

CHAPTER NINE

CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

9.1 Defining and analysing what constitutes or contributes to our cultural relationships with other countries is most difficult. If by them we mean mutual understanding of the language, the history, the political system, the social structure and the national aspirations of our neighbours, then cultural understanding is probably the most vital aspect of a relationship and underpins any lasting success in trade, investment or security matters. How this breadth of understanding of ASEAN might be achieved within Australia and how similar understanding of Australia by our neighbours might be fostered is the subject of this chapter.

9.2 In the 1984 report of the Committee, considerable attention was given to the commercial potential of the provision of education services into the region. This has remained a strong and valuable aspect of government policy and will be addressed later in this chapter. However, in 1984, the Committee concluded that our awareness and understanding of ASEAN was inadequate, that our rhetoric about the importance of Asia to our future was not matched by sufficient national effort to know the region either through national education policies relating to the study of Asian history or languages, through programs of cultural exchange, or through sensitivity in dealing with human rights and media. The Committee noted then that 'The continuing lack of emphasis on Asian studies is particularly notable despite a series of well documented reports in the past decade that have drawn attention to the need to expand the study of Asia in Australia'.¹ It was a picture of low participation, both in schools and tertiary institutions, suggesting that future teaching resources would continue to be inadequate for some time. The Committee endorsed the recommendation of the Asian Studies Association of Australia for the establishment of an Asian Studies Council. This was finally created in 1986.

9.3 In his book, *Is Australia an Asian Country?*, published in 1997, Professor Stephen FitzGerald, suggested that the underlying capacity of Australia to engage effectively with Asia had not greatly improved in the last decade. At the beginning of the 90s he believed that it was 'likely that more than 80 per cent [of Australian students] remain untouched by serious study of Asia'.

This is not in Asian languages, where the per centage is much worse, but in anything at all: in history and geography and literature; in religion and philosophy; in music and painting and theatre; in the history or contemporary state of science, medicine or mathematics. The contributions of non Europeans, where they are mentioned, are still largely eccentricities. ...

1 JSCFADT, *Australia and ASEAN Challenges and Opportunities*, 1984, p. 205.

It produces relationships with Asia in which the Asian party must do all the work.²

9.4 Cultural relations remain low on the agenda. Their very ephemeral nature has undermined their significance in an age of relentless quantification of worth, creating circumstances where we know the 'price of everything and the value of nothing'.³ Nevertheless, as in 1984, the rhetoric remains strong. 'Culture plays a key role in increasing cultural understanding between peoples, which in turn strengthens political, economic and other strands of international relations'.⁴ However, in significant areas, there have been cuts to services and to support for this aspect of our relationship with the region. This is particularly evident in the dismantling of Radio Australia, in the continuing problems in broadening the base of Asian studies in Australia, in the abolition of two student exchange schemes,⁵ in the curtailment of the Public Affairs Division and the Australia-Indonesia Institute and the virtual demise of cultural attaches within Australian Embassies. Professor Trood made the comment to the Committee that:

I am less worried about military capability than I am about diplomatic capability in the region. It seems to me that one of the things that is occurring which has received no attention is the declining proportion of national resources which are being given to the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio to actually pursue its objectives in the region. ... [T]he department has been taking efficiency dividends for five years now and, of course, was chopped in last years budget and has got another this year.⁶

9.5 In respect of the ASEAN countries, there is only one formal institution devoted to fostering cultural activities on a full time basis - the Australia-Indonesia Institute, formed in 1989. The newly formed Malaysia-Australia Society, 1996, was established by the Malaysians in Malaysia but with a counterpart in Australia. Cultural commitments have now formed part of a formal agreement between Australia and Singapore, the Australia-Singapore Partnership Agreement, January 1996.⁷

Government Initiatives

The Australia-Indonesia Institute (AII)

9.6 The Australia-Indonesia Institute was set up 'to promote within Indonesia and Australia a wider community understanding of the other, as well as the enlargement over the longer term of the areas of contact and exchange between each country and their respective peoples'.⁸ It is active in a number of cultural fields including media, the arts, youth programs and sporting links. With the assistance of the Department of Employment, Education and Youth Affairs and the Government of the Northern Territory, the Institute has developed a social studies/geography textbook on Australia for use in Indonesian schools. Since 1995, a

2 Exhibit No. 44, FitzGerald, Stephen, *Is Australia an Asian Country?* pp. 73-74.

3 Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*.

4 DFAT Submission, p. S426.

5 See paragraph 6.59.

6 Professor Trood Transcript, p. 184.

7 DFAT Submission, p. S428.

8 Australia-Indonesia Institute Mission Statement.

series of meetings have been arranged between senior editors from Australia and Indonesia. The meetings have discussed perceptions, cultural differences and sensitivities and media practice. The AII also offers a scholarship to Australian journalists wishing to improve their knowledge of Indonesian language and society. A longstanding and significant program begun in 1981 has been the Australia-Indonesia Youth Exchange Program (AIYEP). It involves 36 participants between the ages of 19 and 25 from both Australia and Indonesia. Participants are involved in community projects, sporting activities, visits to schools, cultural and social evenings and discussions. Among its other activities, the Institute provides funding for artistic exhibitions, tours by Australians and Indonesians involved in the visual and performing arts and exchanges and visits by arts administrators.

9.7 In 1993, the Committee's report on Australia's relations with Indonesia commended the work of the Institute but noted with concern that its funding for that year (1993-94) had not been increased beyond the one million dollars per year that it had received since it was established. This allocation was being absorbed by its administrative costs and hampering its capacity to fulfil its role. Moreover, at that time, the position of Director was vacant and there were threats to reduce its staff from four to two. The Committee recommended that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade strongly reaffirm its support for the work of the Institute, its staff and programs and that its funding be increased.⁹

9.8 This has not happened. The number of staff for the Institute has been reduced from four to two and annual government funding has declined from the previously criticised, static amount of \$1,000,000 to \$900,000 in 1997-98.¹⁰

9.9 Apart from the Australia-Indonesia Institute, other bilateral cultural activities with the ASEANs appear to be more ad hoc, depending on the initiatives of ambassadors in Australian embassies in the region or the broader programs associated with the International Cultural Relations Program of the Department of Foreign Affairs. There are the individual initiatives of the Australia Council or the National Library or the non-government activities of the Asialink Centre or individual entrepreneurial theatre centres and managers such as the Victorian Arts Centre Trust or Stagecraft.

9.10 These activities have become extremely valuable in the contribution they make to regional cultural relations, and particularly in seeking to expand Australia's people to people links in the region and to redress a lack of Asia literacy in Australia.

The Australia Council

9.11 The Australia Council is one of Australia's major cultural institutions. It was formed over 20 years ago, in 1975, with the mandate to promote excellence and diversity in the arts. Its primary focus is domestic: to enable artists, organisations and communities to develop their artistic potential in fields such as drama, music and dance performances, art and craft exhibitions and literature. The Australia Council has made 50,000 grants, the number of practising artists has tripled and the number of arts organisations has increased four fold.¹¹ In this period, the arts in Australia have flourished.

9 JSCFADT, *Australia's Relations with Indonesia*, 1993, p. 152.

10 Exhibit No. 48, Budget papers from the Australia-Indonesia Institute.

11 Australia Council Submission, p. S957.

9.12 The arts have a role in articulating our national identity, in explaining ourselves to ourselves, and therefore, as they have flourished, they naturally project Australia's contemporary image internationally. It can be expected that the image that is thus projected is contemporary and sophisticated, subtle and diverse. Certainly in an environment where our engagement has been criticised as tentative or hesitant and that our image suffers from too many negatives it would seem that a more energetic and committed involvement in the regional cultural forums is necessary. Attendance at or membership of these forums is not just a matter of networking and establishing personal relationships, as important as these are, it is a tangible demonstration of Australia's interest and rightful place within the region. In cultural relations more than any other area, Australia approaches the region with much to learn about some of the richest, oldest and most fascinating cultures in the world and it is an area where we need to demonstrate to the region an image of ourselves that is more sophisticated and complex than the national stereotypes we have too often projected in the past.

9.13 The Australia Council supports international artistic endeavour through direct funding of artists, tours and exhibitions and through funding of other organisations such as Asialink for residency programs. In addition, the Council supports the Performing Arts Markets, by which it brings together a range of people from around the world - entrepreneurs, promoters, festival directors, as well as particular performing arts groups from around Australia - to allow them to make connections, survey Australia's arts products and, it is hoped, make bookings or arrangements for future joint activities.¹²

9.14 A variety of international forums have developed to promote the artistic endeavours of the region. The Australia Council brought to the attention of the Committee the Federation of Asian Cultural Promotion (FACP) in which Australia has members, as well as Mecenat and the Asian Arts Business Forum. As yet, it was the view of the Council that the opportunities were more potential than realised and that other countries were, unlike Australia, aggressively pursuing opportunities in the region.¹³ The Australia Council told the Committee that there was scope for much greater involvement by Australians in these fora; that the Council itself needed to be brought into the regional debate on cultural relations, particularly with the ASEANs. 'The Council was', according to Mr Lynch, the General Manager, 'looking for an opportunity to bring down the cultural ministers from ASEAN to perhaps establish some form of formal dialogue with our own minister or with a range of ministers here'¹⁴ and to be able to establish a broader agenda over the next five or six years.¹⁵

9.15 The Australia Council allocates 3.7 per cent of its budget to international activity.¹⁶ Over 50 per cent of the money allocated for international activities is spent on the Asia Pacific region. However, it was the view of the General Manager that the aspirations of six years ago that there would be a cohesive cultural approach on the part of the Council towards the Asia Pacific has not been met. The Council has been distracted both by internal changes and specific demands to meet other directives such as the New Horizons (India)¹⁷ and the New Images (UK) projects.

