



**Parliament of Australia**

**Report of the Parliamentary Delegation to Vietnam,  
Thailand and Brunei**

**15—25 July 2018**

## **Members of the Delegation**

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Leader of the Delegation

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## Introduction

Australia's economic and security interests remain inextricably linked with the countries of Southeast Asia. In recognition of this, the aims of the annual Australian parliamentary delegation visit to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are to gain a better understanding of developments in ASEAN countries and to examine opportunities to broaden links with those countries, focusing on:

- economic development, including responses to global economic issues and opportunities to strengthen trade and investment links
- environment, including policies and initiatives to meet the challenges of climate change
- security, including defence cooperation and responses to the threat of terrorism
- cooperation within the multilateral system and
- social development, including community health and education.

In 2018, ASEAN celebrated its 51st anniversary. ASEAN was formed in 1967 by the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand. Membership has expanded over the years to also include Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar.<sup>1</sup>

Australia became ASEAN's first dialogue partner in 1974 and entered into a free trade agreement (FTA) with ASEAN and New Zealand in 2010.<sup>2</sup> Negotiations for a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which started in 2012, are continuing. The RCEP is an ASEAN-centred proposal for a regional free trade area, which would initially include the ten ASEAN member states and those countries which have existing FTAs with

ASEAN—Australia, China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand.<sup>3</sup>

Australia's strategic partnership with ASEAN, entered into in 2014, delivers important economic and security benefits to Australia.<sup>4</sup> As a group, ASEAN is Australia's second largest trading partner<sup>5</sup> and Australia is working closely with ASEAN nations in important areas such as counter-terrorism cooperation and maritime security, including through the 2018 *Memorandum of Understanding between ASEAN and Australia on Cooperation to Counter International Terrorism*.<sup>6</sup>

In March 2018, Australia hosted the Australia-ASEAN Special Summit in Sydney, the first time Australia has hosted a summit with ASEAN leaders. The joint statement from the Special Summit—the Sydney Declaration—confirmed a shared commitment to increase cooperation across a range of areas, including countering people trafficking and transnational crime, and capacity building initiatives.<sup>7</sup>

The 2018 ASEAN delegation visited Vietnam, Thailand and Brunei. The program was comprehensive and facilitated insights into Australia's trade and investment, security and defence, development cooperation and people-to-people relationships across all three countries, as well as into the broader issues facing the region and the opportunities to strengthen Australia's engagement at the bilateral and regional level.

It is clear from the visit that Australia is regarded as a valued, constructive and practical partner by our ASEAN neighbours in an era of rapid change and uncertainty. The delegation was warmly received in all three countries by parliamentary colleagues, government officials, business groups and local communities.

In all countries visited, the importance of bilateral visits for creating and maintaining productive ties was emphasised.

The delegation wishes to express its appreciation of the work that went into preparing for the visit, including the support provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the International and Parliamentary Relations Office and the Parliamentary Library. The delegation would also like to thank Australia's heads of mission and all of the mission staff in Hanoi, Bangkok and Brunei for their work in developing the programs and the excellent support and hospitality provided during the visits. The delegation's full program is included as an appendix to this report.

## **Vietnam**

The delegation commenced its program with a visit to Vietnam from 15 to 18 July. The visit provided an opportunity to review progress in strengthening the bilateral relationship under the Strategic Partnership, as well as to discuss shared regional challenges and future opportunities.

### **Bilateral relationship**

Australia and Vietnam's partnership extends across political, security, economic and people-to-people activities. Australians born in Vietnam represent the sixth largest migrant community in Australia, and around 30,000 Vietnamese students enrol in education institutions in Australia each year. Vietnam is one of our fastest growing trade partners, and is central to regional security in Southeast Asia. The country's further development as a strong trade and investment partner is vital to our national interest and the region's prosperity.<sup>8</sup>

