



Submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Inquiry: Funding for public research into foreign policy issues

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee inquiry into the contribution of government funding for public research into current and emerging foreign policy issues affecting Australia.

Current funding for public research into foreign policy issues

DFAT provides funding to a diverse range of organisations to conduct public research into foreign policy issues, with a strong focus on Australia's interests in the Indo-Pacific. This funding is mostly based on addressing specific knowledge needs through targeted research projects or initiatives.

The majority of DFAT's funding for foreign policy research is provided to institutions and universities based in Australia. For example, DFAT provides: \$23.25 million to the Pacific Research Program (2017-18–2021-22), a consortium including the ANU and the Lowy Institute; a \$3.9 million grant to ANU's Asian Bureau of Economic Research (2017-18–2022-23), focusing on Asian integration and the global trading system; \$2.6 million to University of Queensland's Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (2019-20–2023-24); \$2.1 million to ANU's Supporting the Rules-Based Order in Southeast Asia (SEARBO) project (2018-19–2021-22) to conduct research on illiberal trends and democratisation in the region; \$2 million to ANU's Indonesia Project (2020-21–2021-22); \$955,000 to Monash University for research on critical economic issues in Timor-Leste (2014-15–2020-21); and \$887,928 to the Lowy Institute for development of the Pacific Aid Map (2019-20–2022-23).

DFAT also provides some funding to overseas-based institutions to conduct research on foreign policy when this best serves specific needs. For example, DFAT provides \$1.8 million to The Asia Foundation for research on economic and political issues in the Indo-Pacific (2018-19–2021-22); \$1.1 million to the International Crisis Group (2018-19–2020-21) for research on emerging and ongoing global crises; and, \$900,000 to the Overseas Development Institute (2019-20–2021-22) for research on developing humanitarian policy around conflict and disasters.

In many cases, including most of the examples mentioned above, DFAT's investments in public research are made through Australia's official development assistance (ODA). While intended to advance Australia's international development objectives, this research can also support DFAT's own policy development.

In several cases, funding is provided via grants through DFAT-managed Foundations, Councils and Institutes (FCIs) which cover a range of bilateral and regional relationships, or the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations.

A more detailed list of current funding for research into foreign policy issues is provided in Attachment A.

DFAT also provides a range of funding support for research organisations to facilitate other activities, such as training for business executives, conferences, or facilitation of 1.5 track dialogues.¹

Quality and diversity of publicly-funded think tanks focused on foreign policy

Australia boasts a range of well-respected and influential think tanks focused on foreign policy. There is, however, no widely accepted ranking of think tanks or policy research organisations. We note that several

¹ Given the inquiry's focus on research, we have not sought to reflect these activities in Attachment A.

Australian think tanks who work on foreign policy issues in some capacity appear in the *2020 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report* conducted by the Lauder Institute at the University of Pennsylvania.²

Enhancing public understanding of Australian foreign and trade policy

DFAT seeks to enhance official and public understanding of Australian foreign and trade policy in a range of ways.

The Department contributes to public awareness of the Government's international agenda through responsive, high quality engagement with the Australian media, in support of our portfolio ministers. We reach across whole of government to coordinate and inform on contemporary issues that impact on Australia's international interests and national security.

In recent years the Department has increased its online engagement with Australians, notably through social media posts across DFAT's 280 social media accounts globally. The Department's social media attracted more than 40 million public interactions in the 12 months to March 2021. While DFAT's primary social media audience is overseas, we manage 65 Australian-based accounts which have a key responsibility for informing Australians about DFAT's foreign and trade policy, development and consular and passport activities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic DFAT stepped up its efforts to communicate to Australians about the work of the Department – how we implement Australia's foreign, trade and development policies, and the services and programs that we deliver for Australia and Australians – notably through social media. The Secretary of DFAT has used a range of platforms to communicate the value of DFAT's work to the Australian public, including through forums organised with think tanks and institutes such as the Lowy Institute, Business Council of Australia, Institute of Public Administration, and Asia Society.

The Department also has an active trade and investment advocacy program, aligned with the commitment in the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper to strengthen community support for economic openness and Australia's place in an integrated global economy. This work seeks to boost the Australian public's confidence in Australia's continued participation in open global markets and strengthen the awareness of Australian businesses, particularly those in regional Australia, of the benefits which may flow from their entry into international markets.

The Department seeks to build understanding among Australian audiences of the value of Australia's development cooperation program as a key contributor to Australia's security and prosperity – particularly in our priority areas of health security, economic recovery and stability.

The Department's Historical Research Section continues to publish the series, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy (DAFP)*, which seeks to provide an accurate, comprehensive and impartial documentary record of Australia's foreign and trade policy history. The series was initiated following a Cabinet decision in 1971, with the objective of highlighting "what Australian foreign policy was as a whole and how it came to be decided upon".

