



Submission No 4

Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Malaysia

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Submission to

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Inquiry into Australia's relationship with Malaysia

Introduction

The Australia Malaysia Business Council South Australia Incorporated (AMBC SA Inc) is one of four chapters of the (national) Australia Malaysia Business Council. The purpose of the AMBC SA is to "Seek to foster friendship and understanding between the business communities of South Australia and Malaysia and to promote technical co-operation, trade, investment and tourism between the two regions" – in association with the national Council.

Given that the purpose of the National and SA body AMBC is not purely economic, this submission is not limited to economic and trade matters, as outlined in the term of reference of the Inquiry into Australia's relationship with Malaysia.

The AMBC SA and its activities

Established in 1994, the AMBC(SA) has been actively pursuing its purpose since inception. It is served an Executive Committee consisting of members from the business, government and education sectors. The current President Professor Hock Lim Tan, Professor of Paediatric Surgery, University of Adelaide is also an executive member of the Australia Malaysia Institute (AMI) created by The Hon Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Alexander Downer.

The Council has taken part in several trade missions to Malaysia with participants from a diverse range of sectors including health, education, defence, investment services, food, wine, and IT. These missions have brought export sales and inbound investment returns estimated at in excess of \$25M.

Through Professor Tan, AMBC SA has also established links between the Malaysian Ministry of Health and South Australia, culminating in the signing of a letter of intent between the Women's & Children's Hospital and the Malaysian Federal Government, at a function witnessed by the Malaysian Prime Minister during his visit to Sydney last in 2005.

Already in the past six years, the Womens & Childrens's Hospital in Adelaide has successfully trained several young Malaysian specialists, and an agreement is being drafted to formalise the continuing exchange

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of Malaysian and Australian specialists, These linkages built have grown from strength to strength. One of the highlights this year will be the invitation to Professor Tan to address the APEC forum on international exchange of health services within the APEC economies.

The Australia Malaysia relationship

At its very essence, Australia's strong relationship with Malaysia, has been built on a long history of strong educational links which has resulted in many Australian trained Malaysians occupying prominent positions in every aspect of Malaysian life. In the same way, there are now prominent Malaysians working living in Australia occupying prominent positions in Australia.

The AMBC SA sees its role not only in promoting trade but developing professional linkages and mutual professional recognition between Australia and Malaysia. The increased globalisation of professional services will inevitably result in much closer professional linkages developing and it is necessary to look at the factors which may influence this.

Much can be gained by easing and facilitating the recognition and exchange of professions services whether it be lawyers, architects or doctors. There will always be areas of expertise available in one country which may not be available in the other and vice versa, and the ability for each country to facilitate the sharing of these experts is mutually beneficial.

Contrary to popular belief, the AMBC (SA) does not believe that freeing this sector will result in huge influx of professions setting up businesses to compete with locals. It has not happened in the EU, certainly not with medical services and will not happen between Malaysia and Australia. At the moment, it is not possible for top legal expert or medical specialist to register either in Malaysia or Australia without going through a long protracted process.

The points we wish to make are:

1. Both countries need to recognise the need to introduce enabling legislation to enable some mutual recognition of selected professionals and professional services.
2. The AMBC (SA) recognise that this is a complex issue, as the professional recognition in both countries falls on the jurisdiction of professional bodies, but the professional bodies will often hide behind the legislation to protect their stance. It is often "turf" that impact on decisions made by professional bodies.



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3. Notwithstanding this, there are restrictive legislation in both countries that prevent or severely restrict these professional exchanges. Both countries should therefore be looking at developing enabling legislation eg removing the requirement for medical specialists to work for 3 years before they can be registered in Malaysia.

In reality, the world is fast moving towards being a large global village where professionals across the world may be able to contribute their expertise seamlessly. However this can only be achieved, if they are enabled to provide these services, and there should therefore be more focus on this matter at FTA and JTC negotiations.

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