2018 marked 45 years of diplomatic relations between Australia and Vietnam, with bilateral

links having deepened and diversified since the establishment of diplomatic relationships in 1973. A Comprehensive Partnership between the two countries was announced in 2009 and enhanced in 2015.<sup>9</sup> In recognition of the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations, in March 2018, during the visit of Vietnamese Prime Minister H.E. Nguyen Xuan Phuc to Australia, a Strategic Partnership was established, elevating the bilateral relationship.<sup>10</sup> Through the Strategic Partnership, Australia and Vietnam pledged their commitment to 'deepening ties based on respect for the United Nations Charter, international law and each other's sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and respective political systems'.<sup>11</sup>

The *Australia-Vietnam Plan of Action (2016-19)* outlines how Australia and Vietnam will collaborate in the areas of defence, security, economic and development cooperation.<sup>12</sup> Both countries are also focused on ways to promote trade and investment, innovation and measures to improve gender equality.

The delegation met with HE Mr Phung Quoc Hien, Vice President of the National Assembly and members of the Vietnam-Australia Parliamentary Friendship Group to discuss the bilateral relationship and parliamentary cooperation. Both meetings evidenced the depth of the contemporary relationship between the two countries.

The importance of parliament-to-parliament dialogue was emphasised, given the range of parliamentary visits that have taken place in recent years, including the visit to the Australian Parliament by a parliamentary delegation led by Her Excellency Madam Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan, President of the National Assembly, in November 2017.<sup>13</sup> The Vietnamese delegation's observance of the Australian Parliament on that visit inspired several procedural modifications in the

Vietnamese National Assembly, including changes to question time arrangements.

The shared interests of the two countries in responding to the ongoing geopolitical shifts in the region, dealing with the growing threat of regional terrorism and violent extremism, and effectively managing economic transition and reform was evident in the delegation's meetings with our Vietnamese parliamentary colleagues.

### **Defence and security relationship**

2018 marked 20 years of formal defence relations between Vietnam and Australia. In 2010 the two countries signed a *Memorandum of Understanding for Defence Cooperation*. The bilateral defence relationship includes regular Australian Defence Force (ADF) ship visits to Vietnamese ports, training of Vietnamese military officers in Australia under the bilateral Defence Cooperation Program and visits between Australian and Vietnamese senior Defence Force officials.<sup>14</sup>

Australia's defence relationship with Vietnam focuses on peacekeeping, counter-terrorism cooperation, maritime security, and English language training.<sup>15</sup>

The delegation received a comprehensive briefing from senior members of the Peacekeeping Department on Vietnam's contributions to United Nations' peacekeeping operations. Vietnam has been involved in such operations since 2014 and has deployed 27 officers to two UN missions – in South Sudan and the Central African Republic. Australia has supported Vietnam's peacekeeping capacity since 2011.<sup>16</sup>

At the time of the delegation's visit, preparations were being finalised for the deployment of a level-2 field hospital to South Sudan as part of the UN mission in that

country. In October 2018, the 70 Vietnamese peacekeepers were flown to South Sudan by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).<sup>17</sup> On request from Vietnam, the ADF assisted in planning the mission over a number of years, through the provision of logistical advice, the attendance of Vietnamese officers at military training exercises and seminars in Australia, and the provision of specialised equipment. Australian instructors also assisted members of the field hospital reach the standard of English required by the UN for such medical operations. The Peacekeeping Department thanked Australia for its assistance in preparing for the deployment.

The delegation also received a briefing from the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam that provided a snapshot on current security challenges facing southeast Asia and re-emphasised both countries' shared commitment to the international rule of law, the resolution of disagreements through established mechanisms and the maintenance of free trade.

### **Economic and trade relationship**

In the five years to 2017, Vietnam was one of Australia's fastest-growing trade markets in the ASEAN region, averaging 12 per cent annual growth in bilateral trade.<sup>18</sup>

In the Joint Statement on the establishment of the Strategic Partnership, the Prime Ministers of both countries committed to deepen the bilateral trade and investment relationship. Building on the complementary nature of the two economies, both countries pledged to promote market access and trade facilitation, including for agricultural and seafood products.<sup>19</sup> Both countries acknowledged the strong commercial and business-to-business engagement underpinning our trade and investment relationship.<sup>20</sup>

Australia and Vietnam are parties to the *Agreement Establishing the ASEAN-Australia New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA)*, which entered into force for both countries in 2010 and was updated in 2015.<sup>21</sup> The AANZFTA was Australia's first multi-country free trade agreement and was the first time ASEAN embarked on comprehensive FTA negotiations covering all sectors simultaneously.<sup>22</sup> The delegation received a briefing from members of the Australian Chamber of Commerce in Vietnam on new opportunities in the bilateral economic relationship.