DFAT is also providing grant funding of about \$85,000 per year to the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) for projects and activities that help promote public understanding of international issues and Australian foreign policy. Through this support DFAT's contributes to AIIA activities such as website publications, blogs, the AIIA National Conference, publications, and international collaboration.

² The Lauder Institute report contains several lists which include Australian think tanks. For example, it identifies the following Australian think-tanks which cover foreign policy (either primarily or in part) as being among the top think tanks in South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific (excluding India): Strategic and Defence Studies Centre (SDSC), ANU (10), Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) (12), Lowy Institute (13), the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) (16), the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) (60), Australia China Relations Institute (ACRI), UTS (73), Centre for Policy Development (CPD) (78), Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) (81), and Institute for Regional Security (90). In the same report, ASPI, the Lowy Institute, AIIA and SDSC all appear in the list of the top 100 foreign policy and international affairs think tanks.

DFAT's engagement with stakeholders

DFAT engages with a wide range of non-governmental stakeholders as a core part of its work in developing and implementing foreign policy. These stakeholders include all of those identified in the terms of reference of this inquiry: states, business, civil society, unions, universities, think tanks, and diasporas. This engagement is also undertaken by our network of overseas missions, as well as state and territory offices. To illustrate some of the ways DFAT engages outside stakeholders we provide two concrete examples: free trade negotiations (Box 1) and human rights (Box 2).

Box 1: DFAT's engagement with stakeholders on trade negotiations

Prior to free trade agreement negotiations commencing and throughout the whole negotiating process, consultations are undertaken by relevant Australian Government officials with a range of domestic stakeholders. State and Territory Governments are a key focus of the consultation process undertaken during negotiations. This is particularly the case when the subject matter is within the jurisdiction of State and Territory regulation. Stakeholders can also comprise: peak industry bodies; individual companies; academics; unions; and any interested individuals and organisations. These consultations include calling for, and receiving, written submissions. Views expressed in stakeholder consultations and written submissions are considered by Australian Government negotiators and kept confidential when requested. While the Government's negotiating mandate remains important to Australian negotiators, stakeholder consultations and written submissions can also help guide the Government's approach to the negotiations because they help identify commercially significant trade barriers and other issues that may be relevant.

On 17 June 2020, the Government announced the creation of a Ministerial Advisory Council on free trade agreement negotiations. The Council has met four times to date and it provides a forum through which members can exchange views and engage in discussions with the Government and senior trade experts on free trade agreement negotiating issues. The views from the Council meetings help inform the Government's trade negotiating agenda. Council membership is drawn from a wide cross-section of Australian society, including business and community-based organisations. Individual members are leaders in their fields with an interest in international trade policy.

Box 2: DFAT's engagement with civil society on human rights

DFAT hosts regular DFAT-NGO Human Rights forums to facilitate direct discussions with civil society representatives on international human rights issues. The most recent Forum was held virtually due to COVID-19 travel restrictions on 10 December 2020. Over 50 NGOs participated in interactive dialogues addressing: the mechanics of engaging in the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR); reflecting on Australia's membership of the HRC; the rights of Indigenous Peoples; and gender equality including the impacts of COVID-19 in the Pacific, health and sexual and reproductive health and the rights of LGBTI persons.

Strengthening civil society engagement in UN processes, including on global human rights issues, is a government priority. We have advocated consistently for the participation of civil society in multilateral human rights fora, including the HRC and the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee. DFAT also provides regular briefings on sessions of these fora, and the UPR, to interested civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-government organisations (NGOs). These briefings include opportunities for input and submissions to the Government by CSOs and NGOs, to inform our approach to human rights concerns.

In addition, DFAT has an established practice of holding direct consultations with civil society organisations ahead of bilateral Human Rights Dialogues, to provide an opportunity for these organisations to raise issues on topics to be addressed in the Dialogues.

Strategies to build the knowledge needed to support more effective future foreign policy

At a time of intense global disruption, DFAT recognises the need to develop a workforce that is equipped to deal with uncertainty and an accelerated pace of change. DFAT is entering its second year of an ambitious three-year HR Modernisation program that will reform the way the Department identifies its capability needs and mobilises people with the right skills at the right time, place and cost.

As part of this program, DFAT is developing a Capability Framework that will help build, develop and sustain the capabilities DFAT needs into the future. The Framework will be designed to be flexible and open to changes as the world shifts around us. An annual review schedule will be established to ensure that the Framework continues to address emerging capabilities as they arise.

DFAT's Diplomatic Academy, the Department's learning and development hub, will continue to work closely with relevant stakeholders to build DFAT's and the APS' capabilities in international engagement, as canvassed in the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper.

DFAT's Strategic Policy, Contestability and Futures Branch also conducts research on emerging policy priorities, supports the Department's efforts to identify future policy challenges and trends, and critically assesses DFAT's current policy settings.

The Office of the Chief Economist has been established to support the application of sound economic frameworks in DFAT's work, and to augment the evidence base underpinning DFAT's engagement across a wide array of policy challenges.