

# Australia gives ‘retiring’ tanks to Ukraine for war efforts



By [David Crowe](#), Sydney Morning Herald, October 16, 2024

Australia will donate 49 tanks to Ukraine to help its army fight a renewed assault from Russian forces amid fears the growing attacks are putting nuclear power stations at risk.

The donation, worth \$245 million, will give Ukraine more M1 Abrams tanks to add to those it received from the United States and other countries, after months of requests for more Australian help.



An Australian Army Abrams tank during an exercise at Puckapunyal in Victoria in 2018. *Credit: Australian Defence Force*

The move takes the value of Australian military help to \$1.3 billion since the Russian invasion in February 2022, making up the lion’s share of the \$1.5 billion in overall Australian aid.

Defence Industry Minister Pat Conroy confirmed the decision in London on Wednesday night, Australian time, on his way to a meeting with Ukrainian officials and NATO defence ministers in Brussels on Thursday.

“We stand shoulder to shoulder with Ukraine in their fight against Russian aggression,” Conroy said.

“With this illegal invasion, Russia is trying to take us back to a world where only great powers are truly sovereign and their actions are above the law.



“This is not a world where the people of Australia or the people of the United Kingdom would thrive. That is why we are so committed to supporting Ukraine, to end the conflict on its terms.”

The American-made M1 Abrams is seen as one of the world’s best tanks but has been vulnerable to Russian drones, with [the Associated Press reporting in April](#) that Ukraine had taken some out of operation.

Ukrainian technicians have since refitted some of the tanks with steel cages wrapped around the frame to shield them against drone attacks.

The 49 Australian tanks are nearing the end of their working lives. Some will be repaired before being delivered, while others will be used for spare parts in Ukraine.

The Australian Army will keep several of the older M1A1 tanks while it moves to a new version called the M1A2, with 120 new tanks on order under a [\\$3.5 billion deal finalised in January 2022](#).

“Australia’s support for Ukraine has not wavered since Russia’s illegal invasion, and Australia will continue standing with Ukraine,” said Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles.

The new move adds to the \$250 million in military aid in July – including air-defence missiles and anti-tank weapons – and comes after a controversy earlier this year when Australia chose to [scrap rather than donate a fleet of Taipan helicopters](#).

Ukraine's ambassador to Australia, Vasyl Myroshnychenko, expressed concern last month that his country would need more military help as the northern winter approached.

“Ukraine has been asking for decommissioned equipment, any sort of help. Australian support has been great so far. What is important is that it continues to be so,” he said.

The federal government has been considering the decision for months, while experts have long called for the older Abrams to be donated because the newer ones would start to arrive.

Peter Leahy, who served as army chief from 2003 to 2008 and oversaw the introduction of the M1A1 tanks, told this masthead last month that he was bemused about why the tanks had not been sent to Ukraine.

“Although we are retiring them, they are a very competent tank, they should be well-maintained, there are spare parts available, and [the Ukrainians are very keen to get them](#),” he said.

Australia was one of the biggest donors to Ukraine in the immediate aftermath of the February 2022 invasion, according to a regular measure by the Kiel Institute of Germany of donations as a proportion of economic output, but has fallen down the list over time.

Australian commitments were worth 0.06 per cent of GDP over the more than two years to the end of August, the institute estimated in an update last week. That compares to 0.03 per cent for New Zealand and 0.27 per cent for Japan.

The Kiel Institute estimated the total bilateral commitments to Ukraine had reached €317 billion (\$515 billion) over time, but it warned that the assistance could fall if former US president Donald Trump wins the November 5 presidential election.

“Starting next year, Ukraine could face a significant shortfall in aid,” it said.