



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**



# **OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCING AUSTRALIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS THROUGH EXISTING REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE**

Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee inquiry

June 2021

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## INTRODUCTION

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) welcomes the invitation to make a submission to the Committee's inquiry on *opportunities for advancing Australia's strategic interests through existing regional architecture*.

This submission focuses on the DFAT-led engagement with the following organisations and multi-country groups which form the regional architecture in the Indo-Pacific:

- the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the fora it leads, including the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting – Plus (ADMM-Plus);
- the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC);
- the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF);
- the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and
- 'minilateral' groupings, such as the Quad (Australia, India, Japan and the United States) and the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD – Australia, Japan and the United States).

While international organisations, such as the United Nations, G20 and Commonwealth, play an important role across the Indo-Pacific, we have not included them in this submission given their broader geographic remit.

Regional architecture plays a vital role for Australia to advance our Indo-Pacific agenda and our strategic interests. Australia pursues a regional agenda that promotes cooperation on strategic, political and economic issues; reinforces international law; encourages full and active engagement by the United States in regional affairs; and ensures all regional countries – large and small – have a voice on regional issues. ASEAN, APEC, IORA, the PIF, and the forums they convene, are central to Australia's efforts to support a sovereign, resilient and stable Indo-Pacific, governed by rules not by power. Over the last decade, minilateral groupings have achieved significant new momentum and are now established as a key tool of Australian foreign policy.

We derive significant value by working with and through regional architecture to advance our foreign, trade, economic and development objectives. We use regional architecture to facilitate constructive dialogue, reinforce rules and norms, and build cooperative responses to the most pressing challenges facing the Indo-Pacific. In these groupings, Australia collaborates with like-minded countries in pursuit of shared interests. Smaller 'minilateral' groupings, such as the Quad, provide vehicles for strategic dialogue and practical action to address regional challenges, bringing together countries with shared values, common interests and complementary strengths. Australia's regional engagement complements and reinforces our bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

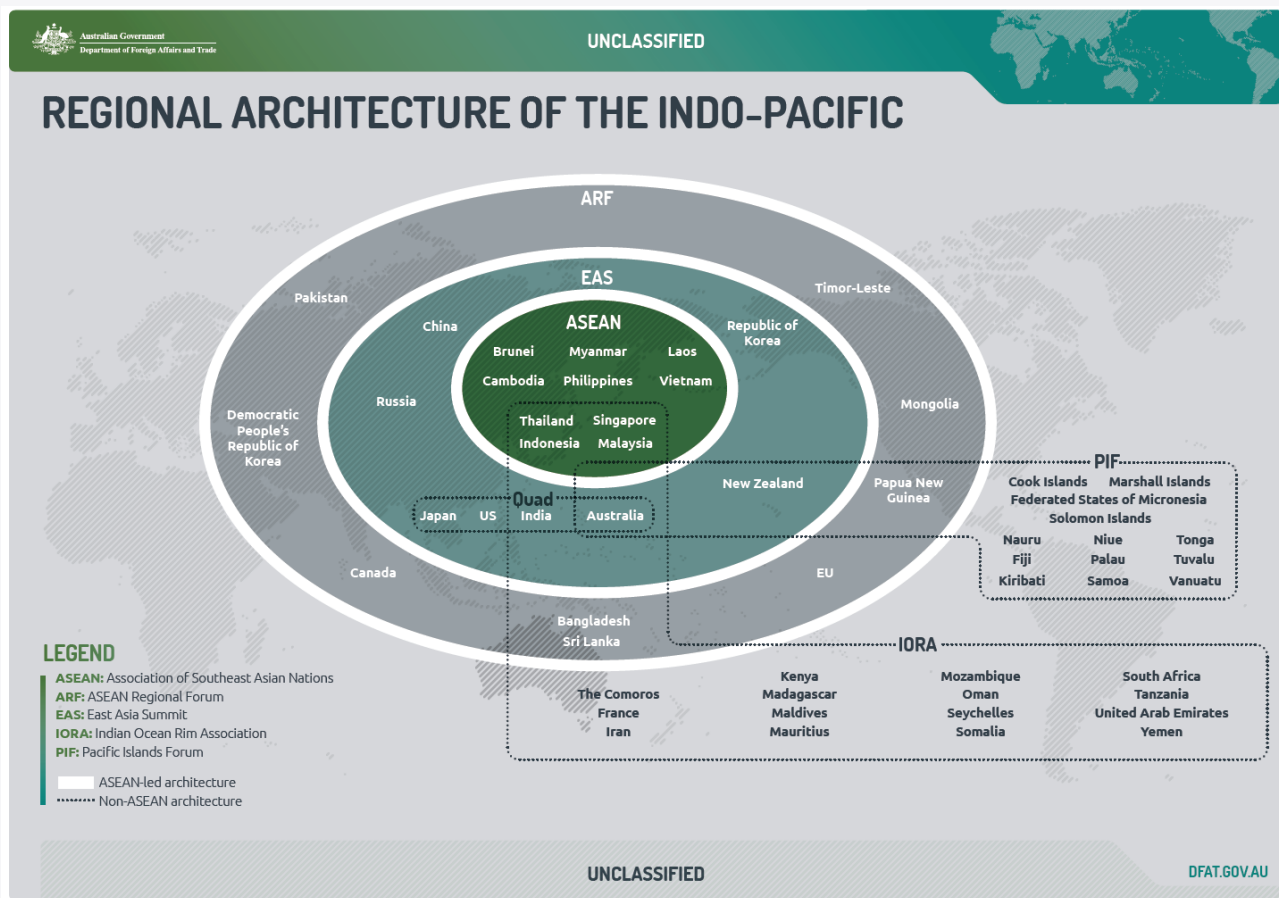
In the face of geopolitical shifts and growing challenges to stability and prosperity – compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic – DFAT is working on strengthening the effectiveness of regional architecture. But as pressure on rules, norms and institutions intensifies, Australia will need to lean in even more strongly to reinforce institutions that tackle shared regional challenges in an inclusive and transparent way. Australia will need to remain agile in forging the right partnerships to meet the challenges of our time and find innovative

