

Submission to Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade ***Inquiry into the funding for public research into foreign policy issues***

Prepared by Perth USAsia Centre Ltd.

1. Overview of the Perth USAsia Centre

The Perth USAsia Centre is Australia's leading think tank committed to strengthening Australia's relationships with and across the dynamic and evolving Indo-Pacific, including with the United States. We are a non-partisan, not-for-profit institution that promotes Australia's Indo-Pacific relationships by contributing to strategic thinking, policy development, dialogues and enhanced networks between government, the private sector and academia.

The Perth USAsia Centre was launched in November 2012, on the sidelines of the AUSMIN 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue held in Perth. Under the leadership of the Commonwealth and Western Australian Governments and the American Australian Association (AAA), the Centre was an initiative to build on the successes of the United States Studies Centre (USSC) at the University of Sydney. The development of a similar centre in Perth would enhance the focus on the growing strategic importance of Western Australia and the Indo-Pacific.

Since its inception, the Centre has grown to work across three inter-related domains:

1. An *Indo-Pacific Focus* program, which explores strategic developments of political and policy significance for Australia's region.
2. An *Australia-US-Indo-Pacific Focus* program, which analyses Australia's relations with the US using the prism of our shared interests and engagements in the Indo-Pacific.
3. An *Education and Outreach* program, which seeks to build and minister to a strategic affairs community across the region, drawn from government, business, civil society and educational groups.

To deliver this agenda, the Centre engages in a range of activities. These include the execution of research; publication of policy reports and digital content; convening of public dialogues and conferences on both a national and regional scale; placement of expert commentary and analysis to leading media outlets; and provision of policy advice to key stakeholders in government and business. To support this work, we have developed a strategic affairs community of over 7,000 stakeholders from Australia and the broader region.

The Centre receives its core operational funding from three sources: the Australian Government (facilitated by the American Australian Association), the Government of Western Australia, and The University of Western Australia. We are also supported by corporate partnerships with five leading Australian businesses: Rio Tinto, INPEX, Wesfarmers, Aural and Chevron.

The Centre is a public company limited by guarantee and is a registered charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission. We publish our revenue and expenditure in our Annual Reports¹ and the distribution of our revenue sources is available on our website². In 2020, we received funding from overseas agencies for two program activities, both of which are lodged under the *Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Register*³.

2. Quality and diversity in the Centre's programming

As a foreign policy think tank focused on Australia's ties with the Indo-Pacific, "relationship building" is the foundational and central objective of the Perth USAsia Centre's work. Whether in our research, advice, dialogue or communication activities, we aim to understand, extend and augment the relationships that connect Australia with our region. The AAA has twice sought an in-depth independent review of the Centre and our activities (in 2016 conducted by Mr Peter Varghese AO and Mr David Ritchie and in 2020 conducted by Dr Martin Parkinson AC PSM and Professor Alan Gyngell AO). In particular, the most recent Parkinson/Gyngell report reinforces both the need for and

quality of the Perth USAsia Centre, to “... provide Australia with a valuable national asset that could not easily be replaced were it to be lost.” Specifically, “The two Centres¹ are performing well and have developed into national assets worthy of further nurturing, especially in this rapidly changing and contested geostrategic environment.”²

The Centre is additive in nature: we seek to bring together the key groups in foreign relations – government, business, civil society and academia – to share ideas and promote collaboration in ways that may not naturally occur.

Our research is primarily undertaken by an in-house team of six foreign policy researchers, led by a PhD-qualified Research Director. We combine expertise across a diverse array of foreign policy issue domains, including economics, security and defence, regional architectures and technology. While our work spans the entire Indo-Pacific geographically, we maintain a particular focus on five countries: Indonesia, Vietnam, India, Japan and the US. These countries are a focus due to their significance for the region, and their importance for their realisation of Australia’s Indo-Pacific foreign policy objectives. A dedicated researcher, with country-specific expertise, leads our work on each of these countries.

Our in-house research capabilities are supplemented by contributions from a network of non-resident Fellows⁴. Nine of our Fellows are eminent foreign policy leaders, who support the Centre through advice, content contributions and relationship building. We also maintain an Indo-Pacific Fellows Program, where each year five Fellows are appointed annually from Indo-Pacific countries. These Fellows provide research and commentary on developments in their home country critical for Australia, a role that has proven invaluable since international borders have been closed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Centre highly values the diversity within our group of experts. Three of our six researchers, nine of our fourteen non-resident Fellows, and twelve of our seventeen total staff are women; furthermore, 60% of our expert speakers throughout 2020 were women. We also place a priority on including international voices in our programs, with experts from Korea, Indonesia, India, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan and Malaysia all recently represented in our non-resident Fellows program.