12 Australia Council Transcript, p. 544.

13 *ibid.*, p. 546.

14 *ibid.*

15 *ibid.*, p. 547.

16 Exhibit No. 53, Australia Council Annual Report, 1996-97.

17 *ibid.* The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade made an allocation of \$10,000 towards this program.

9.16 The Committee recommends that:

17. **representatives from the Australia Council be included in the Australian delegation to the ASEAN Australia Forum and particularly, where appropriate to the working party of the ASEAN Committee on Communications and Information.**
18. **the Australian Government invite the ASEAN Ministers for Culture to visit Australia with a view to establishing a regular dialogue between Australian and ASEAN ministers and officials on cultural matters.**

AusHeritage

9.17 AusHeritage was established in 1996, sponsored by the Department of Communications and the Arts and the Australian Heritage Commission from whom it received seed funding which ceased on 30 June 1997. It is a business network for the export of cultural heritage services especially to the Asia-Pacific region. It is a remarkably slim organisation, with an administrative staff of two reporting to a Board of 12 and an annual budget in 1997-98 of \$328,000.¹⁸ The core organisation represents 32 members comprised of six universities, almost all the national collecting institutions - the National Gallery, the National Library, the National Archives, the National Film and Sound Archives, State galleries, libraries and museums - private architectural firms and private and government conservation services. The network represents highly skilled specialists in conservation practice. Their services include:

- building conservation;
- building and site assessment to determine heritage significance;
- adaptive reuse of historic buildings;
- cultural tourism and promotion of heritage buildings;
- training of built heritage practitioners;
- research on heritage projects and heritage surveys;
- specialised design for art storage museums and laboratories associated with conserving moveable heritage;
- materials conservation and training;
- exhibition development;
- archaeology (land and sea);
- research;
- surveying and recording; and
- management structures and systems.

9.18 The Chair of AusHeritage explained that the organisation offered the possibility of access to key decision makers and legitimacy through government endorsement. It was about promotion, marketing and brokerage. For example, AusHeritage was asked to put in a tender for the fit out of the new national gallery in Kuala Lumpur. It provided a close liaison between Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Communications and the Arts and the business sector. It was a process in which 'our competitors - the French, the Canadians, the Dutch and the British, in particular had

18 AusHeritage Transcript, p. 480.

developed much tighter synergies'.¹⁹ The Department of Foreign Affairs had worked closely with AusHeritage on the ASEAN linkages by including two representatives from AusHeritage in the Australian delegation to the 1996 ASEAN Australia Forum.

ASEAN Committee on Communications and Information (COCI)

9.19 As Government foreign policy has concentrated more on the Asian region over the last 10 years so the target of cultural exchange has also begun to shift away from the traditional European and American focus to regional countries. Given the time we have been here and the diverse and rich cultural heritage of Asia which beckoned, it is perhaps a rather belated effort. Regional initiatives have also been increasing in conjunction with the rising prosperity of regional countries. There has been greater interest in the preservation and conservation of historical sites and artefacts, in the building of arts centres, theatres and galleries and in participation in festivals.

Singapore is due to open one of the leading international performing arts centres at the end of 1999. Shanghai will open probably the biggest and boldest performing arts centre in 1998. There are several buildings in Malaysia for classical music and a range of other performing arts.²⁰

9.20 Unfortunately the economic crisis in the region is likely to put some brake, at least in the short term, on the enthusiasm and the capacity of regional countries to pursue some of these aims. Nevertheless, Australian understanding of the possibilities and the rewards that can ensue from rich cultural interaction with neighbouring countries have been established.

9.21 ASEAN as an organisation has also broadened its field of consultation and begun to consider the importance of cultural and social issues. It has set up functional committees to facilitate cooperation and to set agendas for multilateral regional activities. The Committee on Communications and Information (COCI) deals with culture, communications and the media. The Chairman of this Committee, Mr Choo Whatt Binh, visited Australia in 1998. As a dialogue partner of ASEAN, Australia has participated in the Culture and Information Working Group. This has allowed Australian representatives from the Department of Foreign Affairs and AusHeritage to establish good personal relationships with key ASEAN officials and to make a contribution to the agenda. In particular, at the 1997 meeting of the COCI, Australia presented a detailed proposal for the development of an ASEAN wide strategy for the preservation and conservation of the cultural heritage of the region. This was seen by the COCI as a flagship project for ASEAN in the cultural area.²¹

9.22 An issue not on the agenda but which was proposed by the Australia Council as a possible area of interest for ASEAN was the training of copyright officers. For the last two years, the Australia Council has funded a training program within Australia on copyright protocols and procedures. It was a program that could easily be extended to other countries and, given the current debates about intellectual property, would be of long term value to Australia and countries of the region as they develop industries in the tertiary sector. The copyright issue is one that is of interest to the National Library. Any region wide initiatives

19 ibid.

20 Australia Council Transcript, p. 544.

21 Exhibit No. 22 (b), AusHeritage, *A Regional ASEAN Policy and Strategy for Cultural Heritage*, June 1997.

that wish to address this issue would need to include the National Library and the Attorney-General's Department as well as the Australia Council. ASEAN has embarked on a regional initiative to develop common practices regarding intellectual property.²²

9.23 The Committee recommends that:

19. **the Australian Government endorse the ASEAN initiatives on common practices regarding intellectual property and offer assistance in the form of further training programs or technical assistance for their implementation.**

The National Library of Australia

9.24 In relation to ASEAN, the National Library sees its role as collecting materials on and from the ASEAN countries as part of Australia's national collections, as providing assistance for the development of librarianship in the ASEAN region and as playing a leading role in the development of cooperative national and regional information access infrastructures.²³

9.25 The Library's interest in and connection with the region is longstanding. The decision in the 1950s by the National Library of Australia to establish a major research collection of library materials relating to the South East Asian region has reaped rewards for Australia. In 1971, the Library established a regional office in Jakarta, staffed by one Australia based officer, to act as an acquisitions and liaison office. The result has been that Australia has built 'one of the best contemporary Indonesia collections in the world' and 'one of the best contemporary Asian collections in the world'.²⁴

9.26 Library assistance to ASEAN countries has been comprehensive, involving training, automation of catalogues, preservation of library collections, use of information technology and internet connections, the development of inter-library loan systems, study visits and work experience attachments and the provision of materials. Funding for many of the projects comes from AusAID. Countries assisted in this way include: Laos, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia.²⁵

9.27 The National Library is part of the AusHeritage network and the Library believes that there is a potential to diversify its services from its orientation towards aid and assistance to the commercial export of library services. Areas of commercial interest were a possible document supply service, ie the provision of photocopied journal articles not available in the country of request,²⁶ and material conservation services. The extent of commercial possibilities will be dependent on the prosperity of the region and, given the current crisis, that prospect might well be delayed some years. Mr Horton, the Director General of the National Library, told the Committee that the commercial possibilities were limited and that

22 See Chapter 4, paragraph 4.35.

23 National Library Submission, p. S962.

24 National Library Transcript, p. 536.

25 National Library Submission, pp. S962-S963 and Transcript, pp. 529, 538.

26 *ibid.*, p. S693.

the real gains were to be found in the less tangible but enduring outcomes:²⁷ the development of goodwill and regional cooperation.²⁸

9.28 The National Library noted that Singapore and Malaysia have very advanced library systems and already partnerships had developed with the national libraries in those countries. Interaction between libraries in the region occurs through the Conference of Southeast Asian Libraries (CONSAL) and through the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). In 1995, the National Library of Australia hosted a conference of the Directors of National Libraries in Asia and Oceania in Brisbane to discuss further possibilities for regional cooperation, particularly in relation to the electronic developments in libraries.

9.29 In general terms the Director-General of the Library believed that there was scope for much greater emphasis to be given to cultural and informational links in the region and that indeed Australia had 'gone backwards in those terms'.²⁹ In this, he echoed a sentiment expressed by a number of other organisations which gave evidence to the inquiry.

