safeguards as had been followed by the previous Government.

These safeguards were set out in documents tabled in the Parliament and were thus a matter of public record.

Mr Scholes said the Federal Government had consistently indicated that it would not allow nuclear weapons on Australian soil.

This included nuclear weapons on board a vessel in a dry dock.

Mr Scholes said nuclear powers, including the United Kingdom, adopted a policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons on their ships or aircraft.

Mr Scholes said that the British Government was aware of the Australian Government's policy on these matters.