



## **Submission No 15**

### **Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Malaysia**

**Organisation:** Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia

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## **JSCFADT -Australia's relationship with Malaysia**

### **Terms of Reference**

The Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade shall inquire into and report on Australia's relationship with Malaysia, with special emphasis on:

- o bilateral relations at the parliamentary and government levels;
  - o economic issues, including trade and investment;
  - o cultural and scientific relations and exchanges; and
  - o defence cooperation and regional security.
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### **Submission by the Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia (MASSA)**

September 2006

#### **Introduction**

MASSA is pleased to make a submission to JSCFADT's review of Australia's relationship with Malaysia. Our submission focuses on the term of reference most relevant to the Society, namely *cultural and scientific relations and exchanges*. By focussing on this, MASSA believes that the government will be better placed to enhance its relationship with Malaysia.

MASSA's mission is to bring together scholars and other interested persons/organisations in Australia and elsewhere, and from all disciplines who share a common interest in Malaysia and Singapore. The Society fosters and promotes research on Malaysia with the aim of improving our knowledge of Malaysia. The first issue addressed is the need to maintain a high-quality, competitive research base in Australia. Achieving this goal requires investment in education on Malaysia (both generally and in language skills), culminating in specialised academic (eg. PhD training) and technical training. The second issue addressed is the need to encourage productive communication between the government, Malaysianists and the public. Achieving this goal would be greatly advanced by the funding of a regular Malaysia Update Conference by the government (along the lines of similar update conferences such as, for example, the Indonesia Update conference).

#### **Ensuring a competitive research base on Malaysia in Australia**

People are at the core of developing a robust research base on Malaysian Studies in Australia. Tertiary (and secondary) students should have a broad-ranging knowledge of the politics, economy and society of Malaysia, including its status or position in the Asia-Pacific region. They should also have access to and competence in Malay/Indonesian language skills. In order for Australia to maintain a strong research base, it is imperative both that the strength of Malaysian studies is maintained in our international offerings and that the language skills are robust.

Flexibility and international mobility for researchers will also be crucial to maintaining a strong research base in Australia. Opportunities to collaborate must be available at all stages of career development.

Targeted PhD training must become an attractive option to interested students. Improving career structures (such as post-doctoral opportunities) could result in recruitment and retention.

DFAT could fund MASSA (through the Asian Studies Association of Australia) to develop a web-based research career mapping tool. The tool will provide information such as the range of jobs on offer to Malaysian specialists and the skills and qualities needed to be effective in their jobs.

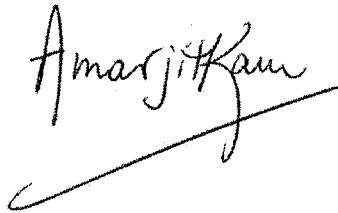
**Encouraging productive communication between the Government, Malaysianists and the public**

The skills that researchers/civil servants require in bilateral cultural and scientific relations and exchange (and indeed in the other areas) ought to be thought of in the broader context of their value to society at large. There is an increasing need to engage in dialogue with Malaysian officials, researchers and with the public. We therefore propose that DFAT provide support to MASSA to hold an annual Malaysia Update Conference, with financial support for at least three keynote speakers at this conference, and participation by relevant Australian officials. We would be agreeable for this event to be held in Canberra.

The Update would then become the most important event organised by MASSA every year in conjunction with the colloquium. The objectives of the Update would be to:

- inform the Australian public and broader academic community on major developments in Malaysia during the preceding year – many touching directly on public policy issues
- provide participants of high quality from Australia, Malaysia and other countries who can help explain developments in Malaysia and in the wider Asia-Pacific region to an Australian audience
- promote exchanges between academic and other sectors in Malaysia and Australia.

It would involve academics, public servants, diplomats and the media. It would become an internationally recognised meeting and the conference itself or participants would feature in media reports in Australia and Malaysia. The Update lectures would be published, making them available to a wide public audience.



Amarjit Kaur

President, Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia

[with valuable input from Ian Metcalfe (UNE) and John Funston (ANU)]