9.30 In particular, as far as Australia is concerned, one of the weaknesses in the library sector of our cultural relations is the paucity of information on Australia within regional libraries. It was a weakness that the National Library would like to see redressed. It argued that:

There is a serious lack of basic information on Australia available in the vast majority of school, public and tertiary libraries in the ASEAN countries. The Library's Book Placement Program provides a small number of Australian books to the less developed national libraries, but a more systematic and better resourced effort is required to address this inadequacy in the Australian Government's cultural relations program.³⁰

9.31 A number of witnesses to the inquiry noted that the United Kingdom, through the work of the British Council, was much more effective than Australia in promoting Britain abroad; its excellence in literature, theatre, education, student exchange. In February, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hon A Downer, MP, announced the formation of the Australian International Cultural Council to better promote Australian arts overseas.

9.32 The Committee endorses the initiative of establishing an Australian International Cultural Council and recommends that:

- 20. the Australian Government provide sufficient financial and human resources to the newly formed Australian International Cultural Council to enable its effective operation in the full range of cultural promotion.**

State Government and Private Initiatives

27 National Library Transcript, p. 530.

28 National Library Submission, p. S962.

29 National Library Transcript, p. 530.

30 National Library Submission, p. S965.

Victorian Arts Centre Trust

9.33 The submission from the Victorian Arts Centre Trust illustrates the solid, economic base and the commercial possibilities associated with cultural activities. The base upon which this is built is the performing arts centres of Australia comprising centres like 'the Victorian Arts Centre Trust with several hundred employees, the Sydney Opera House, the Queensland Performing Arts Trust, the Adelaide Festival Centre and the Perth Theatre Trust, ... [with] several thousand theatre and cultural workers.'³¹ These centres in Australia are rapidly being matched by the development of arts centres in Asia all of which need the skills for the development of the physical building but the expertise in the running of what is a very technically complex facility and all looking for 'artistic product' to play in their houses. The Chief Executive officer of the Victorian Arts Centre Trust told the Committee:

I think it is important to point out that when we talk about a cultural relations strategy, we are not just talking about sending over an orchestra or sending over a play or a musical; we are talking about a whole industry of expertise that ranges from the running of carparks within arts centres through to restaurants and art galleries - with all the management skills that go with that - to computerised flying systems that have been developed here in Melbourne by Bytecrafft and the Victorian Arts Centre Trust which is being installed in Malaysia at a cost of several million.³²

9.34 The Victorian Arts Centre Trust has taken the initiative to develop its international links in a formal way premised on the belief that such links promote growth in the broadest sense of the word; that, through international cultural relations, the Centre can increase its size and significance commercially and at the same time be culturally enriched by exposure to the wider cultural experience and diversity of audiences that comes from international performances; 'to remain insulated is to stagnate and become very much a parochial body acting within a steadily shrinking market'.³³ The Centre has been funded by a number of organisations including the City of Melbourne and Bytecrafft allowing it to form links with the Aichi Arts Centre in Nagoya, Japan, the Singapore Arts Centre and the National Theatre of Malaysia.³⁴

9.35 The formal links have been established through the creation in 1996 of the Association of Asia Pacific Performing Arts Centres (AAPPAC). It has a foundation membership of 12 international centres which expanded to 16 members by the end of 1997. The Association was described to the committee as 'something akin to a cultural APEC' whose intention was to 'build relationships, open and maintain lines of communication, create a touring circuit for product and engage in expertise, technical and staff exchange'.³⁵ A further communication link to the region and the world is made through the quarterly newsletter *World Stage*, distributed to over 2,000 individuals and companies in 54 countries and a monthly newsletter emailed to approximately 80 recipients.

31 Victorian Arts Centre Trust Transcript, p. 471.

32 *ibid.*, p. 471.

33 Victorian Arts Centre Trust Submission, p.S954.

34 *ibid.*, p. S955.

35 *ibid.*, p. S954.

9.36 A private Western Australian theatre entrepreneur, Stagecraft, stressed with the Committee the opportunities that a huge and rapidly developing market might offer, particularly as our proximity allowed for a more economical, superior and rapid response to the demands of clients. The range of supplies and systems that the firm offered is instructive of the complexity that underpins a modern theatre. These included: stage machinery, motorised tracking, curtaining, rigging, power flying systems, scenery and fittings, lighting and lighting grids, sound equipment and portable stages. With work in or requests from over 11 regional countries, the limitation was the capacity of the firm to grow fast enough to meet the demand.³⁶

9.37 However, for all the advances that have been made in a short time in the relationships between regional arts centres, these connections are relatively new and it was the view of the Chief Executive Officer of the Victorian Arts Centre Trust that Australia has 'not yet established ourselves in the minds of Asians as being part of the region'.³⁷ Most arts centres are turning to the French and the Germans or the British and Americans for the technology needed to build and equip their theatres. This, the Committee was told, locked those countries in as suppliers of spare parts, a competitive advantage that Australia should address by packaging up the sum of Australian theatre technology and management skills more effectively.

9.38 The Committee commends the work of the Centre which offers to the region an image of Australia as a cultured and vital place with considerable energy and expertise to share. This is a dimension to our image that is sorely needed. However, the Committee recommends that:

21. the Department of Communications and the Arts and Austrade combine to explore ways in which Australian theatre management and associated technological skills can be more effectively marketed to the region.

The Asialink Centre

9.39 The Asialink Centre was established in 1990 at the initiative of the Myer Foundation and in particular its founding Chairman, Mr Ken Myer and his wife Yasuko. It has sought to 'educate the Australian community about the countries and cultures of the region'³⁸ in order to 'create a generation of Asia-skilled Australians'.³⁹ The Centre receives core funding from the Myer Foundation, the University of Melbourne, the Mazda Foundation and additional sponsorship from other corporations and the Federal Government. It has 24 full time staff and an annual budget of \$2.8 million. There are three strands to its activities: Public Affairs, Arts to Asia and Education. In terms of funding, the Public Affairs and Arts to Asia strands have grown from initial funding of \$25,000 and \$50,000 respectively in 1990 to \$607,552 and \$898,244 in 1997. In the same period the Education strand grew from \$75,000 to \$3,205,582.⁴⁰ Education remains by far the largest focus of the Centre.

36 Stagecraft Submission, pp. S815-S816.

37 Victorian Arts Centre Trust Transcript, p. 473.

38 Asialink Transcript, p. 433.

39 Exhibit No.30 (g), *The Asialink Centre: The First Five Years, 1990-1995*, p. 3.

40 Exhibit No. 30(j), Asialink Budget Information.

9.40 The Public Affairs Program provides lecture series and seminars as well as a youth information and contact network. In 1997 up to September, there were two major lectures given by the Hon Shane Stone, Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, and Mr Don Argus, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, National Australia Bank Limited. The seminar series for 1997 comprised 24 seminars which each attracted over 100 people and dealt with a variety of economic, political and cultural topics. Speakers were both Australian and Asian Ministers, ambassadors, academics and businessmen.

9.41 The Arts to Asia Program sponsors the creation of contemporary art and craft exhibitions and enables them to tour the region. It also funds residencies of up to four months for Australian artists in major Asian art institutions. In 1997, Asialink toured 11 exhibitions to 17 venues and it chose 32 artists from the visual arts, the performing arts and literature, and arts managers for residencies in 12 countries.⁴¹

9.42 The Asialink Education Foundation (AEF), designed to develop and deliver projects to advance the study of Asia in Australian schools, is the largest component of Asialink's work. It provides professional development opportunities for teachers through university accredited courses, country study tours and conferences. It produces curriculum materials: 15 teacher and student books have been produced to date and 18 are in production. The AEF has funding links with philanthropic, corporate and government organisations and, for the delivery of programs, it has formed partnerships with educational organisations, 16 universities, over 1000 schools as well as peak professional associations.⁴² These programs have developed in response to the dearth of capacity among Australian teachers to meet the need of Asian studies in Australia.

41 Exhibit No. 30(i), *The Asialink Centre Report to the Mazda Foundation*, September 1997, p. 7.

42 *ibid.*, pp. 2-6.

Museums and Galleries of the Northern Territory (MAGNT)

9.43 The Northern Territory and Western Australia are two of the most progressive areas in Australia in the development of links in the Asian region. This is in part a result of their geographic proximity but, in the case of the Northern Territory, it is also the result of a deliberate policy decision taken by the Government of the Northern Territory 20 years ago, in 1978. Ties between the Northern Territory and Indonesia in particular are strong.

9.44 The Museums and Galleries of the Northern Territory developed relationships with cultural institutions in Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines and Indonesia over the past 16 years, involving tours, exhibitions, staff exchanges, training, cultural and scientific research. Conservation training has developed as an area of particular interest since 1996 when MAGNT joined the AusAsia Conservation Training business consortium supported by AusHeritage. MAGNT has combined with the Northern Territory University and the Institute of Art and Design in Kuala Lumpur to develop a Diploma Course in Cultural Heritage Conservation.⁴³

9.45 In the Northern Territory, regional cultural activities have been combined with regional sporting meetings such as the Arafura Games, the Pacific School Games and trade fairs such as the annual Expo.

