

Public Research into Foreign Policy Issues

Asialink Submission to an Inquiry by the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee.

1. Introduction

1.1 Asialink at the University of Melbourne appreciates the opportunity to submit views to the Inquiry into Funding for Public Research into Foreign Policy issues by the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee.

1.2 Asialink was established in 1989 as a joint initiative of the Government's Commission for the Future and the Myer Foundation. It is hosted by the University of Melbourne.

1.3 Asialink's purpose is to drive creative Australian engagement with Asia to build a strong shared future through programs in education, business, 1.5 and 2 Track diplomacy, public information, and arts and culture.

1.4 This submission is presented in three parts:

- First, it sets out some key arguments for why Australia must pursue the objective underlying the Committee's Inquiry – to secure appropriate funding for public research into current and emerging foreign policy issues affecting Australia, with a particular focus on our key interests in the Indo Pacific.
- Secondly, it provides an assessment of potential program responses and information and commentary on the topics relevant to the Committee's terms of reference.
- Thirdly, it makes several policy recommendations or identifies potential initiatives worthy of further examination.

2. The Case for Public Research into Foreign Policy

2.1 For Australians, foreign policy is, for the first time since the Second World War, an existential issue, brought to the fore by the rise of China, the relative decline

of the United States, and the growing complexities of global and regional interdependence manifested by climate change, the information and automation revolutions, and the shattering impact of COVID 19.

2.2 Australia's external policies need simultaneously to be grounded in strong foundations and have the flexibility to allow for constant adjustment and navigation to meet sudden and unexpected developments in international relations. Australia faces a strategic environment and an accompanying set of decisions about our national and international orientation that are more challenging than at any time since the 1940s. The decisions facing the current generation of policymakers arguably rival for importance those taken on immigration in by the post War generation and the economic reforms taken by Prime Ministers Hawke, Keating and Howard in the 1980s and 90s.

2.3 While government has the ultimate responsibility for setting foreign policy, the changing international environment, the long term increase in the number of Australians pursuing education, work and professional activities abroad, the importance of trade and investment to Australia's economic prosperity and the emergence of communications technologies that create new transnational communities, means there are more people than ever before contributing to the fabric of Australia's international relationships. Conversely, there are more influences on Australian life from abroad. Whether businesspeople and professionals, private and university sector researchers, non government organisation employees, or students and travellers, these individuals represent a 'politically interested' public that are both a resource for policymakers in helping to shape external relations and a key constituency to engage.

2.4 The wider two way engagement of citizens in the conduct of international relations, and the tendency to erode foreign affairs as the exclusive domain of governments, is an inevitable consequence of globalisation. It means that in confronting the challenges of our external environment, our government will have to be prepared to forthrightly address and engage Australia as a whole, its institutions and its people.

2.5 The better informed our population is, the greater the likelihood that resultant external policies will be in the national interest. Public research into foreign policy issues can act as both an important source of ideas and advice to government and a means of increasing awareness and knowledge of important matters in the public domain.

2.6 A second perspective is that, if, as a nation, we are effectively to engage the region and to prosecute effective external policies, we must understand that unlike most comparable countries with essentially Western systems and cultures, the countries of prime foreign policy focus and of geographic proximity to Australia and New Zealand are nations with quite different stages of development, systems of government and cultural backgrounds to our own.

2.7 Hence, apart from the normal complexities of managing foreign relationships, the cultural dimension of Australia's external outlook is proportionately more significant – or should be – than it is for most countries with similar political and cultural backgrounds. This has ever been a central and undiminished challenge of Australian foreign policy.

2.8 While the work done by successive Australian governments in establishing a network of bilateral and regional arrangements, like APEC, has been thorough and in some cases visionary, we have been less successful at increasing inter cultural understanding with others in the region, a shortcoming that has diminished our overall dealings with regional countries.

2.9 Australia possesses Asia expertise in Commonwealth government agencies, universities, think tanks, and in some areas of business. Recent surveys suggest this expertise is less strong than in the past. The PriceWaterHouse Coopers Asialink Business report "Matchfit – Creating an Asia Capable Workforce" assessed that fewer than 10% of ASX200 C suite and board members were Asia capable. This is at a time when depth of knowledge is all the more necessary, not only because of the growing uncertainties of the region but because many of our regional neighbours, particularly China, are becoming stronger relative to Australia in both economic and military terms and are heavily investing in acquiring knowledge and relationships in countries of primary strategic importance to us in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

2.10 For Australia as a country fully to understand, assess, and further our interests in the region, requires not only a comprehension of international relations work but a capacity for analysis based on knowledge of the culture, social and political dynamics, economies and languages of those to whom we need to relate.

