



Australian Academy of Science

Ian Potter House, Gordon Street, Canberra 2601

President: Professor Andrew Holmes AM PresAA FRS FTSE

9 October 2015

Senator Alex Gallacher
Chair
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator Gallacher

Thank you for your letter of 10 September 2015, inviting the Australian Academy of Science to make a written submission to the inquiry into Australia's relationship with Mexico.

The Academy will limit its comments to matters related to science and research.

Scientific research is not specifically highlighted in the inquiry's terms of reference, but is of fundamental importance, both in its own right and in underpinning economic and social developments in countries around the world. Links in science and technology are being fostered by recognition of their importance by governments, research institutes and universities, as well as between individual scientists.

Australia has a relatively high research output, producing more than 3% of the world's scientific publications yet accounting for only about 0.3% of the world's population. The nature of science and innovation is changing. Increasingly, efforts are undertaken collaboratively between multiple international researchers and institutions. Hence, Australia competes internationally for ongoing, ready access to the 97% of knowledge and knowledge development processes that occur overseas.

According to the World Bank, Mexico's economy is ranked 15th in the world. Only Brazil has a larger GDP among Latin American countries. Mexico's population is approximately 120 million. Mexico's trade and foreign policies have traditionally focused with its northern neighbor, the United States of America. However, Mexico is now focusing beyond and looking at other areas including the Asia-Pacific.¹

The Mexican Government wants to improve its standing in science and is improving funding for this sector. Mexico has expertise in a number of areas including agricultural sciences, aquaculture and fisheries. Mexico hosts the International Maize and Wheat Improvement

¹ Mexico country brief, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. <http://dfat.gov.au/geo/mexico/pages/mexico-country-brief.aspx>



Australian Academy of Science

Ian Potter House, Gordon Street, Canberra 2601

Centre (CIMMIT) <http://www.cimmyt.org/en/>, which aims to sustainably increase the productivity of maize and wheat systems to ensure global food security and reduce poverty.

Mexico also has a modern and dynamic health and biotechnology industry. Mexico is the second largest pharmaceutical market in Latin America and a major producer of high-tech medicine.²

Australia on the other hand has research strengths in areas such as health and medical research, mining and water management, radio astronomy, the environment, and others. It has had some substantial economic successes underpinned by science.

Science diplomacy is crucial to understanding problems and identifying solutions. By strengthening science and technology links with countries such as Mexico, Australia can contribute and develop solutions to global challenges, such as energy security, the preservation of biodiversity, and sufficiency of food.

It is important that Australia explore opportunities for research partnerships with developed and developing nations, including Mexico. By formally engaging with organisations such as G20, APEC, OECD and MIKTA, of which Australia and Mexico are members, Australia has the opportunity to maximise the benefits of its linkages with global scientific activities.

In 2015 the Australian Academy of Science and the Mexican Academy of Science signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to foster mutually beneficial scientific exchanges, workshops and other joint activities. Both Academies are exploring funding opportunities to undertake bilateral activities. The Academy hopes to play a role in building Australia's links with Mexico through this MOU and promote international cooperation in science and technology.

The Academy is aware of the Australia-New Zealand-Mexico Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ANZMEX Australian Chapter) <http://www.anzmex.org.au/> that has actively been working to enhance the bilateral economic and research relations and we commend their work.

The Academy hopes that this submission will be useful in its deliberations. The Academy would be pleased to meet with the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade to discuss any of the above issues.

Yours sincerely

Professor Andrew Holmes AM PresAA FRS FTSE
President

² *Mexico Down Under*, Embassy of Mexico in Australia, Bulletin 21, October 2015.
<http://mexico.org.au/bulletin/october15.html#prettyPhoto>