



**Gary Hale, Curtin University**

***SRF-WEST and Beyond: Building Capability in Nuclear Submarine Workforce***

Australia's decision to acquire nuclear-powered, conventionally armed, submarines under the AUKUS partnership marks a generational shift in defence capability, demanding significant investment in infrastructure, skills, and innovation. Education and training providers, including universities, are central to meeting the substantial and accelerated workforce demand this shift requires. This presentation offers a strategic overview of how institutions such as Curtin University are preparing to support this transition, with particular focus on the anticipated establishment of Submarine Rotational Force-West (SRF-WEST). We move from high-level imperatives to practical responses by examining four interrelated areas: curricular and co-curricular program development; cooperation and collaboration across the tertiary sector; the creation of research and innovation infrastructure; and the institutional challenges faced by universities not traditionally engaged in delivering nuclear submarine capability. We present a realistic assessment of the current state of preparedness in the higher education sector and highlight tangible steps already underway to support the development of sovereign capability. Central to this effort is the need for sustained and purposeful collaboration between education providers, research institutions, and industry to ensure graduates are not only technically capable but mission-ready.