

Oaktree's submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee's Inquiry into Funding for Public Research into Foreign Policy Issues

To the Chair of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee,

Oaktree welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Inquiry into Funding for Public Research into Foreign Policy Issues.

Oaktree is Australia's largest youth-led foreign aid organisation and a leading voice for young people in the development sector. We believe that young people are capable of leading, demanding and creating a more just world and we work to build their social and political power. We recognise the value of youth participation in decision-making and unapologetically advocate for systemic change on the issues young people care about. Our expertise is built upon our close work with youth-led local partners in the Indo-Pacific, where we fund capacity-building programs for the leaders of tomorrow.

Australia must adapt its foreign policy research, development and implementation processes to rapidly changing global contexts. Oaktree believes that there are currently opportunities for Australia as a regional leader in good governance to invest in the strategic involvement of key partners in the Indo-Pacific in developing and implementing effective foreign policy to maintain long-term stability, security, resilience and prosperity.

With a focus on current and emerging foreign policy issues in the Indo-Pacific region, our submission responds to the terms of references **d** and **e**. To ensure that current and future foreign policies are informed by high quality public research, we ask that the Committee considers **Oaktree's following recommendations**:

Term of Reference d

How the Australian Government involves states, business, civil society, unions, universities, think tanks, diasporas and the wider community in developing and implementing foreign policy;

- 1. Collaborate with key groups to bring a variety of perspectives into developing and implementing more inclusive, diverse, representative and sustainable foreign policy.**

1.1. Establish communication channels with and appoint liaising mechanisms between civil society organisations and peak bodies by funding consultations, focus groups and roundtable discussions.

Globalisation has ensured an irreversible diversity of identities within and across states. In a rapidly changing geopolitical environment, effective development and implementation of Australia's foreign policy relies on including diverse and representative perspectives. Actively establishing and enhancing cross-sector and community partnerships through communication channels like consultations, focus groups and roundtable discussions are useful mechanisms for enabling Australia's diverse regional society to shape foreign policy and ensure its longevity.

Our vibrant civil society¹ works to address societal problems that government or private sector services and resources do not or are unable to supply. Many Australian organisations including NGOs, charities, professional organisations, diaspora groups and volunteer groups work hard to help cultivate prosperous communities in the region.² The expertise of these groups is invaluable in informing foreign policy. In particular, NGOs are vital partners in advising government efforts to shape security, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific through the Australian aid and development assistance program, as their expertise of local contexts, understanding of networks, and knowledge and relationships with communities is unmatched.³ Based on Australia's foreign policy interests, fostering liaising mechanisms and investing in dialogue between communities and people in the Indo-Pacific region is of paramount importance. By bolstering Pacific community involvement in developing and implementing foreign policy, Australia is signalling its commitment to growing together through collaborative initiatives. Not only will collaborative policy and research processes yield better policy outcomes but strengthen economic and social ties.⁴

Currently, Australia appoints some liaising mechanisms with existing partners and we commend the government's partnership with the Australian Council for International Development and the Committee for Development Cooperation. We encourage these ongoing partnerships and recognise there is an opportunity to establish further and more meaningful communication channels, to better inform the development and implementation processes of Australia's foreign policy.

1.2. Consult with young people by creating channels for their participation in policy making processes, taking this involvement seriously.

Young people have a right to participate in the decision-making processes that will affect their lives - including foreign policymaking. However, their participation has been left out of

¹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, (2017). *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*. Barton: Australian Government.

² Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, (n.d.). *Australian Aid: Friendship Grants*. [online] Available at <https://www.dfat.gov.au/aid/who-we-work-with/friendshipgrants/Pages/default> [Accessed 28 March 2021].

³ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, (2015). *DFAT and NGOs: Effective Development Partners*. Barton: Australian Government.