Sport

9.46 It would appear to be obvious that a country like Australia which has such avid sporting interests should see sport as one of its basic linkages with its neighbours. This has not been so. As the submission from the Department of Environment, Sport and Territories (DEST) stated, Australia has not been invited to take part in the South East Asian Games or the Asian Games.⁴⁴ However, in May 1997, an invitation was extended to Australia to participate in the East Asian Games. Australia also takes part in the Arafura Games held in Darwin biennially. These games have grown in size and profile. The last meeting expected to be contested by over 5,000 athletes and officials from over 25 countries.⁴⁵

9.47 In the last Parliament, the Federal Government commissioned Price Waterhouse Urwick to provide a report to the government as part of a study into the commercial and cultural and cultural benefits of expanding Australia's sporting and recreation links with Asia. The report, completed in May 1995, identified a number of areas within the sporting field where opportunities existed: sports administration and the development of sports associations; educational services such as physical education, coaching, drug education or sports science; infrastructure development; provision of equipment; management of events and promotion and in-bound tourism.⁴⁶ The opportunities for export-generated income, premised on the then high and the expected continued growth of the Asian economies, were estimated to be in the order of \$600 million per year by the year 2000.⁴⁷ In support of this

43 Northern Territory Government Submission, p. S684.

44 DEST Submission, p. S511.

45 Northern Territory Government Submission, p. S679.

46 Exhibit No. 5, Department of Environment, Sport and Territories, *Expanding Australia's Sporting and Recreational Links with Asia*, 1996, p. 3. Despite the changes that have occurred in the prospects for the region the report is a comprehensive analysis of the interests of the region and the capability of Australian sporting institutions and businesses. The Committee commends it to people with interests in this field.

47 DEST Submission, p. S513.

goal, the Government has established a Sport Export Advisory Council within Austrade to advise ministers on export opportunities. It is likely that these objectives will be hampered by the contractions currently occurring in the Asian markets.

Asian Studies in Australia

Background

9.48 The first major study of the teaching of Asian studies in Australia was conducted by Professor Auchmuty from the University of Newcastle who was made chair of the Advisory Committee on the Teaching of Asian Languages and Cultures. It reported in 1970 and recommended the systematic development of capacity for the inclusion of Asian languages and culture in the Australian curriculum. A national Asian Studies Coordinating Committee was established in 1972 to oversee the changes. Japanese and Indonesian language programs and associated teaching materials were introduced. Progress was reviewed by Harries, 1979, FitzGerald, 1980, and the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, 1980, and the Asian Studies Association of Australia, 1984.⁴⁸

9.49 The assessment of all these reviews was that the study of Asian languages and cultures was growing slowly and involved only a very small proportion of the population. Indeed the study of Asian languages had suffered a decline in the period after 1975. Generalised, non-prescriptive curriculum, a lack of resources to develop curriculum materials and a paucity of trained teachers were some of the factors in the low numbers taking these courses. In 1985, the percentage of all year 12 students studying a language other than English (LOTE) was 15, 668 or 13.47.⁴⁹ Of these, 2,675 or 2.2 per cent studied an Asian language, namely Indonesian, Japanese or Chinese.

9.50 In 1986, the Asian Studies Council, chaired by Professor Stephen FitzGerald, was established to provide direction and advice to governments and to tertiary and other institutions about the resources, financial requirements and overall philosophy for the development of Asia literacy in Australia. The Asian Studies Council produced two reports in its short life: *A National Strategy for the Study of Asia in Australia*, 1988, and *Asia In Australian Higher Education*, 1989.

9.51 Both reports lamented the continuing poor state of Asia literacy in Australia and made precise recommendations to Government to address to problems - targets were set for the achievement of objectives. These included that 15 per cent of students would be studying an Asian language as a mainstream subject in primary, secondary and TAFE colleges and five per cent of tertiary students by 1995 and that this would increase to 25 per cent and 10 per cent by the year 2000. According to Wayne Muller, Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Griffith University, 'some of the target dates have already passed and others are rapidly approaching without anything like the achievement of the objectives'.⁵⁰ Despite these reservations, Asian languages have benefited from the drive to improve the percentages of students studying languages other than English.

48 See details in the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, *Australia and ASEAN: Challenges and Opportunities*, 1984, pp. 204-210.

49 This is considerably less than the approximately 40 per cent of students who studied languages other than English in the 1960s.

50 Exhibit No.14(g), Muller, Wayne, *Asian Studies in the Australian School Curriculum: an ongoing challenge*, *Inicorn*, Vol. 22, No. 4, December 1996, p. 53.

Achievements

9.52 In 1987, the Government had also decided to give language development a national priority, releasing its *National Policy on Languages*. Although there has been a small increase in the percentage of Australian students studying a language other than English, there has been a much greater improvement in the numbers studying an Asian language, albeit from a very low base. In 1985, 17.1 per cent of LOTE students studied Asian languages; in 1996 the percentage was 42.1 per cent.

9.53 In 1994, another major report was prepared for the Council of Australian Governments on a Proposed Asian Languages/Asian Studies Strategy for Australian Schools, *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future*. It noted that the National Policy on Languages had produced the result that States and Territories either 'mandate the study of a second language in schools or at least provide the opportunity for all students to study one'.⁵¹ They estimated that national expenditure on Asian languages was in the order of \$69.2 million.

9.54 In 1995 the Asian Studies Association of Australia listed some of the achievements in the development of Asian studies:

- Since 1990, the raising of Asia to the status of the national priority in all areas of policy formation and, consequently, the designation of Asian studies as a priority area and channelling of funds (\$17 million) into Asian studies;
- The development of an Asian studies centre or institution in almost every University in Australia, 50 in 1994;
- The acceleration in demand for the study of Asia at universities and the creation, in 1994-95, of eight new Chairs of Asian studies;
- The expansion of in-country language study as a component of undergraduate degrees;
- The development of combined degrees which allow for degrees in Asian Studies and law, commerce, engineering and so on;
- The establishment in 1992 of the Asian Education Foundation (AEF) replacing the Asian Studies Council to implement three major curriculum programs for schools;

51 Exhibit No. 52, Council of Australian Governments on a Proposed Asian Languages/Asian Studies Strategy for Australian Schools, *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future*, p. 84.

Table 9.1: Year 12 Candidates Top Ten Languages 1985 - 1996

	1985	1990	1996
1	French 5 413	French 5 071	Japanese 5 381
2	German 2 984	German 2 956	French 4 201
3	Italian 2 175	Japanese 2 541	German 2 674
4	Indonesian 1 254	Italian 2 429	Chinese 2 361
5	Mod Greek 828	Chinese 2 027	Italian 2 100
6	Japanese 737	Indonesian 1 238	Indonesian 1 762
7	Chinese 684	Greek 882	Greek 1 366
8	Latin 340	Vietnamese 655	Vietnamese 1 038
9	Spanish 259	Spanish 545	Spanish 767
10	Turkish 153	Latin 311	Arabic 589
Total LOTE students	15 668	20 036	24 670
Total Yr 12 Students	116 316	169 471	170 729
% Yr 12 students doing LOTE	13.47	11.82	14.45
% of Total students studying an Asian language	2.2	3.8	6.1
% of LOTE students studying an Asian language	17.1	32.2	42.7
% of total students studying an ASEAN language	1.1	1.1	1.6

Source: DEETYA: National Report on Schooling in Australia, Statistical Annex, 1996.

- The designation of four priority languages, Japanese, Chinese (Mandarin), Indonesian and Korean for expansion throughout the Australian school system.⁵²

Limitations

9.55 According to the 1994 COAG report, a number of limitations still exist in the study of Asian Languages in schools. These include uneven and disparate program delivery in terms of:

- quantitative outcomes;
- qualitative outcomes;
- starting age and continuity of language study;
- intensity of language study; and
- teacher supply.

9.56 Of particular interest were the report's conclusions that:

- retention rates between years 7 and 8 and years 11 and 12 were poor;
- most students do not experience a second language until secondary school and where primary courses exist there is little continuity of instruction into secondary school;
- very few schools have proficiency as a target;
- the amount of time per week devoted to language in primary schools was low and in secondary schools, in many instances, inadequate to ensure proficiency;⁵³ and
- there was a continued lack of suitably qualified teachers either in the language itself or in teaching method. Fewer language graduates were being produced and, of those that were, other career options were more attractive or more lucrative.⁵⁴

9.57 The COAG report provided a comprehensive set of recommendations to address these problems, including an endorsement of previous targets with some timeframe extensions, the development of national proficiency scales, an extension of the process of mandating second language study beginning in Year 3 of Primary school, a variety of means to raise awareness of the importance of the study of a second language, the development of extended and uniform hours available for the study of languages within the curriculum, the development of national curriculum statements and suitable materials for the teaching of second languages and the development of strategies for the increase in the supply of teachers.

9.58 The National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) Strategy has been developed to implement these recommendations. It stipulates that by the year 2006:

52 Exhibit No. 14(f), Beverley Hooper, *Asian Studies in Australia: Trends and Prospects*, Asian Studies Review, Vol 18 (3), April 1995, pp.71-75.

