

Ukraine pleads with Australia to remove red tape holding back aid

By [David Crowe](#) and [Andrew Probyn](#), Sydney Morning Herald, February 28, 2024

The federal government is being urged to scale up its aid to Ukraine to help confront a growing danger from the Russian army amid new signs of a reluctance to send more military equipment, ammunition, coal and humanitarian supplies.

The Ukrainian community issued the call in a direct plea to Defence Minister Richard Marles to remove obstacles within his department that have held back some of the support, while also thanking him for \$50 million in aid promised this month.



Co-chair of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations Kateryna Argyrou and Ukraine's ambassador to Australia Vasyl Myroshnychenko urged Canberra to scale up its aid to Ukraine during an address to the National Press Club on Wednesday. *CREDIT: ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN*

With Russian forces advancing in eastern Ukraine, opposition foreign affairs spokesman Simon Birmingham backed the new request and said the government was being too timid in sending help.

Australia was one of the biggest contributors to Ukraine from the non-NATO countries in the months after Russia's full-scale invasion two years ago, but has fallen down the list as it waited to do more while other countries increased their work.

Worried that officials are blocking aid without good reason, the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations said on Wednesday that the Department of Defence did not need to make “risk assessments” about the aid when combatants in the field knew what they needed.

“If it’s a risk assessment issue, please let Ukraine make that risk assessment – they’re the ones on the front line, they’re the ones that can say whether they can use a certain type of equipment or not,” AFUO co-chair Kateryna Argyrou said.

“The decision being made by someone that’s not in a war situation is very different from someone that desperately needs something on the front line.

“Please consider those requests. They are desperately needed and they literally go towards saving lives.”

Argyrou, an investment banker whose sisters and other family members are in Ukraine, spoke directly to Marles from the podium of the National Press Club on Wednesday to thank him for the help so far but emphasised that more military aid was needed.

The government rebuffed a request from Ukraine for old Taipan helicopters from the Australian Defence Force, [which chose to bury the airframes](#) rather than ship them overseas, and it has taken no action on a request for more coal shipments.

The Ukrainian ambassador to Australia, Vasyl Myroshnychenko, said Australia could help by supplying Abrams tanks, to add to Bushmasters, artillery and ammunition already provided.

“We have shown that we do not squander your practical assistance,” he said. “Let us show you that we can do more if you provide us with more.”

Australians have provided about \$20 million in humanitarian aid, Argyrou said, but she added that Ukraine could become a “forgotten war” because it was receiving less attention in the media and the donations from ordinary citizens were falling.

Birmingham said the government should act on Ukrainian requests for military equipment and supply coal as the previous government did.

“What we need to see is a government thinking about everything that can be done, rather than contemplating only the bare minimum,” he said.

“Where Defence assets are being disposed of, or are planned to be disposed of, rather than burying them, let’s gift them and let Ukraine use them for their defence and their safety. Let’s be quick about responding to things like coal requests.”

Whitehaven Coal, which agreed to ship 70,000 tonnes of coal to Ukraine in March 2022 under a \$30 million deal with the Morrison government, told this masthead it stood ready to provide more help.

“If called upon once again by an Australian government to make a shipment of coal available to support energy security for the people of Ukraine, we would look upon that request favourably,” the company said.

The Ukrainian ambassador wrote to Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong on December 5 last year requesting a “year-long” supply of Australian coal. He has not received a reply.

The national secretaries of three major unions – the SDA, AWU and the MEU – urged the government to facilitate Ukraine’s request, writing to Resources Minister Madeleine King on December 15.

“Ukrainian lives are at stake. Our unions will do all we can to facilitate this urgent, humanitarian project,” Gerard Dwyer (SDA), Paul Farrow (AWU) and Grahame Kelly (MEU) told the minister.

“We appeal to you to help provide the resources to ensure that Ukrainians can live and fight another day. It is the least we can do.”

Marles declined to comment after the event at the National Press Club, but a spokeswoman for Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the government was providing “meaningful support” to Ukraine, totalling \$960 million to date, including about \$780 million in military assistance.

“Over the past two weeks, the government has announced new and additional support to Ukraine, and additional sanctions aimed to hold Russia to account,” the spokeswoman said.



Australian Strategic Policy Institute senior analyst Malcolm Davis said the conflict in Ukraine was about a wider test for democratic values from authoritarian nations such as Russia and China.

“We either defend those values, and we defend those interests, or we don’t – and we’re at a crucial testing point,” he said.

World Vision chief Daniel Wordsworth, who will travel to Ukraine in two weeks, endorsed the call for more humanitarian aid for the country.