Education is a key aspect of the trade relationship. In addition to providing education directly to students in Vietnam, Australia is a leading educational destination for Vietnamese students, with Vietnam being Australia's fifth largest source of foreign students.<sup>23</sup> Education-related travel services were Australia's largest export to Vietnam in 2017, worth \$1.2 billion.<sup>24</sup>

The delegation visited the Hanoi campus of RMIT University Vietnam, which is part of RMIT University Melbourne, Australia's biggest tertiary institution.<sup>25</sup> In 1998 RMIT University was invited by the Vietnamese Government to establish Vietnam's first international university campus.<sup>26</sup> RMIT now has two campuses in Vietnam – in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi<sup>27</sup>—with over 6,000 students across the two campuses.<sup>28</sup>

The development of Vietnam's vocational education and training (VET) system offers a significant opportunity for Australia. There is a growing demand in Vietnam for skills training that is internationally applicable, as industry requires increasing numbers of skilled employees and workers seek quality, recognised training.<sup>29</sup>

The importance of vocational education and training was underlined by being the topic of one of the two education focused Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) signed by Australia and Vietnam in March 2018.<sup>30</sup> The delegation received a briefing from the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MLISA), which is a party to the MOU on vocational education and training with the Australian Department of Education and Training.<sup>31</sup> MLISA officials emphasised that enhancement of vocational education is a key element in Vietnam's further economic development, by providing a highly skilled workforce and improved productivity. Such training will be vital as the composition of Vietnam's labour force changes from agricultural to industrial and service sectors. MLISA has commenced a comprehensive three-year reform project of the VET sector to meet the requirements of the labour market and views the signing of the VET MOU with Australia as an exciting move to a new level of cooperation in this vital area. Areas of focus for cooperation under the MOU include ensuring the quality and good governance of the VET system, the accreditation of training providers, and fostering linkages between Australian and Vietnamese training institutions.<sup>32</sup>

### **Development cooperation**

The delegation received a briefing from the Ministry of Transport on the infrastructure challenges facing fast-growing Vietnam and the opportunities this provides for Australian investors. In May 2018, the Ministry had celebrated the opening of the Cao Lanh Bridge by Foreign Minister Julie Bishop. The Cao Lanh Bridge represents the largest single Australian aid activity in mainland Southeast Asia. It is expected to directly benefit five million people in the Mekong Delta area and deliver improved transport facilities to 170,000 daily road users within five years.<sup>33</sup> The Ministry

emphasised the benefits that the bridge is expected to bring to the social and economic life of the region.

Vietnam is increasingly looking to deliver major infrastructure projects through public-private partnerships, including the north to south expressway, a new international airport and a new high speed railway.

Australia is assisting Vietnam in this regard through the Aus4Transport project, which supports the development of high quality transport infrastructure project proposals and facilitates better public-private partnerships.<sup>34</sup> It is expected that this will assist at least eight major infrastructure projects reach completion earlier, saving money and delivering faster access to better services to local communities.<sup>35</sup>



The delegation received a briefing from Mr Phillip Dowler, Head of Hanoi Campus, RMIT Vietnam on opportunities in Vietnam for Australian educational institutions, and a tour of the campus.



The delegation visited Vietnam's Peacekeeping Department to receive a briefing on Vietnam's contributions to United Nations' peacekeeping operations and received thanks for the assistance provided by Australia in preparing for the missions.

## Thailand

The delegation visited Thailand from 18 to 21 July 2018. As well as visiting Bangkok, the delegation also travelled to Kanchanaburi and Hellfire Pass, important sites of commemoration of Australia's sacrifice in World War II.