ways to advance our interests. We will need to continue to engage in regional forums pragmatically and constructively, committed to acting in support of a stable and prosperous region.

Australia's engagement in the regional architecture is prosecuted at leader, ministerial, and official levels. Our diplomatic network plays a central role to advance our strategic interests through regional bodies.

DFAT coordinates closely with other Commonwealth agencies, state and territory authorities, the private sector and civil society to ensure we bring the breadth of our national assets to bear in engaging with the Indo-Pacific's regional architecture.

### Regional architecture of the Indo-Pacific: snapshot of the membership of key institutions



## SUITABILITY OF REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE TO ADDRESS HUMAN SECURITY ISSUES

In considering the suitability of regional architecture to address human security, this submission focuses on issues that affect the security of individuals and communities (rather than the security of states), which are an inherent part of Australia's fundamental objective to support a peaceful stable and inclusive Indo-Pacific region of sovereign, prosperous and resilient states.

### Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Southeast Asia frames Australia's northern approaches and sits at a nexus of strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific. It is of profound significance for our future – strategically, economically, and diplomatically. ASEAN brings together ten Southeast Asian states – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – into one organisation. ASEAN's success has helped support regional security and prosperity for 50 years and it is uniquely placed to address critical regional issues.

Australia supports a strong, resilient and cohesive ASEAN because it is a strategic asset for us. ASEAN and its fora play a crucial role in shaping and reinforcing rules and norms in the region. ASEAN-led architecture provides a framework of regular dialogue and cooperation that underpin peace and stability in Southeast Asia. The centrality of ASEAN within the regional architecture, together with its rotating chair system, ensures that an ASEAN country – rather than a major power – always sits at the head. This is one of ASEAN's unique strengths.

Australia became ASEAN's first Dialogue Partner in 1974. We became Strategic Partners in 2014. Australia and ASEAN have an agreed Plan of Action covering the breadth of our cooperation, which is updated every five years. Our partnership with ASEAN amplifies our voice in the region. It also provides a platform for the Prime Minister and Australian ministers to meet annually with South East Asian counterparts. Officials meet through the annual ASEAN-Australia Forum and other mechanisms.

We use the ASEAN-Australian Strategic Partnership to set a framework underpinning practical cooperation, anchored by development cooperation that reinforces efforts to make Southeast Asia more safe, prosperous and resilient. Our cooperation with ASEAN covers the breadth of human security priorities, ranging from health security to climate change, human rights, labour rights, cyber, humanitarian assistance, disaster risk reduction, defence engagement and counter terrorism.