2.11 Given there is a decline in research funding for Asia related topics, in the learning of Asian languages for students whose first language is English, and markedly less coverage of the region in our media, we risk greater superficiality rather than sophistication in our knowledge of Asian developments to the detriment of our national interests. From our perspective that should create a compelling case for a significant expansion in funding for public research into foreign policy issues.

3. Funding and Programs for Public Research into Foreign Policy

Asialink

3.1 Asialink is the only non government, national organisation with a specific mandate to forge closer ties between Australia and its region of primary strategic, diplomatic and economic interest – the Indo Pacific. It is an Australian organisation founded to serve Australian interests. It is neither a branch office of a foreign organisation nor designed to serve any single private interest. It is unique in other ways: it covers the gamut of Australia’s interactions with the region. Its divisions include Asialink Diplomacy (leading 1.5 and 2 Track exchanges with regional officials and experts), Asialink Business (pursuing its core mission to create *Asia capability* in Australia’s boardrooms and executive suites as the National Centre for Asia Capability), Asialink Education (overseeing the Australian Education Foundation and delivering the DFAT funded ‘BRIDGE’ Program with schools in the Indo Pacific), Asialink Arts and Culture (forging deep artistic and cultural partnerships), and Asialink Insights (daily publishing information, analysis and commentary online about regional affairs and Australian foreign policy).

3.2 Asialink recently celebrated the 30th Anniversary of its founding by the Federal Government’s Commission for the Future and the Myer Foundation. It is headquartered in the Sidney Myer Asia Centre at the University of Melbourne. Over 30 years of doing business, the organisation has demonstrated its contribution to Australia’s relations with the Indo Pacific. In diplomacy, it has convened signature initiatives like the annual 1.5 Track Australia New Zealand ASEAN Dialogue and the Asialink Conversations series, which has brought together leading Australians with their counterparts in Asia for deep discussions on mutual interests. Asialink Business, established with support from the Commonwealth Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources, has very successfully built a National Centre for Asia Capability, delivering insights and skills building to thousands of Australian businesses and helping them navigate the significant economic opportunities in the region.

3.3 However, the lack of long term, predictable funding has limited Asialink’s ability to plan multi year initiatives and exploit the full range of potential activities. This challenge is especially pronounced in its diplomacy and public information activities, which have significant potential to scale further. Stable, long term funding sources would go a long way to addressing current weaknesses and allow Asialink to make a significantly expanded contribution to public education and awareness of key foreign policy issues and, possibly, play a role in activities such as

delivering training programs to diplomats in the region (it should be noted such programs are operated by China). Many other organisations undertaking public research on foreign policy also remain under funded in Australia – in significant contrast to their counterparts in the universities.

The Education System

3.4 The role of better fostering understanding of foreign policy issues – both in the broad and in a specialised sense – falls initially to our education system itself. This is because such an understanding will derive from an improvement in our knowledge as a nation of our Indo Pacific region, including its history, systems of government and culture. We must embrace a coordinated national strategy, combining federal and state governments and education providers, to achieve Asia literacy and set targets for its achievement.

3.5 Greater Australian fluency in Asian languages is an essential ingredient of a better knowledge of the region and capacity to operate within it. Although English is widely used in diplomacy, the level of English competence in many countries is poor. Moreover, language is the departure point for gaining deeper understanding of the dynamics driving both internal developments in a country and the priorities in its foreign relationships. Moreover, local language media is often be very different in content and tone to local English language media. (Examples are common in Japan, China and Indonesia).

3.6 Building knowledge of Asia, including of its languages, starts in our schools. While the Australian curriculum through the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA) places priority on Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia, there is a dearth of accurate data on studies of Asia in schools.

3.7 Asia Education Foundation (AEF) as part of Asialink has been invited to advise ACARA on a review of this curriculum priority, as well as on the General Capability of Intercultural Understanding. The draft Curriculum Review will be released for national feedback on 29 April. The Committee may wish to note this.

3.8 The last comprehensive figures on Asian language teaching in schools were collected in 2010, which showed a decline. A further report in 2014 highlighted the challenges. The only nationally consistent data are from ACARA on the number of year 12 students graduating with languages which shows some languages have struggled in the last decade.

