

Submission to the Australia Post Inquiry

Dear Committee members,

We make this submission in our personal capacities as individuals with a longstanding interest in Australia's engagement with Southeast Asia.

Our submission to the Senate Inquiry into Australia Post relates to the last reference point: any other related matters.

We are also board members of the Australia-ASEAN Council (AAC), which provides advice to government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Four of us have been members of the AAC board since it was formed in 2015 along with Ms Christine Holgate who was appointed the Chair of the Board. Our fifth board member joined in 2016. In that context we have worked closely with Ms Holgate on engagement with Southeast Asia for nearly six years. These comments are addressed to the period while Ms Holgate was CEO of Australia Post. Our sixth member joined in 2020.

As AAC Chair, Ms Holgate has consistently volunteered her time and professional networks to enhance Australia's engagement with the ASEAN region. When she commenced her role as Australia Post CEO she took time to learn about the ASEAN region postal services and briefed the ASEAN ambassadors based in Australia on Australia Post activities, along with the AAC board.

The AAC board has responsibility for about \$900,000 in government funds which are used to deepen people to people relations between Australia and Southeast Asian countries. As a Board we are tasked with choosing the most impactful projects to fund. In this we have taken guidance from Ms Holgate who has drawn on her extensive corporate and government networks to inform our decision making.

As a new Board we had to determine procedures for ensuring that all decisions involved a fair, equitable and reasonable allocation of funds. All our decisions have been subject to a transparent Board process which has benefitted from Ms Holgate's experience as a chief executive of large corporate institutions. We have always operated as a cohesive and collaborative team.

One of the AAC's pioneering achievements has been to reach out to regional areas of Australia. We have held Board meetings in and hosted visits by ASEAN ambassadors to regional areas, including Toowoomba and most recently Tasmania. Ms Holgate's experience with Australia Post branches in regional areas has been an important driving force in our regional focus.

As a Board we are strongly committed to working towards deeper relationships with the ASEAN region. While we each bring individual skills to the Board, it has been Ms Holgate's leadership, networks and commitment that have enabled us to achieve credibility with the

ASEAN ambassadors, the broader Asia-focussed community in Australia and business communities in Southeast Asia.

We would like to acknowledge that Ms Holgate has developed a culture of collaboration and openness on the Board that can be an example for members of other advisory boards.

Submitted by

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