53 In primary schools the average time was one hour or less per week; in lower secondary school two to three hours per week and in upper secondary, more than three hours per week.

54 Exhibit No. 52, op. cit., pp. 85-94.

- 60 per cent of students in years 3 to 10 will be learning one of the four targeted languages;
- the remaining 40 per cent will be learning other languages;
- 15 per cent of the year 12 students will be learning one of the four NALSAS targeted languages;
- another 10 per cent of Year 12 students will be learning other languages; and
- all school students in Years 3 to 10 will have Asia content incorporated into the other subjects they are studying.⁵⁵

9.59 Perhaps the most interesting piece of anecdotal evidence that the Committee heard on the subject came from Professor Carl Thayer who reported that a survey of first year cadets at the Australian Defence Force Academy indicated that 'one third of the entering class at ADFA had studied either Japanese or Bahasa Indonesian to year 12 level. Large number put their hands up and said they would be enthusiastic volunteers to study Asian languages from first year onwards'.⁵⁶

9.60 There is some dispute within the Asian studies fraternity about the emphasis on Asian languages to the exclusion of the more general social studies and social sciences and that the 'Asian studies curriculum in areas other than LOTE is seriously underfunded'.⁵⁷ It is argued that this is driven by utilitarian, economic considerations rather than 'cultural, intellectual and philosophical reasons for coming to terms with our neighbours'⁵⁸ and that the study of languages alone will not equip Australians to deal with the variations in history, philosophy, culture and political and economic systems that inform Asia today.

The University Mobility in the Asia Pacific Scheme

9.61 The development of scholarships and awards (Australian Awards for Research in Asia, AARA, and National Asian Languages Scholarship Scheme, NALSS) were listed by the Asian Studies Association of Australia as achievements in the association President's report of 1995. These two schemes have been terminated.

9.62 In 1997, at a ceremony at Sydney University, the Australian born president of the World Bank, Dr James Wolfensohn, made a plea for more serious engagement of Australia with the region. He called for a student placement program that would send 5,000 young Australians annually to Asian institutions for a year's study.⁵⁹

9.63 Australia has such a mobility scheme for Australian students to study in Asia. It is a program endorsed by APEC. In 1995, the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) program allocated \$1.3 million for overseas study and research places for 306

55 Exhibit No. 14(a), DEETYA, Commonwealth Programmes for Schools, Quadrennial Administrative Guidelines, 1997-2000, pp. 2.95-2.98.

56 Professor Thayer Transcript, p. 560.

57 Exhibit No. 14(f), op.cit., p. 56.

58 ibid.

59 ASAA Submission, p. S991.

undergraduate students. In 1997, UMAP allocated \$1.3 million for 253 places.⁶⁰ The funding for UMAP for 1998 has been reduced to \$1.1 million. The Government allocation constitutes about 15 per cent of the cost of the program. It was described by the Asian Studies Association as 'limited', providing 'only seed money to establish cooperative arrangements between Australian universities and those of the Asia Pacific'.⁶¹ The Association believed it was 'most important to enlarge the number of post secondary students who have the opportunity to study in country in Asia'.⁶² The Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee have proposed a similar enlargement of the program. They compared the Australian program to the European equivalent, SOCRATES-ERASMUS, a program that accounts for only 20 per cent of all student exchanges in Europe, and which received in excess of \$150 million in 1996.

9.64 The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee proposes that the UMAP scheme be modified and strengthened. The new program would consist of three streams, study, research and work experience, across which students could transfer. The AVCC provided the following funding indications:

Table 9.2: Funding Projection for UMAP Expansion

Subprogram	Federal Government funding \$m	Number of participants per year
UMAP exchanges	22.5	5000
Researcher exchanges	0.45	100
Work experience internships	4.5	1000
Central administration	1.5	
TOTAL	28.95	6100

Note: Estimated cost to Government of a UMAP student is \$4500

Source: Exhibit No. 49, Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, Proposal for Australians in the Asia Pacific Program, p. 4.

9.65 The Committee recommends that:

22. **the Federal Government give consideration to the expansion, over a period of ten years, of the University Mobility in the Asia Pacific Program in order to reach the target of 5,000 Australian students studying in Asia annually.**

Educational Services

9.66 Australia has only observer status in ASEAN and this limits Australia's opportunities to deal with educational or cultural relations on an ASEAN wide basis. There is, however, some multilateral activity in this field. The ASEAN Ministers of Education

60 Exhibit No. 14 (c), Press release from the Minister for Employment Education and Training,, Hon S Crean, MP, Dec 1995, and (d), Press release from the Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Hon Sen Vanstone, July 1997.

61 *ibid.*

62 *ibid.*

Forum has met only once⁶³ but Australia has found an avenue for discussion and negotiation of educational issues within the ASEAN Australia Forum. The ASEAN Sub-Committee on Education was formed in 1992. It conducts workshops and has addressed educational issues of mutual interest in three areas: the development of language interaction; institutional links; and recognition of qualifications and skills.

9.67 This last issue has been of particular importance. It fits within the WTO commitments to the deregulation of services by breaking down barriers to mobility of and trade in professional services. The Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) informed the Committee that it works through the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) to conclude arrangements with ASEAN countries on mutual recognition of qualifications. This is achieved in conjunction with individual professions each working on their own professional area. Currently there is a law project, an accounting project, an engineering project and work on architecture and surveying. The benefits, beyond facilitating Australians working abroad, include improved processes for the recognition of migrants' qualifications in Australia and enhanced recognition of and familiarity with Australian degrees overseas, thereby improving the marketing of Australian higher education courses abroad.⁶⁴ ASEAN has also formed an ASEAN Universities Association with which the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee is seeking to forge links.⁶⁵

9.68 Formal regional structures have developed through the APEC Human Resources Development Working Group. This embraces all ASEAN members except Vietnam. Its agenda includes the promotion of better labour market information as well as the mutual recognition of skills and qualifications.⁶⁶

9.69 The value of educational services as an export earner is discussed in detail in Chapter 5; in this chapter, the Committee will consider the cultural benefits of overseas students studying in Australia and the factors within Australia which attract or discourage such students.

9.70 Since 1990, educational services have grown as a source of revenue. Growth from 1994-95 was 20 per cent; 1995-96 was 19 per cent. As an industry, in 1996, it was valued at \$3 billion. In 1996, there were an estimated 141,000 international students in Australia, 85 per cent of them came from Asia, the majority into higher education and vocational training, followed by English language training.⁶⁷ The courses of particular interest were in business and business management, scientific and technical research, technical and trade skills and English language training.

63 DEETYA Submission, p. S982.

64 *ibid.*, p. S987.

65 AVCC Transcript, p. 502.

66 DEETYA Submission, p. S984.

67 Exhibit No. 50(a), Blight, Dr Denis, *Exporting Education: The Impact of Exporting Regional Economic Instability*, 5, December 1997, pp. 2-3.

Table 9.3: ASEAN Students by Country and Educational Sector, Australia, 1996

Country	Higher Education	Vocational Education	School Education	ELICOS Colleges	Total
Brunei	252	87	53	1	393
Burma	61	39	2	1	103
Indonesia	4835	3346	1940	610	10731
Laos	93	12	10	3	118
Malaysia	11012	1180	854	79	13125
Philippines	495	104	59	8	666
Singapore	10259	623	377	6	11265
Thailand	1785	1239	759	779	4562
Vietnam	596	407	38	298	1939
Total	29388	7037	4092	1785	42302

Source: DEETYA, *Overseas Students Statistics*, p. 80.

9.71 In 1997, the University of Southern Queensland and International Development Program (IDP) Education Australia researched the reasons international students choose particular destinations for overseas study.⁶⁸ Students in Malaysia, Thailand and India were surveyed. Similar studies for Indonesia and Taiwan have been compared to the IDP survey results. Although there was variation from country to country in the combination of factors influencing choices, the most significant factor remains consistent across all the studies. Students from every survey consistently stated that the standard of courses and the recognition of qualifications was the most important factor in their choice. For Indian students the availability of scholarships was also an important factor. Malaysian students also rated racism and safety as highly significant factors. The next most significant factor was the safety of the environment. The factor which scored least important was cost.⁶⁹

9.72 The clear perception across the surveys was that the countries which offered the highest standard were the United Kingdom and the United States; Australia consistently rated lower and, in some cases, has the lowest comparative ratings on this highest factor in the choice of educational destination.⁷⁰ Whether this result represents a real weakness in Australian education or an incorrect perception is unclear. However, if we wish to continue to build trade in these services, it would appear that the Government and the universities have a vital role in building and maintaining the excellence of universities, schools and technical institutions in Australia and in promoting Australia as a country of high educational achievement. Professor Milton Smith reiterated this view:

68 In December 1996, the JSCFADT reported on *The Implications of Australia's Services Exports to Indonesia and Hong Kong*. This report considered the difficulties in this sector, notably to Indonesia, as being (i) difficulties with work permits and visas in Indonesia; (ii) restrictions on foreign investment in Indonesia prohibiting individual foreign institutions and limiting joint venture arrangements; (iii) the need for the production of material in Bahasa Indonesia and restrictions on the importation of books; (iv) a longstanding preference for US, UK or European educational services; (v) a lack of government to government interaction in the education field. pp. 121-122.