3.9 The Australian Federation of Modern Language Teacher's Associations received funding in 2019 from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment to update data on languages in schools. A report is due to be issued in 2022.

3.10 A national strategy for Asia literacy starts in schools, but should enable pathways to professional expertise. Asia job skills need to be regarded as a valued complement to other professional qualifications. Investing in the quality and breadth of Asia education available for university and community based delivery will help produce a workforce capable of exploiting the new economic opportunities in Asia and also informing our national policy processes.

3.11 As with schools, the study of Asian languages in universities has been in decline. The situation with Indonesian and Chinese (Mandarin) is pertinent.

- *Indonesian language*: National enrolments in Indonesian language courses at universities are now less than half their peak in 1992. This decline is partly offset by an increase in the volume of in country training, which has been stimulated in large part by the New Colombo Plan.
- *Chinese language*: Studies of Mandarin Chinese have expanded at a slower rate in Australia than globally. However, enrolment in Chinese language programs has grown here as a result of a large number of international Chinese students enrolling in their own language to complete optional subject requirements or to pursue qualifications in translation.

3.12 On Asian studies beyond languages, the Commonwealth and state governments could work collaboratively with universities to ensure area studies are adequately funded and attractive to both scholars and students. It is possible price incentives could play a role. For example, students pursuing a second degree in Asian language or Asian studies alongside a 'core' professional degree could receive discounted course fees.

3.13 Better linkages should be built between hubs of Asia expertise in universities, including academic bodies like the Asian Studies Association of Australia, and government, business and the professions. Asia expertise needs to be treated as a national asset and we could do more to coordinate and institutionalise the connections between the campus and the workplace. This is core business for Asialink. As a major employer, the Commonwealth is in a position to exercise leadership by ensuring Asia expertise is accorded value in the public service recruitment process.

3.14 Within universities, it is necessary to break down some of the silos between fields to ensure a better conversation between those with area expertise on the Indo Pacific and those in other academic disciplines. A better appreciation of the regional and global dynamics affecting Australia would enhance the contribution of much university research, especially into foreign policy issues. Of specific relevance to the work of the Committee, there is a need for greater fusion between area knowledge and the discipline of International Relations (IR).

3.15 While Asian studies specialists have played a valuable role in Australia in building historical and cultural knowledge of our neighbours, there has been less success in constituting Indo Pacific expertise in other specialisations such as law and engineering or economics and commerce. The work of the University of Melbourne's Asian Law Centre and Centre for Law, Islam and Society are examples to emulate.

3.16 While much of this is a matter for the universities themselves rather than government, there needs to be a deeper examination of how international relations is taught. International Relations specialists and Asia area specialists need to forge a more relevant research and teaching agenda and methodology, resulting in a more comprehensive and possibly more useful approach within Australian universities to how we perceive and teach international relations. In Australia, the study of IR has been thriving. But it has been dominated by western, particularly American, perspectives and methodology, a tendency which has been questioned by academics of the stature of Hedley Bull and Wang Gungwu. The Academy of Social Sciences in Australia is holding a workshop this year which is designed to look at these issues.

3.17 Establishing Australia's interaction with its immediate region at the heart of the public research project into international relations benefits enormously from strong academic connections to the region. These have been forged over many years via a myriad of organisational and individual research collaborations and academic personnel exchanges that have enriched Australian scholarship. New security procedures will slow collaborative agreements between Australian universities and counterparts in the region. The Commonwealth should encourage joint research initiatives with a number regional counties, including Japan and Indonesia, similar to the highly successful Australia India Joint Research Fund which has been functioning since 2007.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Programs

3.18 The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade currently funds arrange of projects to promote community understanding and networks with the region under

the International Relations Grants Program (IRGP). The areas nominated include business, education, innovation, science, technology, the arts media and sport. However, the amounts disbursed are small and they are channelled through nine councils and foundations. These processes inevitably involve bureaucratic overheads.

3.19 There is much to be said for both streamlining procedure – perhaps by placing all decisions under one Council – and greatly enhancing expenditure. Given that the Committee will be examining “public research into current and emerging foreign policy issue affecting Australia”, it may wish to consider widening the terms of IRGP applications to include such research and examining whether the existing array of foundations, councils and institutes are sufficient to meet the Committee’s objectives. The creation of a Foreign Affairs Council under the IRGP could allow direct support to non government efforts to promote awareness and understanding of foreign policy issues.