In response to COVID-19, Australia is supporting ASEAN to play a central role in health security and economic recovery in Southeast Asia. Australia has pivoted our suite of ASEAN-Australia development initiatives to address COVID-19-related priorities under the *Partnerships for Recovery Framework*, namely health security, stability and economic recovery. In 2020, Prime Minister Morrison announced \$500 million in a package of

economic, development and security measures to support Southeast Asia's recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Cooperation with ASEAN on human security challenges

Announced at the ASEAN–Australia Special Summit in March 2018 and officially launched in July 2019, **ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking (ASEAN-ACT)** (\$80m, 2018-2028) builds on Australia's 15-year history of supporting ASEAN members to effectively respond to trafficking in persons. ASEAN-ACT advances the protection of trafficking victims' rights in ASEAN and supports ASEAN member states to build capability in implementing obligations under the *ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*. The program is currently focused on the intersection between the COVID-19 pandemic and human trafficking.

The Australian-funded **TRIANGLE in ASEAN** project (\$24m, 2015-2027) promotes safe and legal migration, ensuring the benefits of labour migration are equally realised by men and women migrant workers, employers and governments. The program operates across Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. TRIANGLE provides information and services to migrant workers on their rights and assists ASEAN countries and institutions to strengthen labour migration policies and legislation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the program has supported migrant workers who have lost jobs or were forced to return home by providing them with food, masks, information, counselling and legal assistance.

*Box 1. An example of Australia's work through ASEAN regional development programs to support human security, including during COVID-19*

#### East Asia Summit (EAS)

The EAS is the Indo-Pacific's premier forum for leaders' level dialogue on strategic and economic issues. It is the only leader-led forum which convenes key regional players to discuss political, security and economic challenges facing the Indo-Pacific. Australia supports the EAS' important role to play in advancing closer regional cooperation.

Australia was a founding member of the EAS when it was established in 2005. The EAS has 18 members: the ten ASEAN members states plus Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States. In 2019, EAS members represented 54 per cent of the world's population and accounted for 58 per cent of global GDP. In 2019-20, Australia's two-way trade with EAS countries was worth A\$619.9 billion, representing around 70 per cent of Australia's total two-way trade.

Australia uses annual meetings between leaders, foreign ministers and economic ministers to build and maintain political support for international rules and standards and instil habits of cooperation that support regional stability and economic prosperity. Senior officials' meetings support these processes. EAS Ambassadors in Jakarta meet regularly to discuss emerging issues and take forward decisions by EAS leaders. Australia is a constructive and active EAS member. We work with partners in the EAS to reinforce a rules-based regional order, including through leaders' statements and practical cooperation.

#### Cooperation in the EAS on cyber security

In 2018, Australia and Singapore led a landmark EAS leaders' statement on Deepening Cooperation in the Security of Information and Communications Technologies and of the Digital Economy. This statement committed EAS members to working together to promote an open, secure, stable, accessible and peaceful cyberspace and foster cooperation to support effective information exchange on cyber capacity building within the region. In 2020, we followed up by co-hosting with Singapore a virtual EAS Cyber Workshop to build capacity among EAS countries to identify gaps in cyber capacity, discuss best practice, enhance cooperation and leverage partnerships. Governments with deep capability in cyber security facilitates access to safe information technology, which is an increasingly important priority at the individual level.

*Box 2. Example: how we use regional architecture at leader level to advance security objectives*

#### The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)

The ARF is a key ministerial-level platform for security dialogue in the Indo Pacific. Its broad membership – the ten ASEAN countries, Bangladesh, Canada, China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the EU, India, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea the Republic of Korea, Russia, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, and the US – enables Australia to engage with a wider range of partners than other regional forums.

Australia use the ARF to develop and implement practical, cooperative measures to enhance peace and security in the region. The ARF's value is largely drawn from the mutual confidence built through these cooperative activities.

The ARF meets annually at ministerial level and is underpinned by five work streams: counter-terrorism and transnational crime; information and communications technology security; disaster relief; maritime security; and non-proliferation and disarmament. Australia is engaged on ARF efforts on human security initiatives, such as combatting climate change, countering violence extremism, preventative diplomacy, and coastal disaster mitigation.

