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Pivoting or growing; how does the Australian NPS enterprise prepare for the East Coast Base?

Australia's nuclear-powered submarine (NPS) enterprise is preparing for the establishment of a new naval base on the east coast, as identified by the AUKUS optimal pathway and national defence strategy. This base will provide strategic flexibility and support NPS operations. Three sites have been shortlisted: Port Kembla, Newcastle, and Brisbane, with Port Kembla emerging as the preferred option.

The facilities at the new base will include specialised wharfs, sustainment and maintenance facilities, administrative and logistics support, personal amenities, and suitable accommodation for submarine crews and support staff, akin to HMAS Stirling on the west coast. The development of this base is expected to align with the overall delivery schedule for a sovereign NPS capability, likely commencing after the completion of Submarine Rotational Force (West) (SRF(W)) facilities in 2027. Concurrently, significant delivery phase activities will be underway at Henderson and Osborne shipyards.

This project will require either a pivot of existing resources and capabilities or the creation of new capabilities to manage this complex major project. Funding for the base will come from the existing AUKUS capability budget, estimated at \$368 billion over the next three decades. The workforce needed for this project is substantial, with plans to create around 20,000 direct jobs over the next 30 years.

An analysis of existing NPS enterprise facilities and the resources needed to manage multiple sites will be presented, highlighting the predicted demand curve over the AUKUS lifecycle. The key question remains: can the enterprise pivot development resources quickly enough to meet the demand?