3.20 Until the end of the eighties, DFAT had effective departmental briefing mechanisms on foreign policy issues. Over time, briefing on day to day issues has moved to ministerial offices and the system for in depth departmental briefing has withered. The Committee might wish to encourage processes by which senior policy officers could give in depth issues briefings on background without the requirement to paint every Australian policy move as an unqualified success.

3.21 Unlike some comparable countries, Australia has no system of unclassified in depth policy papers which can assist comprehension by the media and the public of foreign policy issues. Such a system existed in the 1970s and 80s. This could be revived.

3.22 The expansion of DFAT secondments to key think tanks would be of considerable value.

Australian Research Council Grants

3.23 The overwhelming share of Australian Research Council (ARC) grants have been committed in the past decade to STEM areas. However, the Committee may wish to look at the ARC as another mechanism for encouraging research into foreign Policy issues affecting Australia. It should be noted that between 2011 and 2020 the ARC awarded grants to 13,572 research projects. Of these, 184 were for political science projects, 148 were for projects in policy and administration, and 19 were for projects in communications in language, communication and culture.

National Library of Australia Collections

3.24 In another example of Australia's diminishing attention to Asia, in 2020 the National Library felt compelled to downgrade overseas collecting. It removed a number of key Asian countries from its list of priorities, including Japan and Korea, closed its Asian Collections Room, and substantially reduced its subscriptions to Asian periodicals. Funding should be allocated to the National Library to maintain a satisfactory level of Asian content.

Australian Media Coverage of the Region

3.25 There has been a significant decline in the number of full time Australian correspondents in the region working for Australian media. The combination of diplomatic tensions with China and the impact of COVID 19 has exacerbated the trend. The number of ABC correspondents in all overseas posts is about 20 (as compared with 250 BBC correspondents). News Ltd and Nine Media now have only six print correspondents between them covering Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. There are no Australian journalists working full time for the Australian media in China – current plans are for correspondents to be based in either Singapore or Taiwan, severely limiting the ability to provide coverage of events inside China and bring an Australian perspective to developments in China. A combination of COVID and changed work arrangements is likely to leave the ABC as the only Australian media with a full time presence in Indonesia. The major newspapers closed their Tokyo bureaus some time ago. India too has lost its full time Australian newspaper correspondents.

3.26 In another sign of the relative decline in the importance of Asia coverage, two years ago the Walkley Foundation dropped its prize for foreign reporting.

3.27 Australian coverage of the South Pacific also remains poor. A separate but related issue is the lack of a fully fledged Australian international broadcasting service into the region. This void is being increasingly filled by other media sources, including from China.

3.28 A strong, independent source of news and current affairs reporting on our region is essential to spreading awareness and knowledge of foreign policy issues. There are limited tools available to government to ensure this happens. However, government can ensure adequate funding is allocated for foreign coverage by public broadcasters, which in turn can create the competitive incentives for commercial media to fund this coverage.

3.29 A related activity is to ensure Australian public media makes an array of multi platform content available in the Indo Pacific region. Proposals such as the Australian Asia Pacific Media Initiative aimed at significantly increasing the reach of Australian content into the region complements efforts within Australia to improve awareness and knowledge of foreign policy issues.

Society Leaders

3.30 The Committee also sought input into ways of enhancing public understanding of foreign policy issues. A bright spot in this respect has been the New Colombo Plan, albeit some of the resources required for the plan were taken from funding originally allocated to other foreign policy purposes. There may be a need for research on the degree to which the program has sustained longer term involvement in Asia by fellows of the New Colombo Plan and led to increasing levels of expertise in Australia on Asia engagement and foreign policy

3.31 The Asialink Leaders Program, which has run for the past 26 years bringing together professionals from across sectors to deepen their knowledge and understanding of Asia, continued to make a significant contribution to the level of understanding of Australia's foreign, strategic and economic policy as it relates to Asia. This type of capability building by organisations outside government – in this case the not for profit and university sector – adds significantly to the capacity of the Australian community to understand and engage with contemporary Asia. As such, while not pure research – this type of capability building could be better funded by government.