### Bilateral relationship

Australia and Thailand have longstanding and deep connections, with formal diplomatic relations commencing in 1952. The two countries cooperate in a broad range of areas of mutual interest, including trade and investment, law enforcement, counter-terrorism, education, security, migration and tourism. Reflecting the extensive cooperation between Australia and Thailand a treaty-level *Agreement on Bilateral Cooperation* entered into force on 27 July 2005.<sup>36</sup> It provides a framework for cooperation in areas including security and law enforcement, environment and heritage, science and technology, telecommunications, civil aviation, public administration, energy, immigration, education, culture and social development. Senior Officials' Talks are held on a regular basis, most recently on 13 September 2018.

Australia's relationship with Thailand is one of our most important bilateral relationships. Our embassy in Bangkok is Australia's fourth largest and the scope and scale of activities on which we are working with government, business and civil society partners across Thailand continues to expand.

Our strong bilateral relations are reflected in extensive people-to-people links. Thailand attracts large numbers of Australians for tourism and business— approximately 800,000 Australians visit Thailand each year. More than 72,000 Thais live in Australia (2016 Census).<sup>37</sup> A Memorandum of Understanding

(MOU) on 'Work and Holiday' visas allows nationals of both countries to undertake 12-month working holidays in the other country.<sup>38</sup>

The delegation had a very positive meeting with the President of the Legislative Assembly, His Excellency Mr Pornpetch Wichitcholchai and members of the Thai Parliament. The meeting highlighted the breadth and importance of the relationship, as well as the potential for further expanding parliamentary ties as a means of enhancing mutual understanding and managing shared challenges. In particular, the delegation appreciated the chance to explore how economic and security cooperation between Thailand and Australia might be further strengthened. The importance of regular parliament-to-parliament dialogue was also emphasised, along with a recognition that the two countries cooperate on both a bilateral and multilateral basis, with regular meetings at international parliamentary fora.

The delegation was pleased to hear that general elections were planned for 2019.

The delegation's visit to Thailand came shortly after the remarkable rescue of the Wild Boars soccer team and coach from a flooded cave in northern Thailand. The delegation conveyed Australia's relief and joy that the boys and their coach had emerged safely from a very precarious situation. The delegation was proud and delighted that Australians, including Australian Federal Police (AFP) rescue divers, ADF specialists, and Drs Richard Harris and Craig Challen had been able to assist Thailand's impressive and effective rescue mission.

The delegation was also fortunate to attend a function hosted by the Thailand-Australia Parliamentary Friendship Group. The Group was established in 1993 to contribute to the

maintenance of strong relationships between the parliaments of the two countries. The delegation appreciated the insights received from the members of the Group on how we can further strengthen political, strategic, economic and people-to-people links between Thailand and Australia.

### **Defence and security relationship**

Defence relations between Thailand and Australia began in August 1945. In 1972 a formal Defence Cooperation Program (DCP) was initiated with emphasis on individual training and combined maritime, ground and air exercises. This aspect of the Defence relationship has continued to develop and is now characterised by regular senior officer visits; seminars and workshops; individual education and training courses for Royal Thai Armed Forces personnel at ADF schools, colleges and national universities; the conduct of several annual combined exercises across all military disciplines; logistics systems and support; and science and technology cooperation, particularly in the area of research and development.<sup>39</sup> The defence relationship between the two countries is significant.

Defence policy talks have been held on an annual basis since 1990. The ADF and the Royal Thai Armed Forces have used these talks to continually improve the bilateral defence relationship, and to promote mutual understanding and cooperation on regional security issues. There is also an annual bilateral dialogue on regional security issues, involving foreign affairs, defence and military officials.