#### Cooperation in the ARF on maritime security

In the ARF, Australia currently co-chairs the maritime security workstream (with Vietnam and the EU). Since 2018, Australia has led ARF discussions to boost regional cooperation and address emerging challenges to the international rules and principles that ensure order at sea. Within the workstream, Australia has co-hosted workshops on a range of maritime-related themes, including 'Dispute Resolution and the Law of the Sea' (with Malaysia and Timor-Leste) and 'Enhancing Cooperation among Maritime Law Enforcement Agencies' (with the EU and Vietnam). We will shortly be co-hosting ARF workshops on 'Law of the Sea and Fisheries' (with India and Indonesia) and 'Implementing UNCLOS and other International Instruments to address Emerging Maritime Issues' (with the EU, Vietnam, India and Canada). Regional cooperation on maritime issues boosts the security of fishing societies and coastal communities.

*Box 3. Example: how we use regional architecture at the working level to advance security objectives*

### **Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)**

The PIF is the Pacific's preeminent regional organisation, covering political, economic and security issues. The Secretary General of the PIF is Chair of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP), which includes nine regional organisations. Key members of the CROP include: the Pacific Community (SPC) which provides scientific and technical support across more than 20 sectors including public health, economic management and food security; the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) which helps Pacific nations manage fishery resources; and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), which supports sustainable development. Australia uses these bodies to engage with the Pacific region in support of mutually agreed priorities. Australia is a member and major funder of the PIF Secretariat, SPC, FFA and SPREP. Australia's flexible support to these organisations and philosophy of 'leading from behind' creates space for Pacific island countries to own and drive the regional agenda.

The security pillar of Australia's Pacific Step-up reinforces the Boe Declaration on Regional Security (adopted by leaders in 2008). The Boe Declaration recognises the importance of human and environmental security for a stable Pacific and highlights the need to address the threat posed by climate change. DFAT also works with regional organisations in the Pacific to promote gender equality, tackle high rates of gender-based violence, and promote disability inclusion. The Pacific labour mobility scheme helps Pacific workers understand strong labour laws and protections.

### **Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)**

APEC provides a key leader-level platform to engage on economic cooperation and to influence economic policies of regional partners. It comprises 21 member economies: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, China, Hong Kong - China, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, the United States and Vietnam. Through APEC Australia works to drive economic growth by promoting regional economic integration and supporting free and open trade and investment. APEC's technical and regulatory work delivers incremental reform at a practical level, making it cheaper and easier to do business across the region. APEC's long-term economic cooperation policy agenda, the Putrajaya Vision 2040, includes a focus on health and the environment.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, APEC has offered a strong foundation for collaborative regional economic recovery. APEC plays a role in building resilience across the region to future shocks. On health, for example, APEC facilitates the rebuilding of supply chains which helps the flow of vaccines and other essential goods. On climate change, APEC builds on its existing work to support trade in environmental goods. On labour rights, there is scope for APEC to build capacity and momentum for good practice trade agreement provisions on this issue.

### **The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**

IORA is the only ministerial-level forum focused specifically on the Indian Ocean region. It comprises Australia, Bangladesh, the Comoros, France, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Key priorities for IORA include maritime safety and security; trade and investment facilitation; fisheries management; disaster risk management; academic, science and technology cooperation; tourism and cultural exchange; the blue economy; and women's economic empowerment



Australia uses IORA to engage with key partners in the Indian Ocean region (such as India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) and in Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand) on maritime safety and security, women's economic empowerment, the blue economy, fisheries management and institutional strengthening. There has been one leaders' meeting of IORA in 2017. IORA foreign ministers meet annually. Australia chaired IORA in 2013-15.

### Minilaterals

The **Quad**, comprising **Australia, India, Japan and the United States**, is a forum for leader and ministerial-level discussion of strategic challenges in the Indo-Pacific. Through the Quad, Australia seeks to promote and protect a shared vision of the region and a balance that supports our interests. Our Quad engagement provides a mechanism for practical cooperation on the region's most pressing priorities, complementing Australian engagement with ASEAN and other bilateral and regional engagement. The Quad was originally born of joint efforts responding to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. After a period of hiatus, it was reinvigorated in late 2017 through regular senior officials' meetings.

Quad Foreign Ministers first met in New York in September 2019. Ministers subsequently met in Tokyo in October 2020 and virtually in February 2021. Australia uses the Quad to deepen practical cooperation on pressing regional challenges including maritime security, infrastructure, supply chain resilience, counter-terrorism, humanitarian and disaster relief, cyber security and countering disinformation.