Diaspora Communities

3.32 Regarding the Committee's references to involving diaspora communities in developing and implementing foreign policy, in Australia there is a huge variety of diaspora and community groups outside government and universities, who have an interest in promoting wider knowledge in the nation about the countries on which they focus. There may be room for the Committee to examine how the activities of the best of these groups can be used for wider national purposes with or without government support.

Polling

3.33 Asialink sees merit in a polling project, possibly in conjunction with a major Asian research body to discern better discern Asian perspectives on Australia. This

would examine perceptions of Australia's strengths and weaknesses as a regional partner.

3.34 There are a number of surveys by Pew and others on how the United States, China and Japan are regarded in relative terms. There are also surveys of Australia on tourism and education, polling by Lowy of Australian perceptions of the region, and a number of indices that seek to measure both the power and soft power of an array of countries, including Australia. However, there is only limited and incomplete survey data on how Australia is regarded by the region militarily, economically, and as a responsible regional player. Such a survey might not only give us a clearer idea of our regional standing but would assist in planning optimum areas of development assistance and where best to use public diplomacy resources.

Engaging the Community – States, Business and Civil Society

3.35 The Committee has sought input on how the Australian government might engage with states, business, civil society, unions, universities, think tanks, diasporas and the wider community in developing and implementing foreign policy. Like in other big federated countries the relationship between the central government and the groups in question does not have the same ease permitted by propinquity as in more centralised countries such as the UK, France, Thailand or even Indonesia. This means Australia benefits from effective communication of foreign policy priorities. Documents such as Foreign Policy White Papers, where they provide a clear description of foreign policy principles and processes, rather than attempting the complex task of predicting the future, can be beneficial in educating and coordinating with diverse groups in society. Regular consultation between executive government and the parliament, employing existing consultative mechanisms, also can be valuable. It is important government as much as possible, bearing in mind the subject matter of foreign policy often requires confidentiality, is as transparent and open as possible in describing the rationale for its policies.

3.36 This submission sees most issues with foreign policy implications that arise between the commonwealth and states (such as foreign direct investment, quarantine, foreign students, implementation of treaties, and extradition) as likely better to be addressed by bodies with greater experience in these areas. The evolution of the Council of Australian Governments into the national cabinet during the COVID crisis has clearly improved federal state coordination, if it can be sustained.

3.37 Until the passage of the recent legislation, there has limited interest by the Commonwealth in the external activities of state governments, which in the main

can be summarised under the heading of ‘state promotion’. It is for the states themselves to judge the benefits they receive from having separate representatives abroad. But it is clearly in the national interest that there is appropriate coordination with Commonwealth government missions abroad where states do make foreign appointments. On the whole, dealings between our embassies and state offices overseas are satisfactory, although some duplication exists and confusion can arise in a host country on who does what.

3.38 There are a number of mechanisms both formal and informal for the Commonwealth to deal with business on external issues. Heads of missions are obliged to have extensive consultations with business when in Australia, as do representatives from relevant departments on the full range of government activities with foreign implications. There are extensive formal and informal consultation processes with business on trade agreements and economic engagement.

3.39 There is, however, considerable scope for enhancing the level of research by non government agencies into Australia’s economic and business engagement with the region in support of Australia’s foreign policy. Organisations like Asialink Business have made a decisive contribution to that agenda in recent years through publishing a range of business relevant research reports on trade and investment with Asia, including the [“Winning in Asia”](#) report launched in 2020 by the Minister for Trade which looks at the success factors for Australian business in the region, as well as [“Match Fit”](#) developed with PwC Australia on Asia capability in corporate Australia. These reports assist both government and business in navigating the opportunities and challenges in the region in Australia’s long term national interest.

3.40 As mentioned, a key theme of this section of the submission is effective government communication on the rationale for specific foreign policy decisions or orientations. This can be taken a step further in regard to the domestic media in dealing with government and foreign correspondents dealing with missions abroad. There are advantages in the government giving serious thought to better in depth media briefing on foreign policy issues, where necessary on a confidential basis.

4. Recommendations

Asialink

4.1 As a unique Australian institution whose mission is to focus on building Asia capabilities and engagement, Asialink is ideally suited to delivering public education and awareness of key foreign policy issues. An injection of long term funding would

provide the ability for Asialink to plan and implement a significant expansion of its delivery of those goals.

National Strategy

4.2 Australia should develop a coordinated national strategy, combining federal and state governments and education providers, to achieve Asia literacy through schools and universities and set targets for its achievement. This should include targeting an increase in the volume of native English speakers learning Asian languages.