Regional stability is a key area of mutual interest. Thailand was one of the first countries with which Australia concluded a bilateral MOU on Counter-Terrorism, in October 2002. This was followed by MOUs on

police cooperation (June 2003), mutual assistance in customs matters (December 2003), and money-laundering (June 2004), and a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (July 2006).<sup>40</sup> Thailand is also a key player with Australia in efforts to strengthen regional cooperation against people smuggling and trafficking. Under the auspices of Taskforce Storm, the AFP and Thai law enforcement agencies work together to disrupt narcotics trafficking and transnational organised crime.<sup>41</sup>

The delegation's visit to the Hellfire Pass Interpretive Centre and Memorial, the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery and the Thai-Burma Railway Centre served as an important reminder of the shared suffering of Australian prisoners of war and Thai civilians in the construction of the Burma-Thailand railway by the Imperial Japanese Army in World War II. The railway resulted in the deaths of approximately 13,000 prisoners of war and up to 100,000 civilians. The delegation was deeply moved by the stories of the suffering, friendship and perseverance of individual prisoners and was honoured to lay a wreath at the Hellfire Pass site to commemorate their immense sacrifice. The generosity of the Thai Government in allowing the Hellfire Pass memorial to exist on a Royal Thai Army base is sincerely appreciated by the delegation.

The Kanchanaburi War Cemetery contains the graves of 5,084 Commonwealth casualties of World War II, many of whom died during the construction of the Thai-Burma Railway. It also contains 1,896 Dutch war graves and one non-war grave. The delegation was honoured to pay its respects and lay a wreath at the cemetery to remember those who lost their lives in the conflict.

## **Economic and trade relationship**

Thailand's economy is the second largest in ASEAN. Australia has a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Thailand, which entered into force on 1 January 2005.<sup>42</sup> The trade and economic relationship between the two countries has grown strongly since the entry into force of the FTA, with trade in goods almost tripling since 2004.<sup>43</sup> Thailand is also a party to the *ASEAN-Australia New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA)*, which entered into force for both countries in 2010 and was updated in 2015.<sup>44</sup> Both Australia and Thailand are currently participating in negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, launched in November 2012.<sup>45</sup>

In 2018, Thailand was Australia's fifth highest goods import source. Thailand is now also Australia's ninth largest goods and services trading partner, and our second-largest in ASEAN. Total Thai investment stock in Australia has grown significantly from \$294 million in 2006 to \$3.1 billion in 2017; while Australian investment stocks in Thailand were valued at \$4.5 billion at the end of 2017. Australia's key goods exports to Thailand are crude petroleum, gold, aluminum and coal, and Thailand's key exports to Australia are passenger and goods vehicles.<sup>46</sup> (Thailand is the largest source of vehicles in Australia, by country.)

Australia enjoys a well-developed education, training and research relationship with Thailand. A Memorandum of Understanding on education and training is in place between the two countries and Thailand's Ministry of Education currently works with Australia on a number of priority issues related to education and training policy and systems.<sup>47</sup> Australia continues to be a leading destination for Thai students, with more than 30,000 Thai student enrolments received in 2018, placing Thailand

as our seventh largest source of foreign students. More than 1,300 Australian undergraduates have chosen to study in Thailand under the New Colombo Plan, since the program began in 2014.<sup>48</sup>

It is clear that Australia's tertiary alumni networks across Thailand are a key resource in efforts to further build economic and people-to-people links. In addition, fresh ties are being forged through the operation of the New Colombo Plan. Australia's diplomatic mission in Thailand is actively supporting and strengthening these networks. It was a highlight of the delegation's visit to meet some of these alumni and New Colombo Plan scholars at a reception hosted by the Australian Ambassador.



The delegation, accompanied by Deputy Head of Mission at Australia's Embassy in Bangkok, Mr Paul Stephens, and Ms Juthaporn Pansombon, Operations Manager at the Hellfire Pass Interpretive Centre, laid a wreath at the Hellfire Pass Memorial to honour those who suffered and died in the construction of the Thai-Burma Railway.

## **Brunei Darussalam**

The delegation visited Brunei Darussalam from 21 to 25 July 2018. The visit was based around the capital, Bandar Seri Begawan. Brunei is a valued partner to Australia in the Commonwealth and numerous multilateral organisations, and was the coordinator for ASEAN in the negotiations leading to the signing of the *ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA)* in 2009.