In March 2021, US President Biden hosted an historic Quad leaders' summit, by VTC, following which leaders issued a joint statement committing to strengthening cooperation on the economic and health impacts of COVID-19 on the Indo-Pacific, climate change and critical and emerging technology. Australia will contribute subject-matter experts to the Quad working groups that have been established on each these issues to take forward the agenda.

#### Cooperation in the Quad on COVID-19 vaccines

Quad leaders announced a landmark Quad partnership on COVID-19 vaccines, which aims to accelerate the region's pathway out of the pandemic by ramping up vaccine manufacturing capacity, funding the procurement and distribution of vaccines and providing 'last-mile' delivery support across the region. The Quad will work in close coordination with the existing relevant multilateral mechanisms including the World Health Organization and COVAX.

*Box 4. Minilateral cooperation on response to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

The **Trilateral Strategic Dialogue**, comprising **Australia, Japan and the United States**, brings together key like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific to engage on strategic priorities. The most senior meeting of this group has been at leaders' level. The group is focused on counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, maritime security, good governance, the rule of law and human rights.

The **Australia-Indonesia-Timor-Leste** trilateral has potential deepen engagement between the three governments. The most senior meeting of this group has been at foreign ministers' level. Ministers committed to working together to support the security, economic recovery and stability of the Indo-Pacific; encouraged concrete activities enhancing connectivity, trade, investment, tourism, agriculture and fisheries; reaffirmed support for Timor-Leste's application for ASEAN membership and committed to gender equality, including as a key part of COVID-19 recovery efforts.

The **Australia-India-France** trilateral is an emerging mechanism focused on shared interests, particularly in the Indian Ocean. The most senior meeting of this group has been at foreign ministers' level. The group is focused on practical responses to the pandemic, rising strategic competition, sustainability of oceans, disaster resilience, climate change and reinforcing the rules-based order.

The **Australia-India-Indonesia** trilateral brings together three major regional democracies to cooperate on connectivity, combatting terrorism and transnational organised crime, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and maritime security. The most senior meeting of this group has been at senior officials' level.

## COMPLEMENTARITY OF REGIONAL SECURITY GROUPINGS AND REGIONAL COOPERATION MECHANISMS

Regional architecture is an essential tool for delivering Australia's foreign, security, and economic policy objectives. Australia harnesses the complementarities between regional fora, including the ASEAN-led architecture, APEC, IORA and the Quad. Australia's engagement with regional forums complements our bilateral and multilateral work to advance Australia's international policy objectives. Leveraging these complementarities promotes cooperation on strategic, political and economic challenges.

As outlined above, the Indo-Pacific's regional architecture comprises a range of groups with different mandates across security, political, development and economic cooperation agendas. The Australian Government recognises the value of each. We focus and calibrate our engagement to advance our objectives, reflecting the influence, mandate and membership of each forum. In some cases, we proactively work on similar themes across a range of groups, recognising that some aspects of an issue can be better tackled with a particular set of partners. When viewed in totality, the bodies forming the regional architecture provide complementarities – and various pathways – that enable us to deliver better foreign, trade and development policy outcomes.

Australia works through the various groupings to promote, strengthen and reinforce links between regional initiatives. For example, it has been important over the last 18 months to underline the complementarities between ASEAN and the Quad. At the recent Quad Summit, for example, Quad leaders underscored their steadfast support for ASEAN centrality and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. The Quad also helps the four partners to be better, more coordinated Dialogue partners for ASEAN. The Australia-India-France trilateral dialogue helps partners to better coordinate as IORA members. Minilaterals also deliver initiatives to support the priorities of regional groupings – for example, planning is underway in the Australia-India-Indonesia trilateral to co-host workshops in the ARF on maritime issues.

We note some observers have from time to time described regional architecture as a 'spaghetti bowl' of complicated arrangements that might impede prosecution of our international agenda. We do not agree with this characterisation. Australia actively engages in regional architecture to reinforce foreign policy priorities – for example, in both the EAS and APEC we use leader-level engagement to buttress international trading rules against protectionist pressures. Prosecuting our agenda through multiple forums provides Australia with strategic ballast and builds international support to advance our interests.