4.3 A commitment to expanding Asia literacy should be accompanied by improved data collection on the state of study of the Indo Pacific in primary, secondary and tertiary education, including of Asian languages.

Education

4.4 Asia job skills need to be a valued complement to other professional qualifications. This will help produce a workforce capable of exploiting the new economic opportunities in Asia and also informing our national policy processes. The Commonwealth, as a major employer, can demonstrate this by giving weight to Asia capability in its hiring practices. Universities too can ensure Indo Pacific area studies are adequately funded and attractive to both scholars and students. One possible mechanism for encouraging enrolments is via price signals. For example, students pursuing a second degree in an Asian language or Asian studies alongside a 'core' professional degree could receive discounted course fees.

4.5 Better linkages should be built between hubs of Asia expertise in universities, including academic bodies like the Asian Studies Association of Australia, and government, business and the professions. Asia expertise needs to be treated as a national asset and we could do more to coordinate and institutionalise the connections between the campus and the workplace. This is core business for Asialink.

4.6 Within universities, it is necessary to break down silos between fields to ensure a better conversation between those with area expertise on the Indo Pacific and those in other academic disciplines. A better appreciation of the regional and global dynamics affecting Australia would enhance the contribution of much university research, especially into foreign policy issues. Of specific relevance to the work of the Committee, there is a need for greater fusion between area knowledge and the discipline of International Relations (IR).

4.7 Public research into international relations benefits enormously from strong academic connections to the region. The Commonwealth should encourage joint research initiatives with a number regional countries, including Japan and Indonesia, similar to the highly successful Australia India Joint Research Fund, which has been functioning since 2007.

Australian Research Council

4.8 The ARC offers another mechanism for encouraging research into foreign policy issues affecting Australia. There have been relatively few ARC grants made over the past decade for research projects relevant to this subject, even as the strategic and external economic environment has become more challenging.

National Library of Australia

4.9 Funding should be allocated to the National Library of Australia to maintain a satisfactory level of Asian content in its collections., reverse a decision to curtail overseas collecting, and reopen the Asian Collections Room.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

4.10 The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's International Relations Grants Program could be streamlined. It currently funds several bilateral and regional councils, foundations, and institutes. One option would be to place all funding decisions under one Council and to significantly increase expenditure. Another option would be to create a separate Foreign Affairs Council with a mandate to support non government efforts to promote awareness and understanding of foreign policy issues.

4.11 The terms of IRGP applications could be widened to include a specific mandate for activities that increase awareness and knowledge of foreign policy issues.

4.12 The anecdotal evidence suggests the New Colombo Program has been a success. However, there may be benefit in conducting research on the degree to which the program has sustained longer term involvement in Asia by NCP alumni.

4.13 Documents such as Foreign Policy White Papers, where they provide a clear description of foreign policy principles and processes, rather than attempting the complex task of predicting the future, can be beneficial in educating and

coordinating with diverse groups in society. Government should endeavour as much as possible, bearing in mind the subject matter of foreign policy often requires confidentiality, to be as transparent and open as possible in describing the rationale for its policies.

4.14 It is necessary to ensure coordination between Commonwealth government missions abroad and representatives of the states and territories, where the latter do make foreign appointments. Dealings between our embassies and state offices overseas are generally satisfactory, although some duplication exists and confusion can arise in a host country on who does what.

4.15 The government should resume the practice – common until the end of the 1980s – of providing in depth media briefings on foreign policy issues, where necessary on a confidential basis.

4.16 Unlike some comparable countries, Australia has no system of unclassified in depth policy papers which can assist comprehension by the media and the public of foreign policy issues. Such a system existed in the 1970s and 80s. This could be revived.

Media Coverage of International Relations

4.17 A strong, independent source of news and current affairs reporting on our region is essential to spreading awareness and knowledge of foreign policy issues. Government should ensure adequate funding is allocated for foreign coverage by public broadcasters, which in turn can create the competitive incentives for commercial media to fund this coverage. Proposals such as the Australian Asia Pacific Media Initiative aimed at significantly increasing the reach of Australian content into the region would complement efforts within Australia to improve awareness and knowledge of foreign policy issues.

Polling

4.18 There would be merit in a polling project, possibly in conjunction with a major Asian research body, to better discern Asian perspectives on Australia. This would examine perceptions of Australia's strengths and weaknesses as a regional partner.

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