### **Bilateral relationship**

Australia and Brunei enjoy a warm and broad relationship, focused on defence, security, education and trade links, as well as a shared Commonwealth heritage. Australia has maintained a diplomatic presence in Brunei since it gained its full independence from the United Kingdom in 1984. However, our historical links stretch back to WWII, when in 1945, Australian forces landed at Muara Beach as part of the Allied campaign to end the occupation of Borneo. The delegation was honoured to pay its respects and lay a wreath at the Brunei-Australia memorial, which marks the site of the successful landing led by Australian forces with the cooperation of the people of Brunei.

The delegation met with the Speaker of the Legislative Council, YB Pehin Orang Kaya Seri Lela Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Abdul Rahman bin Dato Setia Haji Mohamed Taib and members of the Bruneian parliament. This meeting highlighted the breadth of the relationship, as well as the potential for further expanding parliament-to-parliament ties as a means of enhancing mutual understanding and confronting shared challenges.

### **Defence and security relationship**

Australia has long-standing defence and security links with Brunei. Australia and

Brunei hold regular joint defence exercises and strategic dialogues, and have MOUs on Combating Transnational Crime and Developing Police Cooperation, and on Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism. The latter MOU provides for cooperation on customs, finance, immigration, intelligence, law enforcement, security and transport. Our defence relationship spans military exercises, defence policy talks, intelligence exchanges and joint training opportunities.

Australia and Brunei cooperate closely on security threats facing the region and there are close links between Australian and Bruneian police, security, counter-terrorism and immigration authorities.

The delegation received a comprehensive briefing from the Ministry of Defence on our defence and security relationship, opportunities and challenges. Both sides expressed enthusiasm for the then upcoming Exercise Mallee Bull 2018, which took place in Brunei in December 2018 with the aim of developing the interoperability between the Royal Brunei Land Force (RBLF) and the Australian Army.<sup>49</sup>

Exercise Penguin, the 18th series of bilateral naval exercises between Australia and Brunei, which took place in October 2018, was also highly anticipated as a means to increase the interoperability of the our two countries' naval forces.<sup>50</sup> Brunei also participated in two military exercises in Australia in 2018— Exercise Pitch Black, which was a three week multi-national Air Force exercise conducted in the Northern Territory<sup>51</sup> and Exercise Kakadu, a joint Navy-Airforce exercise that aimed to foster and strengthen effective security and humanitarian partnerships across the Indo-Pacific region through a series of training and engagement activities.<sup>52</sup>

## **Economic and trade relationship**

Australia and Brunei are both strong supporters of free trade and parties to the AANZFTA, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the ongoing negotiations to establish the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.<sup>53</sup> Our countries have a shared commitment to further strengthening regional security and prosperity.

While the bilateral economic relationship is small relative to our trade and investment ties with other ASEAN countries, the delegation was pleased to meet with Bruneian business people to discuss trade and investment opportunities.

Brunei's economy is largely based on revenue from oil and gas output, which makes up more than 50 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Brunei also has extensive foreign investments managed by the Brunei Investment Agency, and small manufacturing and primary production sectors. Brunei is seeking to diversify its economy by promoting investment in downstream oil and gas, and in non-energy sectors.

A briefing from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade provided insights into Brunei's security, trade and legal reform priorities and highlighted our two countries' concern to ensure the maintenance and expansion of free trade, as well as our joint commitment to the international rule of law and respect for established international institutions and processes.

The Ministry encouraged Australia to view Brunei as a convenient base for reaching the 18 million residents of Borneo, utilising Brunei's first class transport infrastructure, including high quality network of roads.

Strong education ties underpin Australia's relationship with Brunei, with Australia the second largest destination for Bruneians studying overseas (after the United Kingdom). Brunei alumni of Australian universities number almost 12,000 and include high ranking people in government, the military and business. The delegation was pleased to meet alumni who had studied in Australia, and their families, at a meeting organised by the High Commission.