### **Leveraging complementarities in the regional architecture**

Australia pursues a common agenda through the EAS, ARF, ADMM Plus, IORA and ministerial such as the Quad to strengthen regional maritime security. We use these forums to increase cooperation and dialogue, which is critical to achieving our strategic objective for a stable Indo-Pacific. Australia is co-chairing the ARF workstream on maritime security (with Vietnam and the EU). We have co-chaired a number of EAS conferences on maritime security issues, including maritime security cooperation (with India and Indonesia); maritime security and international law (with Malaysia); and maritime security cooperation (with Indonesia). We participate in the ADMM Plus Experts' Working Group on Maritime Security. The Quad leaders' joint statement reflects our commitment to collaborating with Quad partners on maritime security, including to prioritise international law and meet challenges to the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas. Australia is an active member of the IORA maritime safety and security working group, which promotes collaboration and enhances member states' understanding of norms and practices. Activities include workshops on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and Port State Controls. Maritime security is an example where the Australian Government actively uses the complementarities of the regional architecture to advance our strategic interests.

*Box 5. An example of using the comparative advantages of different institutions to implement Australian interests*

### **The Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative**

This initiative was specifically referenced in the terms of reference for this inquiry. It was established in 2014 by the Republic of Korea (ROK) as an annual event comprising a 1.5 track dialogue (think tanks and officials) and an officials' meeting to facilitate peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia by promoting economic cooperation. Members include ASEAN, Australia, China, the EU, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, the ROK, Russia and the US. Over the period 2017 – 2019 Australia participated in the forum. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has been invited but has never attended. A focus of the initiative is engaging the DPRK economically. Sanctions on the DPRK and its continuing refusal to abide by legally binding UNSC sanctions make this difficult. This initiative has not met since 2019.

*Box 6. Details of the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative*

## HOW EXISTING REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE DEEPENS DEFENCE ENGAGEMENT AND STRATEGIC COOPERATION

Australia engages with ASEAN and other regional bodies to achieve our security, defence and strategic objectives. Some of these regional groupings are explicitly focused on such issues, such as the EAS, the ARF and the TSD – which provide opportunities to enhance regional cooperation.

Under the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership there is a strong stream of work on maritime challenges; cyber security; women, peace and security issues; and transnational crime. Australia is also providing funding under this arrangement to ASEAN to respond to risks to stability flowing from the pandemic.

The Department of Defence also uses ASEAN to deepen engagement and build strategic cooperation. For example, the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus (ADMM Plus), comprising ASEAN and eight Indo-Pacific countries, is an opportunity for ministerial-level dialogue on shared security challenges. At the working level, Defence officials participate in a range of Expert Working Groups, and currently co-chairs the Expert Working Group on Military Medicine (with Brunei). The first ASEAN-Australia Informal Defence Ministers' Meeting was held in 2020.

Australia works to ensure the EAS maintains its focus on key regional strategic priorities. For example, in 2020 EAS leaders discussed safe, affordable and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, health resilience, the South China Sea, the Korean Peninsula, the situation in Hong Kong, climate change, marine plastic debris, cybercrime, extremism and disinformation. Leaders adopted joint statements on issues including preventing and responding to epidemics; regional economic growth; women, peace and security; and marine sustainability – which is evidence of the value of the forum in deepening strategic cooperation.

As noted above, in the ARF Australia currently co-chairs the maritime security workstream (with Vietnam and the EU). Australia has held multiple workshops on 'Enhancing Cooperation among Maritime Law Enforcement Agencies' and 'Implementing UNCLOS and other International Instruments to address Emerging Maritime Issues'. Also, in the ARF context, the Defence Officials Dialogue provides a useful mechanism to deepen Australia's defence engagement across the Indo-Pacific. This dialogue facilitates the exchange of defence policy information and cooperation to support broader ARF efforts in areas such as transnational crime and disaster relief.

Australia uses the TSD to reinforce shared strategic principles with Japan and the US, such as working with other countries to uphold a rules-based order under which disputes are resolved peacefully; freedom of navigation and overflight is upheld; and markets remain open. We also ensure that the TSD supports ASEAN, IORA and the PIF. Through ongoing TSD engagement we have discussed high priority strategic issues at leader and ministerial level, including maritime security, development in the Mekong, quality infrastructure investment, the DPRK, the South China Sea, cyber security and counter-terrorism.