⁴ Dobell, G. (2019). *Australia's Pacific pivot: Destiny, duty, denial and desire*. Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

these processes.⁵ They should be consulted to establish inclusive, diverse, representative and sustainable foreign policy. The need for youth participation in the policy process is even more vital in the Pacific, where young people make up over 50% of the population.⁶ Taking into account *their* concerns on the ground will better inform foreign policy research at home. Doing so will help identify emerging regional priorities and potential triggers of civil instability.

Young people are interested in Australia's relations with international partners and close neighbours in the Indo-Pacific and have a vested interest in resolving transnational issues such as climate change, which disproportionately affects them. Though, there are few channels for young people to speak to the government, or existing ones are mostly one-way transactions⁷ or passively tokenistic.⁸ The government could meaningfully involve young people by inviting the participation and partnership with youth-led civil society groups, youth advisory panels, and representative samples within the youth community regarding gender, age, ethnicity and cultural background. Amplifying and taking seriously youth voices through participatory channels in policy and planning contexts helps to secure the best policy results.

Term of Reference e

Strategies the Australian Government should adopt to build the knowledge needed to support more effective future foreign policy;

2. Apply a youth focus to foreign policy research processes by recognising the youth demographic's participatory potential and collecting age-related disaggregated data in monitoring and evaluation methods.

Young people are vital stakeholders in foreign policy but are not engaged in a manner proportional to their size and significance for a safe and secure future. As over half of the global population is under the age of 30, the participatory potential of knowledge sharing from the perspective of this youth demographic in informing foreign policy is significant. This is especially true for young people in the Pacific, where over half of the population is under 25.⁹ The youth bulge highlights the untapped potential of the youth demographic in informing foreign policy, as well as highlighting the need for foreign policy objectives to focus on young people. Viewing youth as a resource and accessing the knowledge and skills of young people allows for the identification and understanding of their actual needs and the issues they care about, better informing decision making and more effective policies around these issues.¹⁰

Effective future foreign policy needs to be sustainable to reach long-term interests, though

⁵ Oaktree, (2016). *Practice Note: Youth Participation in Development*. [pdf] Available at https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/ACFID%20Practice%20Note%20%20Youth%20Participation%20in%20Development%20FINAL.pdf [Accessed 20 March 2021].

⁶ Secretariat of the Pacific Community, (2015). *The Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014–2023: A coordinated approach to youth-centred development in the Pacific*. Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

⁷ Victoria State Government, (2016). *Youth Policy: Building Stronger Youth Engagement in Victoria*. Melbourne: Victorian Government p.6.

⁸ *ibid.*, 5.

⁹ *ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰ Department of Premier and Cabinet, State Government of Western Australia, (2006). *Working Together: Involving Community and Stakeholders in Decision-Making*. Perth: Office of Citizens and Civics.

also adaptable as transnational challenges arise, such as the effects of climate change, the ongoing and future implications of Covid-19, the threat of future pandemics, migration, and rising inequalities. Young people are a vital resource in informing foreign policy around these issues as they are more acutely aware of transnational threats and are more connected to the global community than any other generation prior to them.¹¹

Just as the youth bulge creates a window of opportunity for knowledge acquisition, so too are booming youth populations in some of Australia's key neighbours undermining regional stability and prosperity.¹² The bulge in Indo-Pacific countries, mainly those with low emigration and sparse job opportunities for young people, have the potential to destabilize states in the developing world and make them prone to civil conflict.¹³ Located in the region where disruption to prosperity and peace is most likely to occur, Australia's core economic and strategic interests are vulnerable without a youth focus in foreign policy. Importantly, this provides an opportunity for Australia to mitigate the risks and enhance its regional leadership as an innovative and globalised actor by applying a youth focus and engaging young people in the Indo-Pacific. With the right long-term investments, creating inter-regional youth dialogue **promotes the exchange of ideas and innovative thinking** amongst young people, building the knowledge needed to support more effective future foreign policy. Focusing on youth participation in the policy process fosters good relationships, empowers and engages the youth population and promotes democratic practices, which strengthens both Australian leadership and regional prosperity. This achieves more sustainable results through stronger governance systems that support policy objectives.¹⁴ When conceptualising foreign policy as a long-term strategy, applying a youth focus and involving young people in foreign policy development helps to ensure policy longevity by training and **building the capacity of emerging leaders and policy-makers in preparing them for modern governance challenges**. Building young people's human capital sets the tone for Australia's future relationship with the Indo Pacific and the world

