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Driving the narrative - shaping enduring positive public attitudes to AUKUS

Acquiring, building and operating Australia's nuclear-powered submarines under AUKUS will demand robust and enduring social licence. However, efforts to inform and positively shape public opinion and attitude are hindered and sustained by (often negative) media output. Domestic political party point-scoring; public scepticism about AUKUS ever materialising; fears regarding nuclear technology; environmental concerns; state and non-state foreign political agitators; protest groups and demonstrators – all have a cumulative and often deleterious effect on public opinion and therefore the circularity of political decision-making. Moreover, state and national governmental changes in the UK, US, and Australia and their consequences also influence public perception and support for the endeavour. Driving the narrative and addressing these challenges to build trust and credibility requires transparent communication, consistent engagement, innovative thinking – and considerable determination.

This presentation will provide insights into effective strategies for analysing, building and maintaining social licence, emphasising the importance of comprehensive and strategic engagement with stakeholders throughout the entire lifecycle of the AUKUS endeavour. This is imperative, particularly in addressing concerns about public safety and environmental impacts, including, ultimately, the disposal of nuclear materials.

Driving a positive narrative that highlights not only the strategic and security benefits of AUKUS but also the economic and societal advantages for all Australians is crucial. A whole-of-nation approach is essential: by fostering a well-informed and engaged society, we can shape public understanding and generate enduring support for AUKUS.