The delegation also received a briefing from the Minister of Education, highlighting areas of mutual interest and co-operation between the two countries, including teacher training, vocational and technical education, and the development of an apprenticeship system. Specific examples of successful collaboration between Bruneian and Australian tertiary institutions was discussed, including a partnership in engineering between the University of Technology Brunei and the University of New South Wales, and a collaboration between Queensland TAFE and Brunei film company Origin, to establish Brunei's first film school. In addition, under the BRIDGE program, which creates connections between classrooms in ASEAN, seven Bruneian teachers travelled to Australia in 2018 and eight Australian teachers were scheduled to attend Brunei in January 2019.<sup>54</sup> The delegation was also fascinated to hear about the collaboration between Flinders University and Brunei's world class autism facility, SMARTER Brunei, facilitated under the New Colombo Plan.<sup>55</sup>

A meeting with the Minister for Primary Resources and Tourism provided the delegation with valuable insights into potential areas of collaboration and trade opportunities in the primary production sector, including through advanced agricultural research and agribusiness development. Given that Borneo imports

about 80 per cent of its food requirements, opportunities exist for Australian agribusiness companies to assist Brunei in increasing its domestic food production.

The potential for Brunei (which consists of about 70 per cent protected rainforest under the Heart of Borneo agreement) to attract more Australian tourists, particularly in the sustainable eco-tourism and conservation tourism sectors, was also highlighted.

The delegation was also grateful for the insights gained from a meeting with the Minister of Energy and Industry, including the challenges and opportunities posed by moves to renewable power sources, measures to enhance domestic participation in construction employment, and the potential for greater collaboration between the oil and gas industries of Australia and Brunei.

### **Introduction of Syariah law**

Brunei has a dual legal system—a common law system inherited from Britain and a Syariah (Sharia) system, the first stage of which was introduced in 2014. Currently punishments under the Syariah framework include fines and imprisonment. While corporal and capital punishments are not currently applied for Syariah offences, they do apply to common law offences and are foreshadowed for introduction in future stages of implementation of the Syariah system.

The delegation pursued an interest in understanding the goals for the introduction of the Syariah Penal Code in Brunei, and in particular what impact the action might have on Australians living in and visiting the country.

Bruneian Ministers and officials stressed that the standard of evidence required before corporal or capital punishment will be able to

be imposed under the Syariah Penal Code will be very high.

Nevertheless, the delegation remains concerned about the level of detail available regarding the implications of the Code to foreign residents and visitors, and about the rights of women and members of minority religious groups living in Brunei. The delegation noted the importance of ensuring that the Syariah legal framework is implemented in accordance with Brunei's commitments to international human rights.

### **Conclusion**

As a channel for deepening mutual understanding, the annual ASEAN parliamentary delegation remains a very important part of Australia's overall engagement with the countries of Southeast Asia. It allows Australian parliamentarians to engage in a dialogue with their peers in different ASEAN countries, as well as with partner government officials, businesses, experts, non-government organisations and local communities with whom Australia is working to advance our shared interest in ensuring a secure, stable and prosperous region.

Members of the delegation were very pleased to participate in the annual Australian Parliamentary visit to ASEAN in 2018, and to have the opportunity to contribute to the valuable relationships that Australia has with Vietnam, Thailand and Brunei.

The delegation believes that there are several ways these visits could be further strengthened. First, we believe that at the commencement of each visit program, future delegations would benefit from a briefing by the ASEAN mission in Jakarta on Australia's overall regional engagement strategies. This could be held either in Jakarta or remotely, prior to departure.

Secondly, we consider that facilitating reciprocal visits to delegation members' electorates by parliamentarians from visited countries could promote a better understanding of Australia's diversity, including the range of services and goods produced across the country. We believe this could facilitate greater cooperation, understanding and trade relationships between countries.

Thirdly, we believe that there may be value in considering whether future delegation visits should be timed to coincide with meetings of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, of which Australia is an observer member, in order to maximise the delegation's interaction with regional parliamentarians.