Australia must also establish evaluating mechanisms that measure the efficacy of current foreign policies to better inform effective ones in the future. Collecting representative data is vital to building the knowledge needed to develop policies based on evidence and success indicators. Currently, DFAT's performance evaluation framework for Australian foreign aid policies, 'Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid', does not have age-related monitoring indicators¹⁵. Without such data, monitoring and evaluation frameworks are unable to identify the impacts policy initiatives have on different age groups, missing opportunities to identify means to make programming better for the range of demographics involved and achieve realistic objectives. This is problematic as Australia must ensure that foreign policies are impactful on the youth population in order to respond to the significant risks and opportunities that the youth bulge presents in securing foreign policy objectives.

¹¹ Oaktree, (2017). *Collective Future: Young Australians and their Vision for Foreign Policy*. Carlton: Oaktree.

¹² Firth, S. (2018). *Instability in The Pacific Islands: A Status Report*. [online] Available at https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/instability-pacific-islands-status-report#section_35046 [Accessed 25 March 2021].

¹³ Beehner, L. (2010). *The Effects of 'Youth Bulge' on Civil Conflicts*. [online] Available at <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/effects-youth-bulge-civil-conflicts> [Accessed 26 March 2021].

¹⁵ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, (2014). *Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid*. Australian Government.

3. Liaise with the international community and policy makers to keep up with foreign policy issues.

Stronger networks between states assists Australia's strategic foreign policy alignment to a globalised world. Our future security and economic prosperity are contingent on the stability and prosperity of others, making necessary multilateral and bilateral dialogue on shared interests.¹⁶

One of the responsibilities that come with being a regional leader in the Indo-Pacific and becoming more prominent internationally should be demonstrating partnership with our neighbours and strengthening state-to-state relationships by liaising with the international community. This works to share knowledge and build research connections on current and emerging foreign policy issues. Considering the national interest of our neighbours when examining our own enables stronger, more efficient solutions to international issues.¹⁷ Taking inspiration from what our key partners and global players are doing in the foreign policy space builds the groundwork to guide more effective future foreign policy, allowing Australia to better execute its policies in the future.

Currently, Australia is out of step with the international community. Regionally, the Pacific, amongst a large global standpoint, views climate change as the single greatest threat to state interests, though Australia does not hold this threat to the same importance in its policy objectives. If Australia chooses to liaise with Pacific researchers and policymakers on climate change policies, here lies a once in a lifetime opportunity for Australia to be a regional leader in the long process of building an economically and politically secure region. Australia best serves itself and the Pacific through plenty of listening and learning.¹⁸

Internationally, Australia is out of step with its most important security and stability partner, the United States (U.S.). The three D approach to U.S. foreign policy has historically placed development as a key priority in approaching contemporary national security challenges, besides defence and diplomacy.¹⁹ Now, President Biden's regime has committed an ambitious development agenda and elevated development aid to the ultimate national security body,²⁰ emphasising development as a vital foreign policy tool. Australia has not placed the same importance on development, though, this presents an opportunity for the presidential administration's objectives to inform Australia's policy efforts. Aligning both state's development agendas will enhance the strategic relationship and the future of Australia's foreign policy. Australia does not want to fall behind on its bilateral partnership and the global stage - if the government is committed to its strategic alliance with the U.S., it must liaise with its international partner to secure a more effective future for foreign policy.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 11.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 4.

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USAID, (2018). *USAIS Policy on Cooperation with the Department of Defense*. [online] Available at <https://www.usaid.gov/policy/dod-cooperation>.

²⁰ Moores, D. (2021). *What Biden means for Australia's aid policy*. [online] Available at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/what-biden-means-australia-s-aid-policy> [Accessed 28 March 2021].