3. Enhancing public understanding of foreign policy issues

To make a positive contribution to policy development, quality research must also be effectively communicated to key stakeholders. The Centre strongly invests in the communication of our research and insights, through a five-person communications team led by a PhD-qualified External Relations Director.

The Centre takes seriously its education remit and has included an ‘Education and Outreach’ pillar in the Strategic Plan and annual business plan since its inception. The Centre embeds structures and processes to clearly communicate its work and to make it as accessible as possible. This commitment to open and transparent communication is included in our values⁵ and, as such, all content is available in a multitude of formats.

Publishing research reports which analyse and explain policy impacts of recent developments in international geopolitics are one of the primary modes of informing the public. These publications take a diversity of forms, including short policy briefs, major research reports, commissioned and technical studies, and edited collections featuring multiple authors. Recent topics have included geoeconomic contestation⁶, the US-Australian alliance⁷, Korea’s Indo-Pacific outlook⁸ and the trilateral cooperation between Australia, Japan and India⁹. In 2020, the number of Centre-authored publications grew by over 180% which was significantly enhanced by the launch of our inaugural Indo-Pacific Fellows program, with representation from Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan and Vietnam.

¹ United States Studies Centre and Perth USAsia Centre

² Extract United States Studies Centre and Perth USAsia Centre Evaluation Report, prepared by Dr Martin Parkinson AC PSM and Professor Allan Gyngell AO, May 2020. Report as it relates to the Perth USAsia Centre is attached below.

As well as these established formats used by think tanks, the Centre has developed a suite of digital content including video interviews, a podcast series, social media, webinars, explainer videos, a regular web series and blog articles. Content is targeted at communities overseas and diaspora in Australia by making content accessible online, in-person and in languages other than English when useful. All reports that include analysis of an overseas country have summaries translated into the relevant language and all video content is captioned. In response to COVID-19 travel restrictions in 2020, the Centre commenced production of in-house Centre interviews with key thinkers and policymakers across the globe such as former US Ambassador to South Korea Mark Lippert and Shangri-La Dialogue Senior Fellow for Asia-Pacific Security Dr. Lynn Kuok, to produce 46 video interviews throughout the year for public viewing.

Whilst think tank content has traditionally found an audience in government and academic sectors, the Centre delivers on its clear intentions to provide clear and useful research across all sectors of society. Centre experts are in high demand to present tailored business briefings for corporate entities to support their work on trade, exports, infrastructure projects and international partnerships. The Centre's in-house and non-resident experts make an active contribution to foreign policy debate through media commentary, across print, web, TV, radio and blog outlets. Media appearances are aimed at providing clear and concise analysis and the Centre takes care to include in our media outreach those outlets that may not typically feature international relations content including business media, nationally networked television and local radio. We are regularly placed in all major national media platforms in Australia, as well as leading international outlets such as The Washington Post, Nikkei Asia, South China Morning Post, Straits Times, New York Times and Financial Times. The Centre saw significant growth in media placements throughout 2020 resulting in an increase of over 170% from 2019. The Centre also offers a year-long program of free public discussions targeted at civic society to share insights on key geopolitical issues in the public domain – in 2020 the Centre hosted the equivalent of one public event every fortnight.

Our work with government and education sectors of course remains important. By expanding the breadth of the 'Education and Outreach' pillar in 2020 to include Government Outreach and with the launch of our Indo-Pacific Fellows program, we were able to increase our program of activity in this pillar by over 80%. When requested, the Centre provides bespoke policy advice on a confidential basis to key Australian stakeholders. This can include written and verbal briefs, contributions to policy planning activities, and submissions to official public inquiries. This policy advice is provided gratis to our stakeholders. In 2020, there was more than a 90% increase from 2019 for the Centre to provide analysis briefings to senior national and international government and business leaders.

