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15th AUKMIN Summit: Australia and UK Strengthen Ties in Sydney

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The 15th Australia-United Kingdom Ministerial Consultations (AUKMIN) took place in Sydney on 25 July 2025, with Australian and UK ministers advancing defence and economic cooperation amid ongoing global tensions. The talks reinforced the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) partnership, although some critics have raised concerns about the economic costs and strategic priorities under the current Labor government.

The summit was hosted by Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles alongside Foreign Minister Penny Wong. They welcomed UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy and Defence Secretary John Healey. This marked the second AUKMIN meeting since the UK's Starmer Government assumed office and emphasised strengthening ties through AUKUS and regional security cooperation. The UK's Carrier Strike Group, led by HMS Prince of Wales, made its first Australian visit since 1997, arriving in Darwin ahead of Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025. Defence Minister Marles described the partnership as essential to addressing "shared strategic challenges in an increasingly complex world." However, the opposition expressed concern that the Labor government's emphasis on international alliances might divert resources from domestic priorities such as infrastructure investment and cost-of-living support.

On the economic front, the AUKUS submarine program remains a major investment, with costs projected at approximately \$368 billion by 2050. While the program promises significant industrial and technological growth, critics warn that it places a heavy financial burden on taxpayers amid broader economic challenges. The Australia-UK Free Trade Agreement (A-UKFTA), now operational, has opened new trade opportunities, though businesses are calling for clearer policies to manage ongoing global supply chain disruptions. Alex Bristow from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute noted that the increased frequency of AUKMIN meetings signals the UK's growing strategic importance. Conversely, Shadow Foreign Minister Simon Birmingham criticised the government for vague trade commitments, suggesting they weaken Australia's economic influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

The summit also addressed current global conflicts, condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and North Korea's support for Russia. Both governments urged China to use its influence to help resolve the conflict. Foreign Minister Wong highlighted the need to modernise the Australia-UK relationship to enhance economic resilience and uphold human rights. Despite these commitments, scepticism remains over Labor's capacity to balance international ambitions with Australia's immediate economic needs, as the opposition continues to call for a sharper focus on domestic priorities over costly global engagements.