69 Exhibit No. 50(b), Meredith Lawley and Denis Blight, *International Education in Two Hemispheres: New Images and New Realities*, 30 September 1997.

70 *ibid.*

I think quality is the critical thing if we are to get the top students and the high fliers [T]here is a place for scholarships but I think at the end of the day the best students will make their judgements on the reputation [of the institutions] and the perceived added value that the degree will give them in later life. They see it as a life investment.⁷¹

9.73 The Committee recommends that:

- 23. the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, through the establishment of the International Cultural Council, and in conjunction with the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee develop strategies for the promotion of Australian excellence in educational and cultural fields.**

9.74 The provision of a safe and friendly environment was a matter of some discussion during the inquiry. The importance of attracting regional students to Australia to study goes far beyond the commercial benefits. A number of witnesses looked back to the legacy of the Colombo Plan, a matter of aid not trade, where the benefits to Australia were profound and continuing. Mr George Yeo, Singapore Minister for Information and the Arts and Second Minister for Trade and Industry, gave his perceptions on the relationship to a Perth audience in August 1997:

Singapore's links with Australia are long standing and extensive. ... It is a friendship built up over a long period of time and partly paid for in blood and tears when Australian forces helped to defend Malaya and Singapore against the Japanese during the Second World War. ... By and large, Singaporeans are comfortable with Australians and welcome them. Australians are less formal than Britishers, perhaps somewhat rowdier, but make good company especially over a glass of beer. ... Australian universities have trained a large number of our doctors, engineers, architects and accountants.⁷²

9.75 Professor Milton Smith explained the advantages of Asian students in Australia in terms of networks of people who can in future facilitate Australia's trade and security links, but this was an aspect that we did not capitalise upon.

I would have said that one of the things that Australian governments need to do is to think about the infrastructure that goes not so much with industry policy as such, but with facilitating networks, trade centres, exhibition centres, conference centres, the things that make Australia a hub and a focal point for certain types of activities.⁷³

9.76 Dr Tan, a former Colombo Plan student and Senior Vice-President of the Australian Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Western Australia, told the Committee:

71 Professor Milton Smith Transcript, p. 405.

72 Exhibit No. 28 (b), *The Australia-Singapore Hyper-Link*, Address by Mr George Yeo, Singapore Minister for Communication and the Arts and Second Minister for Trade and Industry, Perth, 27 August 1997.

73 Professor Milton Smith, Transcript, p. 399.

At one time in Brunei I think 70 per cent or 80 per cent of the ministers or heads of department were Australian educated. ... The environment was good, the people were very friendly and there was a lot of back up support. ... But as we become more competitive ... it becomes more of a business. ... [W]e then have a tendency to fall short on what I call pastoral care of the students here. Students are exposed to drugs, violence, discrimination and even some schools going bankrupt. These things are very damaging to our reputation as a safe environment to which to send what is essentially the most precious commodity a family can have.⁷⁴

9.77 His view on the need for better care of the current generation of students, for treating them as guests or special clients was endorsed by other witnesses. It was suggested to the Committee that a mentoring or sponsorship scheme would be useful whereby students would be exposed to the whole cultural spectrum of Australia and meet Australian families.

9.78 The Committee recommends that:

24. the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs liaise with the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee to investigate the establishment of a network of supporting arrangements for foreign students studying in Australia.

9.79 The importance of ensuring that foreign students are treated with special care, apart from reflecting on our own honour and dignity, helps to create a network of valuable contacts in the region for the future. The view that Australians were poor at developing their networks was made on a number of occasions to the Committee. The Chairman of the Asialink Centre, Mr Carrillo Gantner, reminded the Committee that:

by the turn of the century there would be half a million people from ASEAN countries who have completed a significant component of their education in Australia. Ideally, graduates from our universities will return home with a special affection for Australia and will build on their personal links with this country, translating them into professional networks that will benefit bilateral relations.⁷⁵

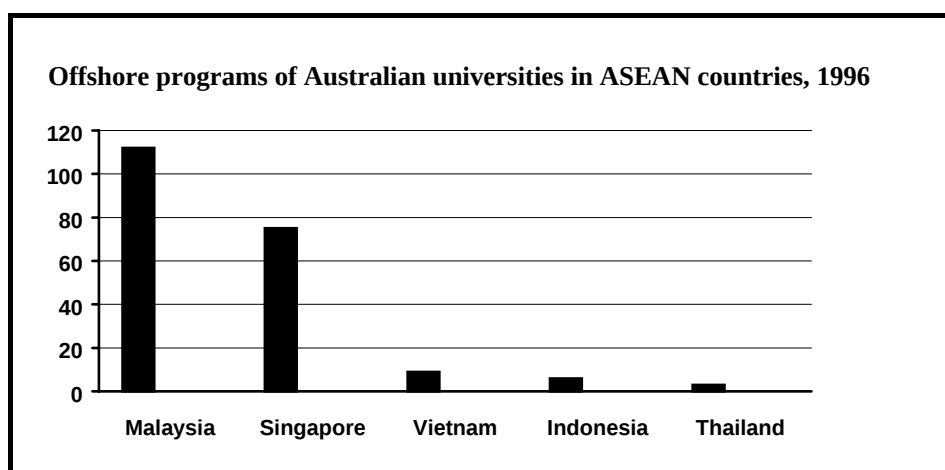
9.80 As well as attracting students to study in Australia, Australian universities have begun joint ventures with regional universities by developing in-country programs. They occur mainly in the major international source countries - Malaysia and Singapore.⁷⁶

Table 9.4: Offshore Programs of Australian Universities in ASEAN, 1996

74 Dr Tan Transcript, p. 400.

75 Asialink Transcript, p. 439.

76 AVCC Submission, p. S945.



Source: Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee Submission, S946.

9.81 This would appear to be a transitional stage. The Vice Chancellors' Committee was aware of the limits to growth in the market. The Executive Director of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, Professor Hamilton, told the Committee that there had been 'a fall off in the rate of increase in some of our major ASEAN market countries, such as Malaysia and Singapore'.⁷⁷

My understanding is that we have come off a low base. That the rate of growth has been spectacular and no one expects it to continue like that. ... I do not think that we have this naive faith that the upward growth of earnings from this source will continue and that somehow this is the answer to all universities' financial woes - importing students as an ever increasing source of revenue.⁷⁸

9.82 Given the multitude of factors that determine the choice of education, at the time of conducting the inquiry it was unclear whether this was a significant decline and what its causes might be. There had been speculation during the year that the race debate in Australia would have a detrimental effect on educational services. At the end of 1997, this was overwhelmed by the currency crisis as a limit to the market.

9.83 IDP Education Australia looked at the effect of the currency crisis on education exports in October. This study was made before the crisis had run its full course, so the extent of the damage to regional economies was unknown. The extent of the depreciation of the currencies is a highly significant determining factor in the choices that will be made.

Table 9.5: Changes in Purchasing Power of Asian Currencies over Currencies of Australia, UK and USA, November 1996 to November 1997

	Indonesia	Malaysia Korea, S	Singapore	Japan	Hong Kong
Australia	-22%	-14%	+6%	+7%	+20%
UK	-35%	-28%	-12%	-10%	0%

⁷⁷ AVCC Transcript, p. 503.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 508.

USA					
-----	--	--	--	--	--

Note: Over the twelve-month period the purchasing power of the US dollar and pound sterling over the Australian dollar have both increased by 20 per cent.

Source: Reserve Bank Bulletin.

9.84 IDP expected that, in the short term, the major impact would be felt by the short courses like ELICOS and that numbers in the longer courses might be protected by the reluctance of parents to remove students in mid course. The real impact would be on new enrolments. The factor in Australia's favour was that Australian courses would now be comparatively cheaper as the Australian dollar had depreciated vis a vis the American dollar and the British pound.⁷⁹

9.85 Finally, there also needed to be a recognition that as countries developed, particularly our two most important sources, Malaysia and Singapore, they would seek to supply their own educational services and to turn themselves into exporters.