The delegation held frank and fruitful discussions in each of the three countries visited, and concluded the trip with a greater understanding of the challenges being faced by those countries, the nature of Australia's relationships with them and ways in which those relationships could be enhanced and consolidated.

Parliamentary delegations such as this provide a strong bipartisan mechanism to engage with our regional neighbours and support the excellent work being done by Australia's diplomatic missions and all Australians in the region.

Rowan Ramsey MP  
Leader of the Delegation  
March 2019



The delegation was welcomed by members of Brunei's Legislative Council.



The delegation, accompanied by H.E. Ms Nicola Rosenblum, Australian High Commissioner to Brunei Darussalam, and Colonel David Hay, laid a wreath at the Brunei-Australia memorial at Muara Beach.

### ***Delegation program***

#### **Vietnam**

##### **Sunday 15 July**

- Delegation arrives in Hanoi

##### **Monday 16 July**

- Briefing from Australian Ambassador and relevant Australian Agency heads.
- Tour and briefing at RMIT Hanoi Campus.
- Meeting with Vietnam's Peacekeeping Department.
- Meeting with Mr Nguyen Hanh Phuc, Chairman of the National Assembly Office, Chair of the Vietnam-Australia Parliamentary Friendship Group
- Meeting with HE Mr Phung Quoc Hien, Vice President of National Assembly.
  - Tour of National Assembly building and museum.
  - Dinner reception with the Vietnam-Australia Parliamentary Friendship Group.

##### **Tuesday 17 July**

- Meeting with Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
- Meeting with Vietnam's Ministry of Transport.
- Roundtable at the Australian Embassy with AusCham and Australian businesses.
- Meeting with Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam.

#### **Thailand**

##### **Wednesday 18 July**

- Arrive Bangkok.
- Briefing from Australian Ambassador and section heads and tour the Embassy.
- Reception hosted by Australian Ambassador to Thailand in honour of Australia Parliamentarian's visit to Thailand. Invitations to New Colombo Plan scholars, Australian Chamber of Commerce board and Australian alumni.

##### **Thursday 19 July**

- Meeting with HE Mr Pornpetch Wichitcholchai, President of the Legislative Assembly and Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee.
- Visit Parliament Chamber and the Parliament Museum. Receive brief on new parliament.

- Working lunch hosted by Thailand-Australia Parliamentary Friendship Group.

#### **Friday 20 July**

- Visit Hellfire Pass Interpretive Centre and Memorial and lay commemorative wreath.
- Visit War Cemetery Kanchanaburi and lay commemorative wreath.
- Visit Thai-Burma Railway Centre.

### **Brunei**

#### **Saturday 21 July**

- Arrive Bandar Seri Begawan.
- Dinner with High Commission staff.

#### **Monday 23 July**

- Briefing with HE Nicola Rosenblum, Australian High Commissioner to Brunei Darussalam.
- Meeting with YB Pehin Orang Kaya Seri Lela Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Abdul Rahman Dato Setia Haji Mohamed Taib, Speaker of Legislative Council and dialogue with Members of the Legislative Council.
- Meeting with Yang Berhormat Dato Seri Paduka Awang Haji Erywan bin Pehin Datu Pekerma Jaya Haji Mohd Yusof, Second Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- Dinner with Australian alumni, hosted by the High Commissioner.

#### **Tuesday 24 July**

- Meeting with Yang Berhormat Dato Paduka Awang Haji Hamzah bin Haji Sulaiman, Minister of Education.
- Meeting with Yang Berhormat Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Ali bin Haji Apong, Minister of Primary Resources and Tourism.
- Visit to Australia-Brunei Memorial and lay commemorative wreath.

#### **Wednesday 25 July**

- Meeting with Yang Berhormat Dato Paduka Dr Awang Haji Mat Suny bin Haji Mohd Hussein, Minister of Energy and Industry.
- Meeting with Yang Berhormat Pehin Datu Lailaraja Major General (Rtd) Dato Paduka Seri Haji Awang Halbi bin Haji Mohd Yusof, Second Minister of Defence.
- Working lunch with Bruneian Business People, hosted by the High Commissioner.



## Endnotes

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