

AIMPE



AMOU
Australian Maritime
Officers Union

The Hon Anthony Albanese
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

30th April 2026

By email a.albanese.mp@aph.gov.au

Dear Prime Minister,

Re: Strategic Fleet implementation

On behalf of the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers and the Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU), we write to support the correspondence of the Maritime Union on Australia of 24th April 2026 on the subject of the Strategic Fleet.

AIMPE has been arguing in favour of coastal tankers for several years. We argued for coastal tankers to the Coalition when they were in Government. In our 2019 submission AIMPE wrote:

All of the foreign flag/Australian crewed vessels that were issued with Transitional General Licences in 2012 have been withdrawn from operating in Australia including all of the tankers that were servicing the coastal trade in petroleum products. The Australian seafarers who worked on these vessels have lost their jobs. In addition, several Australian flag ships have been withdrawn causing more job losses. The cargoes of these ships are now routinely being carried by foreign flag ships with foreign crews operating under Temporary Licences.

In our 2020 submission AIMPE and AMOU jointly observed:

Australia's liquid fuel problem is a result of an absence of action over declining domestic fuel refining capacity as the petroleum industry has shut down refinery after refinery. This, combined with a lack of onshore storage capacity, contributes to Australia's inability to meet internationally mandated fuel reserve levels.

AIMPE and AMOU have previously submitted that Australia has a fuel security problem which is exacerbated by our lack of Australian flag tanker ships. AIMPE and AMOU have proposed to

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the Federal Government a practical solution to this problem in various submissions over the last 12 months.

This was followed up with correspondence to both Minister Michael McCormack and Minister Barnaby Joyce when they respectively held the Infrastructure and Transport portfolio - unfortunately they took no action.

In our submission to the Strategic Fleet Taskforce in 2022 AIMPE and AMOU argued that the first ships in the Strategic Fleet should be tankers – for fuel security reasons:

Liquid bulk shipping (tankers)

Crude oil and refined petroleum products make up another very significant element of Australia's shipping freight needs. These are predominantly imports from the Asian region. There is also an important coastal distribution task carried out to deliver specific grades of fuels to particular ports around the coast. Another segment of Australia's shipping is the chemical trade which also uses specialised tankers. These cargoes are vital strategic cargoes essential to keeping the economy in its current form ticking over. Depending on future energy trends these types of ships could become more and more important in the transport of methanol and ammonia cargoes.

And also, in our 2022 submission to the Strategic fleet Taskforce:

Tankers

The oil price spike which hit the world after the Russian invasion of Ukraine showed how sensitive the Australian community is to fuel supply disruptions. A very large proportion of Australia's domestic freight transport (surface and aviation) relies on regular fuel supplies. Additional liquid fuel storage has been funded by the Federal Government but Australia's storage capacity is still far below the IEA recommended 90 days storage. Australia also has secured access to a certain amount of US strategic fuel reserves (crude oil) but lack the sovereign capacity to transport those reserves to Australia. A relatively small number of ships could have a large influence in this segment.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that at least four liquid tanker ships should be included in the structure of the Strategic Fleet and these should be the first ships contracted under the Strategic Fleet program. One of these ships should be a crude oil tanker and one should be a chemical tanker.

The issue of Fuel Security is currently a major topic in Australia and the rest of the world as the consequences of the US/Israeli attacks on Iran have triggered retaliation and caused major disruptions to world fuel supplies. This has cast a spotlight on Australia's lack of liquid fuel security – the closure of oil refineries in the last decade, the withdrawal of our Australian crewed coastal tankers and the use of foreign flag/foreign-crewed tankers to carry all our liquid fuel cargoes.

In 2025 over 2 million tonnes of petroleum was transported between Australian ports under Temporary Licences. 200 Australian coastal voyages obey foreign ships [*including Chinese flag ships*] with foreign crews transporting petroleum cargoes between Australian ports to keep Australians driving their cars and to keep trucks, buses and trains moving. Australia is totally dependent on these foreign ships. Australia's coastal tanker fleet was removed by the oil industry in the 2014-16 period and Australia has suffered a decade of total dependence on foreign tankers since!

On Tuesday 31st March 2026 AIMPE and AMOU participated in a fuel security panel in Parliament House Canberra. The panellists were: defence specialist Jennifer Parker, former Deputy Chief of RAAF John Blackburn, MIAL's Angela Gillham, ITF President Paddy Crumlin and AIMPE's Martin Byrne. The panel highlighted Australia's fuel security problem and called for action from the Government.

It is extremely frustrating how slow the Albanese Government has been on implementing its Strategic Fleet policy and more recently the Maritime Strategic Training Initiative. We have all known the problems - we just need to get the Government to act in the national interest.

Yours faithfully.



Martin Byrne,
Federal Secretary
AIMPE



Jarrod Moran,
Executive Officer
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