9.86 Problems of perception and engagement with the region in Australia's political and cultural relations with the region existed in 1984. In the 1984 report, the Committee concluded that there was a need for enhanced international coordination between Australia and ASEAN. It argued then, and the argument holds today, that the Australia ASEAN relationship involves a wide variety of areas of cooperation. Not only was there a need for policy coordination across a number of Government departments - Foreign Affairs and Trade, Defence, Education, Immigration, Communication and the Arts - but the relationship needed a wide range of policy planning based on an integrated political, cultural, economic and strategic understanding of the region. The 1984 Committee recommended consideration of a council - the Australia ASEAN Council - to provide research, planning, administrative coordination and liaison with the ASEAN secretariat. This Committee believes that initiative is worthy of reconsideration. Therefore the Committee recommends that:

25. **the Australian Government investigate the feasibility of establishing a broad based Australia ASEAN Council, comprising business, academic and cultural interests, as well as relevant government and non government agencies, to support, coordinate and review Australia's programs which seek to advance Australia's relations with ASEAN.**

79 Exhibit No. 50(a), op. cit., pp. 8-12.

Australia's Image in the Region

The Race Debate

9.87 Beyond our diplomatic efforts, educational services and tourism, we project ourselves through the media of newspapers, radio, film and television. These are perhaps the most immediate, powerful and, in conjunction with theatrical exchanges, the most imaginative means of explaining the complexities of modern Australia to the region. Unlike the 1984 inquiry, the Committee received no submissions on the role, reputation or reactions to Australian journalists and newspapers reporting on the region.

9.88 In 1997, the debate over race and immigration stimulated by the maiden speech of the member for Oxley loomed large. Witnesses before the inquiry were more concerned with the extent to which that debate revived notions in Asia that the White Australia policy was not dead. The views expressed by the Member for Oxley were ill founded, illogical and held little currency in the country as a whole but, insofar as they presented a passionate anachronism expressed in extreme and negative language within the forum of the national Parliament, they attracted an unrelenting fascination from the national and regional press. The coverage in the region was so extensive that the Member for Oxley became the best known political figure, mistaken in some quarters for the Prime Minister of Australia.⁸⁰

9.89 The reactions to what became a media-generated political phenomenon were varied during the inquiry as some of the following quotations will illustrate:

In our contacts with our performing arts colleagues, it [the One Nation Party] is always raised, usually in the first three or four sentences. ... They are looking for reassurance that this is an aberration.⁸¹

The current turmoil within our society about Asian immigration is destructive of our relationships. When I was in Bangkok for three days, on each day the *Bangkok Post* ran stories about the current debate here. It ran an editorial about the current debate and the government's inability to deal with it. ... Let us not kid ourselves that this is not harming us; it certainly is. It is causing a great deal of concern.⁸²

Yes it is mentioned all the time, both at home and abroad. I think there are two features of what has happened ... First of all ... is the obvious one that we did not deal with it firmly enough or quickly enough. Secondly, ... we dealt with it in a way which in my view was wrong. What we tended to say was that Hanson is saying the wrong sorts of things not because we find them morally repugnant and unacceptable, but because they are going to hit our back pocket.⁸³

[W]e have given the South East Asians a weapon to hit us over the head with, although they are sophisticated enough to know that this is

80 Exhibit No. 47, *Herald Sun*, Monday, 11 August 1997, p. 2.

81 Victorian Arts Centre Trust Transcript, p. 476.

82 Mr Soorley Transcript, p. 153.

83 Professor Blunt Transcript, p. 348.

a minority point of view, that it is not necessarily anti-Asian but reflects the uncertainties of our economy and unemployment problems and so on.⁸⁴

Asia has erupted in fury over Pauline Hanson, with politicians, newspapers and analysts in the region warning the race debate is crippling Australia.⁸⁵

9.90 It would appear that, at least at an official level in Asia, there was an understanding of both the cause and a measure of the support for Pauline Hanson's views. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade told the Committee that:

[I]t is clear that the leaders of the ASEAN countries recognise that these views are not those of the Australian government or the majority of the Australian people.⁸⁶

9.91 Evidence of this can be seen in Mr George Yeo's statement in August 1997 in Perth. He commented that:

As a result of the recent immigration debate in Australia, some East Asians have taken to criticize Australia as being racially-oriented. This is not entirely fair. In fact the problem also exists in Asia. ... The recent brouhaha over immigration in Australia is to be expected. It is not possible for such a major reorientation of Australia to be achieved without intense domestic debate and minor social upheavals.⁸⁷

9.92 Not all conclusions were so reasonable. Considerable concern was expressed at the capacity of Australia to counter this negative publicity effectively. This was particularly raised in the context of the issues raised at the beginning of this chapter - the dismantling of Radio Australia, the continuing problems in broadening the base of Asian studies in Australia, the abolition of two student exchange schemes,⁸⁸ the curtailment of the Public Affairs Division and the Australia-Indonesia Institute and the virtual demise of the position of cultural attaches within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the cuts to the aid budget.

Film Australia

9.93 The two visual media which present Australia to the world are Film Australia and Australia Television. Both get minor subsidies from government of approximately \$6.6 million dollars per annum. Film Australia has been in operation since 1946. It is a film production and distribution organisation located in Sydney with 54 permanent staff and issues close to 1,000 project contracts per year to the free lance production sector. It makes and distributes films which examine matters of national concern, it competes for commissioned

84 Mrs Spencer Transcript, p. 424.

85 Radio Australia Transcript, p. 101.

86 DFAT Transcript, pp. 11-12.

87 Exhibit No. 28 (b), op. cit., pp. 4-5.

88 See paragraph 6.59.

products and it has built a global marketing and distribution enterprise. It also preserves a large film library of 7.5 million feet of stock footage.⁸⁹

9.94 Film Australia has developed joint venture projects with German, Polish and Chinese partners for the production of children's programs for television. Other programs have been sold to ABC, SBS, Channel Four, the BBC and PBS in America as well as documentaries into the Middle East, Malaysia and Korea. Distribution of educational programs largely from the ABC has become a valuable part of Film Australia's revenue in recent years.⁹⁰

9.95 The concern expressed to the Committee was that the Gonski report into the Film Industry 'recommends fairly savage deconstruction [of Film Australia], ... that the national interest program continue and that we actually sell our premises and all other assets'.⁹¹

9.96 In November 1997, the Government announced its response to the Gonski Report. It has chosen to retain Film Australia as a Commonwealth owned company located at the Linfield site in Sydney, to retain the film archive and to extend until 2003 the National Interest Program at the current budget of \$6.4 million per year. In addition, the Government announced that it would introduce a pilot scheme, the Film Licensed Investment Scheme (FLIC) for a 100 per cent tax concession to investors in companies licensed to invest in a slate of film and television production.⁹²

Australia Television

9.97 Australia Television is a much more recent development. It was launched in February 1993 under a one-off grant of \$5.4 million to cover establishment costs. It was intended that recurrent costs would be met by sponsorship and advertising. This expectation was not met in its first two years of operation. In 1995, the government decided to provide \$18.6 million over the next three years (1996-1999), annual funding for 1996-97 - \$6.6 million, to give ATV a more secure footing. This decision was reversed in 1996 when the new government announced that ATV would be privatised.⁹³

9.98 A Senate inquiry was critical of this decision on the grounds that in commercial terms it was premature and that there was no guarantee that a privatised service would continue to use Australian content in a way that would promote Australia's regional interests and the objectives of international broadcasting as stated in the ABC charter. That Committee recommended that the government not privatise ATV and that the government maintain funding in accordance with the three year funding package decided in October 1995.⁹⁴

9.99 Both the Senate Committee and this inquiry received evidence about ATV which depicted it as an embryonic enterprise of significant achievement. The major target area is

89 Exhibit No.7 (f), Film Australia Limited, *Annual Report*, 1996, p. 7.

90 Film Australia Transcript, pp. 95-100.

91 *ibid.*, p. 94.

92 Media Release, Minister for Communications, the Information Economy and the Arts, Senator Alston, 15 November 1997.

93 Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, *The Role and Future of Radio Australia and Australia Television*, May 1997, p. 131.

94 *ibid.*, p. 135.

the ASEAN countries. At the time of writing, it was carried in 500 hotels in Asia. Its reach was estimated to be 22 million households in Asia, including ministers and leaders in Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia. It received a large correspondence in praise of its service and its success in bringing Australian enterprises to the notice of regional customers.⁹⁵

9.100 In July 1997, ATV was sold to the Channel Seven Network owned by Mr Kerry Stokes. Channel Seven agreed to meet the operating costs for at least four and a half years but the ABC was to retain editorial control over the news and current affairs programs.⁹⁶

9.101 The Committee recommends that:

26. **post-privatisation, the Government continue to monitor and enforce the adherence of ATV to the contractual obligations requiring the use of Australian content, the retention of Australian and ABC news and current affairs and the service's consistency with broader national objectives.**

Radio Australia

9.102 For all witnesses to the inquiry, the most counterproductive and incomprehensible action in Australia's regional public relations was the effective closure of Radio Australia to much of the region. Radio Australia was an enduring national institution and affectionately held, both in Australia and abroad. It embodied and fostered, through the provision of training and employment, fine creative and technical broadcasting talents in Australia. Radio Australia provided a consistent, daily, professional projection of Australia and regional affairs; the 'cheapest and most effective form of public diplomacy [Australia] has'⁹⁷ reaching tens of millions of people in the Asia Pacific region; and a balance to our more obviously self-interested striving for economic advantage.

