



THE HON JULIE BISHOP MP

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Dr Dennis Jensen MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear ~~Dr~~ Jensen

Thank you for your letter of 2 December 2014 regarding a recently submitted petition on China's actions in the South China Sea.

The Australian Government is concerned by recent developments in the South China Sea because of our strong interests in the maintenance of peace and stability, unimpeded trade and freedom of navigation and our respect for international law. Australia does not, however, take a position on the merits of competing claims in the South China Sea.

South China Sea disputes must be resolved peacefully and all dispute resolution options – including arbitration – should be considered. The Government urges all parties to exercise restraint, take steps to ease tensions and refrain from provocative actions. Australia opposes the use of intimidation, aggression or coercion to advance any country's claims or unilaterally alter the status quo.

Australia urges governments to pursue their claims in accordance with international law, including the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*. The Government encourages practical implementation of commitments under the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, including on self-restraint. We continue to urge China and ASEAN member countries to make early progress on a substantive Code of Conduct for the South China Sea.

I trust that this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

~~Julie~~ Bishop
17 JAN 2015