

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – Public Hearing – 26 June 2020
Opportunities for strengthening Australia's relations with the Republic of France

1 Question by Senator Fawcett (HANSARD, pp. 13-14)

Senator FAWCETT: That's okay. My next question relates to it. We've had a previous submission suggesting that Australia should actively support France's application for membership of the IORA, the Indian Ocean Rim Association. Do we have any action in train to that effect?

Mr McInnes: No, we don't. I'm very happy to follow up on that, but we don't have any active arrangements on that at the moment.

Senator FAWCETT: Are you familiar with the Indian Ocean Commission?

Mr McInnes: I'm familiar with it—probably not the details, but you could try me.

Senator FAWCETT: Do we have any action underway to seek observer status with the Indian Ocean Commission?

Mr McInnes: I am unsure. I'll have to take that on notice for you.

Senator FAWCETT: That would be good if you could.

Answer

Australia has supported France's application for membership of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in IORA forums and in bilateral discussions with IORA Member States.

Senior officials from IORA Member States decided, at the Committee of Senior Officials meeting held 29 June – 1 July 2020, to recommend to the IORA Council of Ministers (COM) that France's application for membership of IORA be approved. The COM will consider this recommendation at its next meeting at the end of 2020.

The Australian government has been keeping under review the issue of whether Australia should seek to join the Indian Ocean Commission as an observer. This includes monitoring broader strategic developments in the western Indian Ocean and the impact on Australian interests of transnational crimes (such as people and narcotics smuggling and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing) in that region.

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2 Question by Senator Kitching (HANSARD, p. 16)

Mr McInnes: We have an ambassador to the OECD, who represents our interests, but there are also a number of other agencies represented in the OECD. That engagement is primarily on a range of economic cooperation issues.

CHAIR: What issues has our ambassador to the OECD raised recently?

Mr McInnes: I would have to take that on notice.

CHAIR: That's fine. I'd also ask the same of UNESCO. How do we interact and what issues have we raised recently in those organisations and in any of the subfora or the specialised committees on specific policy areas that are particular issues or priorities of Australia?

Mr McInnes: I'm very happy to come back to the committee with some further details on those questions.

CHAIR: Lovely. Thank you.

Answer

Australia's Ambassador to the OECD has recently raised the following issues:

- Understanding the economic, financial, social and environmental impacts of COVID-19 on OECD member economies, and policies to boost growth and employment during the recovery
- Tax policy, including digital tax
- Governance and future direction of the OECD, including SG succession
- Preventing Terrorist and Violent Extremist Exploitation of the Internet (PTVEEI)
- The Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI)
- Response to environmental emergencies and wildfire management
- South East Asia Regional Program bureau (SEARP)
- Energy policy

In most cases, Australia is represented at UNESCO meetings by the Deputy Head of Mission at the Australian Embassy in Paris, who is also designated as Australia's Permanent Representative to UNESCO.

Australia attends meetings of UNESCO's governing bodies, statutory meetings related to Conventions we have ratified, subsidiary bodies to which we have been elected, and other Intergovernmental Meetings of Experts. These include: General Conference; World Heritage Committee; International Oceanographic Commission; Committee on Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property; Conference of Parties to the International Convention against Doping in Sport; and the International Coordinating Council of the Programme on Man and the Biosphere.

In July 2019, Australia played a leadership role in agreeing UNESCO's Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education. This Convention will facilitate mobility and the recognition of student qualifications around the world, supporting Australia's quality higher education sector.

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In 2019, Australia co-chaired UNESCO's International year of indigenous languages, increasing international awareness and understanding of Australia's ancient and continuous indigenous culture, heritage and knowledge. In 2020, Australia is participating in an expert group assessing how to protect World Heritage Sites from climate change impacts. Australia is also engaging in UNESCO's campaign to fight disinformation about COVID19.

3 Additional Written Questions on Notice

Page four of DFATs' submission notes that at the Australia-France Trade and Investment Dialogue, hosted by the Minister for Trade with the French Foreign Minister in November 2019, the Ministers discussed strengthening links in areas including: infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific, renewable energy (hydrogen, wind, solar), critical minerals and fintech. Are there particular challenges that may be faced by organisations in these sectors?

Answer

A range of organisations work on different aspects of these issues and there are opportunities for stronger cooperation in many areas.

4 Additional Written Questions on Notice

In the Joint statement of enhanced strategic partnership between Australia and France, one of the political cooperation recommendations was to consider holding a regular economic leadership forum targeting business leaders, and including political or officials' attendance if possible. Could you advise the committee whether these economic leadership forums have taken place? If they have been held, is there any information you can provide the committee about the content covered or the outcomes?

Answer

Regular business missions have been held from Australia to France, organised by the European Australian Business Council (EABC), and from France to Australia, organised by Mouvement des Entreprises de France (MEDEF). Most recently, EABC led a business mission to France in June 2018 and MEDEF led a business delegation to Australia in October 2019. Both EABC and MEDEF missions regularly include engagement with political figures and senior officials.

5 Additional Written Questions on Notice

It has been suggested by other witnesses (including submissions from the National Security College and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute) that Australia should work towards building a comprehensive trilateral security relationship with France and India.

- a) What is the Department's position on this trilateral relationship?
- b) Please provide details on any current and future engagement that is being pursued by the Department to advance this trilateral relationship.

Answer

- a) The Australian government strongly supports advancing trilateral cooperation with India and France.
- b) We have been endeavouring to convene further trilateral meetings, subsequent to the inaugural 1.5 track meeting held in January 2018 in New Delhi.

6 Additional Written Questions on Notice

On page 2 of your submission it states 'In February 2019, Senator the Hon Marise Payne, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women, met with French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, to finalise a joint report on AFiniti, which underlined progress made in strengthening the relationship.'

Please provide the committee with the joint report on AFiniti that is referred to in your submission.

Answer

The 2019 AFiniti report is not public. It is a confidential communication from foreign ministers to leaders.