#### Cooperation in the Pacific and Indian oceans on maritime security: Fusion centres

Australia is supporting the **Pacific Fusion Centre**, which will build regional capacity to respond to common security priorities identified in the PIF's Boe Declaration. The Pacific Fusion Centre aggregates, analyses and disseminates information from multiple sources to equip Pacific decision makers with assessments to better identify and respond to regional security threats including transnational crime, climate change, disasters, cyber security and natural resource protection. Most recently, the Centre has pivoted to support the COVID-19 response. It has acted as a reliable source of information for Pacific Governments on pandemic developments, including advising on emerging issues such as countering disinformation, ensuring food security, and managing border security.

The **Indian Ocean Region - Information Fusion Centre** (IOR-IFC) is enhancing maritime domain awareness and coordinating activities with partner nations and agencies through information sharing, cooperation and capacity building. Australia has seconded a Navy Liaison Officer to the IOR-IFC, and the Australian Border Force is working toward greater engagement with the IFC-IOR through officers posted to the Australian High Commission in New Delhi.

*Box 7. An example of building on regional architecture initiatives to advance security objectives*

## HOW REGIONAL GROUPINGS PROMOTE A STABLE, RESILIENT AND INCLUSIVE INDO-PACIFIC

Australia uses meetings of the regional groupings and organisations to install habits of regular dialogue and cooperation which are important tools of influence to create the conditions for a stable, resilient and inclusive region. We ensure that the framework underpinning regional architecture regularises annual dialogues between leaders, ministers and senior officials. This helps to foster trust and build confidence.

Australia recognises the value of regional architecture in providing smaller states with greater bargaining power, making them more resilient and able to set their own priorities for regional cooperation, and providing inclusive frameworks for smaller states to be part of decision-making on key regional issues.

For example, ASEAN and ASEAN-led forums emphasise norms of acceptable behaviour and build standards that support a peaceful, rules-based, resilient region on issues including terrorism, transnational crime, people smuggling, health security, cyber, illegal fishing and biosecurity. APEC helps diversify trade opportunities and supply chains, making the Indo-Pacific more resilient and prosperous.

### **Progress on maritime security, cyber and critical technology, critical minerals, counter-terrorism and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief**

Australia optimises participation in regional forums to work with Indo-Pacific partners on maritime security, cyber and critical technology, critical minerals, counter-terrorism and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief – all core challenges facing the region.

For example, under the Australian-ASEAN Plan of Action, we have committed to cooperation in maritime security, military medicine, counter terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping operation, mine action and cyber security.

In the ARF, Australia is working across a range of workstreams, including disaster relief, counter-terrorism and transnational crime, maritime security, and cyber security.

In the Quad, Australia will provide experts for a Critical and Emerging Technology Working Group that will ensure technology design, development and standards are governed by shared interests and values.

And in the Pacific, Australia has used the PIF's Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 as a vital mechanism for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The Pathway has facilitated sharing of information, delivery of medical supplies and agreement of common protocols to allow the transport of people and goods while minimising risks of COVID transmission.

Australia has the largest search and rescue area in the Indian Ocean, equivalent to one tenth the earth's surface, and is working with IORA member states through the Australian Maritime Safety Authority to build capacity and improve coordination on responses to maritime incidents.

### Feasibility of institutionalisation and expansion

Each regional group has its own policies and rationale relating to institutionalisation and expansion. Being a member of the group includes subscribing to those principles and policies. Each group has its own processes for considering governance and membership.

ASEAN has its own processes for considering applications for membership, and for new Dialogue Partners. For example, ASEAN is currently considering a formal application by Timor-Leste to become a member. ASEAN has set out a detailed process for this, which involves Timor-Leste demonstrating its capability to fulfil its obligations as a member should it be admitted. Australia supports Timor-Leste's aspiration for ASEAN membership, and is exploring options to work together with ASEAN member states to build Timor-Leste's capacity to meet the requirements of ASEAN membership. The decision on membership is a decision for ASEAN.

ASEAN has long-established criteria for EAS membership, which include being an ASEAN Dialogue Partner, having substantive cooperation with ASEAN and accession to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. Russia and the US were admitted as members in 2011. Australia does not advocate for a further expansion of the EAS.