9.103 The report of the Senate inquiry into Radio Australia encapsulated the role and achievements of the broadcaster comprehensively:

The broad foreign affairs aspects of international broadcasting cannot be valued in dollars and cents. It is about the subtle messages conveyed to the peoples of the region, about life in Australia, the beauty and sometimes starkness of our countryside, our hopes and disappointments, our achievements in many fields, our democratic principles and our perceptions of issues and events which affect Australia, the region and the world. It is about creating an awareness of Australia, an understanding of our way of life and the multicultural nature of our society and showing that our future is inextricably linked with Asia and the Pacific, even though we maintain strong links with countries in other regions from which Australians have come. It is also about programming which draws attention to things which relate

95 Radio Australia Transcript, pp. 105-106.

96 Exhibit No. 47, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 July 1997, p. 1.

97 Radio Australia Transcript, p. 104.

specifically to trade, business, education, tourism or diplomacy from which Australia might benefit directly as a result of those broadcasts.⁹⁸

9.104 The pleas of the outgoing General Managing, Mr Derek White, and the Foreign Affairs and Defence reporter, Mr Graeme Dobell, for the maintenance, as we moved into volatile times, of our own voice in the region became more significant as 1997 came to a close. They told the Committee that:

[W]e establish an image of Australia as a friendly nation. It has taken years and years to build that. ... I have a feeling that, if we are not there, the destruction of it by counter press copy would be much quicker than the building up. ... [I]f we are not prepared to speak for ourselves in the region, the people of the region are going to form opinions of Australia based on what others say about us, and that is totally unacceptable.⁹⁹

9.105 The cuts to Radio Australia occurred on two levels and were particularly savage. There was a halving of the operating cost for the language services and a two thirds reduction in the transmission costs with the loss of the three powerful 250-kilowatt transmitters in Darwin. The Radio Australia budget was very modest - \$13.5 million for 1996-97 for program production and administration and the employment of 144 staff to make programs in English, Mandarin or standard Chinese, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Khmer, Thai, Indonesian, French and Tok Pisin. The budget was reduced to \$6.3 million and the staff to 68 approximately. The Thai, Cantonese and French services were stopped and the time allocated to Indonesian, Vietnamese and Mandarin was more than halved.¹⁰⁰

9.106 At the time of the inquiry, the Darwin Cox Peninsula station was to be sold. This is a world class facility in which the Government has invested \$13.5 million since 1993. A large 300-kilowatt transmitter was refurbished at the cost of a million dollars and transported from Carnarvon to Darwin, the submarine cables between Darwin and the Cox Peninsula have been duplicated and two new, state-of-the-art transmitters have been installed.¹⁰¹ In transmission generally, over \$23 million was invested over six years.¹⁰² The overall value of the Cox Peninsula station is estimated at \$50 million.¹⁰³ It has been idle for over six months. The illogicality of abandoning such capital investment so soon after it had been made was described to the Committee as 'a very strange exercise in economic rationalism'.¹⁰⁴

9.107 The Cox Peninsula transmitters were particularly well placed for broadcast into Asia. The removal of the physical capacity for transmission from Darwin has meant that transmission into Asia is severely restricted. The Government spent \$10.5 million in 1991 to orient the Shepparton transmitters into the Pacific, removing a number of the aerials. Then, in 1997-98, the funds available for transmission were reduced from \$7 million dollars to \$2.5 million, to be supplied by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. On this budget, transmission is available from the Shepparton and Branson stations only. These transmitters

98 *ibid.*, p. 107.

99 *ibid.*, p. 109.

100 *ibid.*, p. 102.

101 *ibid.*, p. 253.

102 *ibid.*, p. 104. See also paragraph 6.95.

103 Exhibit No. 47, Tony Wright, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 November 1997, p. 2.

104 Radio Australia Transcript, p. 104.

are smaller, weaker and poorly positioned to broadcast into Asia. Most of South East Asia receives either a poor or no signal from Shepparton. We have in reality lost our voice in Asia. The closure of the Cox Peninsula transmitters brought an actual saving of \$1.6 million in 1997-98; operating and maintenance costs were \$4 million most of which are ongoing. The saving of only \$1.6 million is the cost of electricity.¹⁰⁵

9.108 The loss of Radio Australia's full service into Asia for the saving of \$1.6 million appears to the Committee to be farcical. The transmitters have been kept operational through a maintenance program with a view to leasing time to other international broadcasters but leases have not been achieved; without a lease or an appropriate budget for Radio Australia transmission, the transmitters are not turned on and Radio Australia cannot hope to resume full broadcasts. Hope was expressed in the middle of 1997 that a leasing arrangement might save the transmitters from being sold and open the possibility of a return to Radio Australia broadcasts, albeit under circumstances where the share of time to Radio Australia might be unsatisfactory.¹⁰⁶

9.109 At the time of writing this report, the transmitters had not been sold or leased. Interest from the American broadcaster Radio Free Asia was rejected. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hon Alexander Downer, MP, explained that the responsibility for technical and commercial decisions rested with the Minister for Communications and the Arts, Senator Richard Alston,¹⁰⁷ but that 'questions about the future use are still hypothetical because applications for that use have not been called for'.¹⁰⁸ However, Mr Downer, in response to questions about objections from the Chinese Government to Radio Free Asia operating out of Australia, remarked that 'We are certainly not in the game of provocatively damaging our relations with China'.¹⁰⁹

9.110 The regional approval of Radio Australia, as documented in the Senate inquiry report, was broad¹¹⁰ and enthusiastic. It was a service that was much appreciated by millions of ordinary people in the region for whom it was a source of trusted information. It was also listened to and relied upon by the elites of the region and by expatriate Australians. It explained Australia to the region in ways that were natural and friendly. All witnesses to this inquiry confirmed the reactions to Radio Australia found by the Senate inquiry.

9.111 The response to possible closure not only brought a huge letter campaign from regional listeners but saw acute, critical comment in the regional press.

Radio Australia is, however, altogether more significant and should Canberra allow the axe to fall on the service, it will be sending a signal that challenges the regional ties that successive Australian leaders have worked so hard to foster. ... It is puzzling that the [Mansfield] report identifies this independence [of the ABC] as a weak point when listeners throughout the region, particularly in countries in which oppressive governments spoon feed audiences with

105 *ibid.*, p. 252.

106 *ibid.*, p. 264.

107 Exhibit No. 47, Pilita Clark and Craig Skehan, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 November 1997, p. 3.

108 Exhibit No. 47, Geoffrey Barker, *The Australian Financial Review*, 6 November 1997, p. 9.

109 Exhibit No. 47, Pilita Clark and Craig Skehan, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 November 1997, p. 3.

110 Two million people for its Indonesian service in Indonesia alone, 4.9 million in Asia and the Pacific and 700,000 in China, 540,000 in Vietnam. Submission, pp. S583, S586.

distorted pap, recognise and appreciate the services of Radio Australia (*Bangkok Post*, 6 February 1997).¹¹¹

Should Australians pay for Radio Australia to continue to be a beacon of information and exchange or allow its closure to signal another disengagement of Australia from Asia. Any budgetary gains would be relative peanuts against the diplomatic disaster that a closure of Radio Australia would represent in terms of Australia's engagement in Asia (*New Straits Times* of Malaysia, 28 April 1997).¹¹²

Why do so many Indonesians turn to Radio Australia? One obvious reason is that Radio Australia's reception is good in many areas of Indonesia. Also many Indonesians seem to like the stations programs. Another, and perhaps more significant reason, however, is that Radio Australia, in many cases, satisfies Indonesians' need for unpartisan and accurate information (*The Jakarta Post*, 11 February 1997).¹¹³

9.112 Given the volatility of the situation in Indonesia (and earlier in Cambodia), it is particularly to be regretted that Australia has had no direct way of communicating throughout this period with the region, and not least with expatriate Australians concerned about what is happening around them.

9.113 The saga of Radio Australia is indicative of many areas of our international cultural relations; the money made available is in very small amounts,¹¹⁴ usually somewhere in the vicinity of \$6 million to \$15 million per annum,¹¹⁵ amounts about which, in the current climate, questions are constantly raised as to the utility of the expenditure at all.

9.114 The Committee believes that such views are short sighted. It recommends that:

27. the Government restore the Cox Peninsula transmitters to full operation for the use of Radio Australia.

111 Radio Australia Submission, p. S585.

112 *ibid.*, p. S587.

113 *ibid.*, p. S586.

114 Some perspective on this amount might be seen in comparing the losses of Murdoch's Star Television of \$2 million per week to the annual budgets of Radio Australia or ATV or Film Australia. Transcript, p. 110.

115 Film Australia operates on government funding of \$6.6 million and Australia Television prior to privatisation also operated on government funding of \$6.6 million per year. Radio Australia programming and administration cost \$13.5 million in 1996-97; this year reduced to \$6.3 million. AusHeritage cost only \$328,000 up to 1997 and is now self-sustaining. The Australia Indonesia Institute cost just over \$1 million per year. The University mobility scheme has been reduced to \$1.1 million in 1998.