Continued connection with students and scholars via university teaching and emerging leader programs takes place via course teaching, guest lecturing, keynote speeches, workshops and tutorials. In 2020, we expanded our teaching contribution and for the first time engaged with international universities across the Indo-Pacific region resulting in a 60% increase in the delivery of formal course content to students. We were also able to provide 20% more intern placements over the Summer and Semester 1 intakes; in collaboration with USSC supported more than double the 2019 placements for the Washington D.C. placement program; and alongside the US Department of State, we continued to build on our engagement with Australia's potential next generation of alliance leaders conveying a third 3-day workshop immersed in Canberra and began to build an "Alliance Network" of scholars. Despite COVID-19 travel restrictions, staff experts maintained their external outreach by representing the Centre at over 135 national and international events, forums and conferences across 8 countries and 13 cities.

4. The Centre's strategic affairs community

One of the most critical functions of the Centre is to develop a strategic affairs community that can engage in Western Australia's and Australia's key issues of interest in the Indo-Pacific and United States. Our community is necessarily diverse and deliberately and carefully draws from business, government, university, military and civil

society as well as overseas missions and Embassies/consulates in Australia. With support from government funding, our remit is to bring together established and emerging leaders and act as a vehicle that allows the Australian government to engage these organisations in discussion at both public events and closed-door Chatham-house style dialogues.

Our particular strength lies in bringing diverse stakeholders together – not with the aim of seeking consensus, but with the goal of progressing shared understanding. The complex issues facing Australia, the Indo-Pacific and the United States require the intellectual heft from all sectors of society and the Centre is particularly well known for drawing together groups that include dignitaries, students, public servants, innovators, researchers, business executives, community leaders, not-for-profits and youth networks.

The Centre directly implements our relationship building agenda through convening events, dialogues and conferences. These convening activities serve multiple functions: building a community of interest between Australia and the Indo-Pacific; contributing to public debate on key foreign policy issues; promoting our research and analysis to key stakeholders; and fostering the international exchange of ideas.

A core component of our convening activity are public events, which are provided free of charge to all registrants (with the exception of a nominal charge for large scale conferences to encourage attendance on the day). These range in scale from large conferences drawing international speakers to Australia, to public lectures delivered by foreign policy leaders. Until 2019, the Centre largely delivered these events in-person, including major international conferences in Perth such as our In The Zone¹⁰ and WA Indo-Pacific Defence¹¹ annual conference series.

The Centre also convenes private policy dialogues on behalf of our stakeholders. Typically held under the Chatham House Rule, these provide a platform for information sharing and collaborative policy development between experts and decision-makers. Illustrative activities include pre-departure and mid-term briefings for Australian diplomats to the Indo-Pacific, private roundtables for visiting foreign officials and academics, and our annual Japan Symposium delivered on behalf of the Japanese Consulate in Perth¹². These dialogues are essential in building the person-to-person ties that undergird international relationships across government, business and academia.

In April 2020, to accommodate COVID-19 travel restrictions we expanded our in-house capability to deliver events online. With the ability to host events in-person, online and in a “hybrid” format (in-person and live-streamed/recorded) the Centre was able to increase the delivery of public and private events by over 35% from 2019. Despite COVID-19 limiting our ability to bring speakers to Perth, we were able to host over 200 speakers from 23 cities across 11 countries via virtual event delivery.

¹ At time of submission, the most recent is: *Perth USAsia Centre 2019 Annual Report*, <https://perthusasia.edu.au/our-work/2019-perth-usasia-centre>

² <https://perthusasia.edu.au/about-us/our-funding>

³ Respectively, see <https://transparency.ag.gov.au/SearchItemDetail/373b2ced-ae7e-ea11-8137-0050569d2348> and <https://transparency.ag.gov.au/SearchItemDetail/d56125f3-ae7e-ea11-8137-0050569d2348>

⁴ <https://perthusasia.edu.au/about-us/our-people/fellows>

⁵ <https://perthusasia.edu.au/about-us/our-values>

⁶ <https://perthusasia.edu.au/our-work/geoeconomics-report>

⁷ <https://perthusasia.edu.au/our-work/state-of-the-united-states-an-evolving-alliance-a>

⁸ <https://perthusasia.edu.au/our-work/embracing-the-indo-pacific-south-korea%e2%80%99s-progress>

⁹ <https://perthusasia.edu.au/our-work/australia-japan-and-india-a-trilateral-coalition>

¹⁰ <https://perthusasia.edu.au/itz>

¹¹ <https://perthusasia.edu.au/events/indo-pacific-defence-conference>

¹² <https://perthusasia.edu.au/2021-japan-symposium>