Australia does not see merit in institutionalising or expanding the Quad. The Quad's strength lies in its flexibility to respond to emerging and pressing challenges. Australia's position is that the Quad remains an agile group of four countries working together constructively for the peace, prosperity and stability of the Indo-Pacific. Nevertheless, Australia welcomes constructive and positive engagement by non-Quad members in the Indo-Pacific.

### Deepening of cooperation between regional security partners on economic and development issues

Australia has deepening security partnerships with a range of countries in the Indo-Pacific, including the US, New Zealand, Japan, India, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Singapore and Malaysia.

Australia employs an active approach to multilateral, regional and bilateral engagements and build the domestic benefits of open trade and investment and to tackle global development challenges. This includes strengthening and expanding our current network of 15 free trade agreements with 26 economies. These agreements complement and support our shared interest in fostering a secure and prosperous region by promoting mutually beneficial trade and investment. Economic resilience in the Indo-Pacific region is critical to our collective long-term prosperity.

The Indo-Pacific region has immense economic potential. Australia is actively deepening economic engagement with a range of partners, including through existing trade agreements such as the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA), the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus (PACER+) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). In addition to these regional arrangements, Australia has bilateral Free Trade Agreements with New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, ROK, Japan, China, Hong Kong and Indonesia.



Australia uses regional trade agreements to strengthen the economic architecture of the Indo-Pacific, set the norms for trade and economic engagement in our region, and send an important signal of regional support for trade liberalisation and rules-based order. AANZFTA continues to underpin Australia's strong economic engagement with ASEAN and remains one of ASEAN's highest quality FTAs. The conclusion RCEP, the world's largest free trade agreement, will support a stable, predictable economic environment for recovery of trade and investment in the Indo-Pacific and serves as just one example of ASEAN's leadership to support the rules-based multilateral system. RCEP will deliver a range of improvements over our existing FTAs with RCEP partners (ASEAN Member States, Australia, China, Japan, Korea and New Zealand), especially in areas where our partners' economies have the greatest growth potential, such as services, investment, and digital trade. RCEP will also provide a platform for ongoing dialogue and cooperation on the range of trade and economic issues facing the region. CPTPP is one of the most comprehensive trade deals ever concluded and is in force for Australia, Canada, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Singapore and Vietnam. We are designing a new Regional Trade for Development Initiative (RT4D) that will provide economic cooperation programs to assist with the implementation of RCEP and AANZFTA.

ASEAN is Australia's second largest trading partner as a bloc with over \$100 billion in two-way trade and \$250 billion in two-way investment in 2019. The markets of Southeast Asia are critical for diversification of Australian trade. We use the annual meetings of ASEAN economic ministers to discuss implementation of our regional free trade agreements, regional connectivity, digital trade, geo-economic dynamics, and economic recovery.

Australia has a long history of economic cooperation and capacity-building. The ASEAN-Australia Development Program (Phase II) has helped ASEAN improve regional connectivity, narrow the development gap between ASEAN member states, and is now supporting ASEAN to develop a consolidated strategy on the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and the future of work. In 2020, ASEAN leaders adopted a Comprehensive COVID-19 Recovery Framework. Australia has committed \$1 million to support sustainable infrastructure under this framework. In September 2020, Foreign Minister Payne committed \$57 million to continue supporting ASEAN's economic integration, recovery and digital transformation. The ASEAN-Australia Digital Trade Standards Initiative is also working to boost digital trade capacity in ASEAN member states.

In the Pacific, Australia's security and development assistance ranges from addressing traditional security issues, such as maritime security and transitional crime, through to emerging priorities, including cyber-crime and health security. Recent Australian initiatives, such as the Pacific Fusion Centre and the Australia Pacific Security College, contribute to achieving strengthened security outcomes under the Boe Declaration. Implementation of the Boe Declaration is coordinated by the PIF Subcommittee on Regional Security (FSRS). Other regional bodies support the FSRS and the Forum's regional security agenda, including the Pacific Immigration Directors Conference (PIDC), the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO), the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), and the Pacific Transnational Crime Network (PTCN).

In the Indian Ocean region, Australia's Blue Carbon Hub is assisting IORA member states to strengthen their coastal ecosystems to manage marine stocks, mitigate the impact of disasters and offer a nature-based means of carbon sequestration. Australia is also providing \$850,000 to fund women's economic empowerment activities for IORA member states.