

Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry, Innovation and Science Portfolio
2016-17 Supplementary Budget Estimates
20 October 2016

DEPARTMENT: DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

TOPIC: Singapore strategic partnership

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 20 October 2016, page 61)

QUESTION No.: SI-7

Senator IAN MACDONALD: Are you involved with the Singapore cooperation agreement?—and that is not the correct terminology.

Senator SINODINOS: The strategic partnership?

Senator IAN MACDONALD: The Singapore strategic partnership.

Dr Finkel: Not directly. These things are negotiated government to government and department to department.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: One of the significant parts of that agreement was a build-up of science and culture, if I remember correctly. I was just wondering whether you were planning anything proactive to increase the science connection or interaction between Australia, and, to declare an interest, particularly with northern Australia and James Cook University. As you probably know, they are the only foreign university in Singapore that is accredited as a university.

Dr Finkel: I was involved in some level of casual discussion about the attractiveness of Singapore as a country with whom we should be having these discussions, and I think it is a terrific country. We have a number of these kinds of bilateral arrangements with other countries. I will be leading next year, in around April, a science delegation to a number of European countries, in fulfilment of the expectations under these bilateral agreements that exist with a number of European countries. So if the Singapore agreement unfolds and has those kinds of expectations then I would see myself and successive Chief Scientists participating through leading delegations and trying to build bridges with our colleagues there. That is facilitated once these agreements are in place, because then it is much easier to get the support of the departments in each country for the visits and exchanges of information.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: These agreements were only signed when the Singaporean Prime Minister was out here last week. Could you on notice give me a fuller answer on whether you will be involved or whether it will be just the department? If it does involve you, how will you be involved and how do you envisage building upon the agreement? The agreement I think was signed last year, but separate, more particular agreements were signed earlier this week.

Dr Finkel: Happy to take that on notice.

Ms Beauchamp: I would like to add to that. Thank you for the question. I will work with Dr Finkel, but leading into that partnership we had our Singapore dialogue. A number of agencies at the Commonwealth and state levels, together with the Singaporeans, actually developed what was an underpinning science and research element of the partnership agreement. We have got universities to universities working together, along with business to business and government to government, and we can provide some of the details of that MOU.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: That would be great. Thanks very much.

ANSWER

The Memorandum of Understanding

The MOU was signed on 13 October 2016 by the Foreign Ministers of Australia and Singapore, in the presence of the Prime Ministers and Australia's Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science.

It provides a framework to enhance practical collaboration on innovation and science between Australia and Singapore, by committing to closer collaboration, exchanges, and agency-to-agency engagement.

The MOU falls under the auspices of the treaty level *Cultural Agreement Between Australia and Singapore (1975)* and the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) concluded by the Prime Ministers of Australia and Singapore in 2015.

The lead agency for the Government of Australia is the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science. The lead agency for the Government of the Republic of Singapore is the National Research Foundation. Other agencies or institutions, including businesses, industry associations, scientific research institutions, and educational institutions, may lead or participate in activities identified in the MOU.

The two governments will hold regular Joint Strategic Dialogues to build on cooperation opportunities focused on innovation and science. The first of these was held in Canberra on 26 August 2016.

In addition to several institutional level initiatives arising from the first dialogue, the two governments are supporting research workshops on data science and marine science in Singapore in early 2017. At these workshops, researchers from the leading research institutions of both countries in those disciplines will explore opportunities for strategic collaboration.

Australia is also establishing an innovation landing pad in Singapore for which Singapore will provide connections to its key institutions, universities and businesses.

Role of the Chief Scientist

The Chief Scientist for Australia, Dr Alan Finkel AO, was one of the key stakeholders consulted during the development of the MOU.

The Chief Scientist plays a role in supporting Australia's international science and innovation linkages, and in helping to maximise mutual and global benefits of science and research. The Chief Scientist meets with other government scientific advisors, decision makers and leading researchers in other countries to identify elements of new or strengthened collaborations, through delegations, bilateral talks and ongoing engagement.