



Submission No 5

Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Malaysia

Organisation: Australian Research Council

Contact Person: Barbara Remmel
Assistant Director

Address:

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE,
FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUB-COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH MALAYSIA**

**AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL (ARC) – BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON
SCIENTIFIC RELATIONS AND EXCHANGES BETWEEN AUSTRALIAN RESEARCHERS
AND THEIR MALAYSIAN COUNTERPARTS**

TERMS OF REFERENCE

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

- Bilateral relations at the parliamentary and government levels
- Economic issues, including trade and investment;
- Cultural and scientific relations and exchanges; and
- Defence cooperation and regional security

The committee will consider both the current situation and opportunities for the future.

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE,
FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUB-COMMITTEE**

Committee members

The Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee consists of:

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INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of reference the Committee will review the full range of Australia's relations with Malaysia.

In preparing its background information, the ARC has focused on the area of *scientific relations and exchanges* between Australian researchers and their Malaysian counterparts, in particular, collaborative activity on ARC-supported research projects. It should be noted that the ARC supports research across all disciplines, including the social sciences, humanities and the arts, with the exception of clinical medicine and dentistry.

BACKGROUND

The national innovation system comprises all the institutions, people, and processes that create, share and use new knowledge and, importantly, the collaborative linkages and interactions among them. It includes government, higher education and business elements.

The Role of the Australian Research Council

Within the Australian innovation system, the ARC is responsible for identifying and investing in the highest-quality research that has the potential to deliver the greatest impact in the form of economic, social and environmental returns to the community. In order to ensure that national benefit is derived from research excellence, the ARC supports a continuum of research activities, from "blue sky" discovery research to research that is linked to the strategic requirements of industry.

The ARC's mission is to advance Australia's research excellence to be globally competitive and deliver benefits to the community. This entails activities in three broad areas:

- supporting the best research which is most likely to contribute to innovation;
- brokering partnerships among researchers, industry, government, community organisations, and the international community; and
- providing policy advice to the Australian Government on investment in the national research effort.

The ARC is accountable for these activities to the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Julie Bishop MP.

The ARC pursues its mission under a set of key objectives, which are to:

- develop and maintain a broad foundation of high-quality world-class research across a wide range of disciplines;
- encourage and extend cooperative approaches to research by strengthening links within Australia's innovation system and with innovation systems internationally;
- contribute to high-quality research training and foster career opportunities for Australia's best and brightest researchers;
- facilitate access for Australian researchers to state-of-the-art facilities and equipment and provide incentives for the cooperative development of research infrastructure;
- encourage excellent research and research training across the broad range of national research priorities and ARC structural priorities; and
- increase awareness, understanding and support among the community of the outcomes and benefits of Australian research.

National Competitive Grants Program

The National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP) is the primary vehicle by which the ARC pursues its mission. Under the NCGP the ARC identifies and allocates funding competitively, by means of a system of internationally benchmarked peer assessment, in order to support the highest-quality research in Australia.

The NCGP is a set of integrated program elements that are structured so as to provide a pathway of incentives for Australia's researchers, as they develop in expertise and experience, to build the scope and scale of their work. The NCGP targets funding in two areas:

- developing and sustaining excellent research capability; and
- building the scale and focus of world-class research in areas of national priority.

Research capability is built by nurturing the skills and expertise of individuals and encouraging partnerships through the formation of teams under the Discovery and Linkage elements of the NCGP. Funding is allocated to support research capability in response to investigator-initiated proposals.

Achieving scale and focus in identified areas of priority occurs under the Research Networks and Centres elements of the NCGP. These concentrations of research activity serve as regional, national and global focuses for knowledge creation, research training and infrastructure development. The research is characteristically cross-cutting and multidisciplinary in nature, with strong collaborative links into wider innovation networks. Funding is allocated on the basis of a competitive process involving applicant-initiated research proposals shaped by pre-defined objectives and outcomes in identified areas of national focus.

RESEARCH COLLABORATION WITH MALAYSIA

The ARC has no formal research cooperation agreement with any Malaysian research agency. However, under the NCGP the ARC provides funding support to research projects, many of which involve international collaboration. The NCGP also provides funding for awards specifically to support Australia-based researchers' participation in joint research projects with overseas collaborators, and for fellowships specifically to enable Australia-based researchers to work in overseas research organisations and overseas researchers to work in specified organisations in Australia.

Research projects involving collaborative links between Australian researchers and their counterparts in Malaysia are a relatively small proportion of the total number of NCGP-funded projects which involve international collaborative links. ARC data on collaboration shows that a total of 35 projects involving collaboration with Malaysia have been funded under the NCGP between 2002 and 2006, with a peak of 14 projects in 2005. Of the 35 projects, 21 were supported under the Discovery element of the NCGP. The dominant discipline in collaborative activity is the social sciences with political science as the chief area of research. In 2006 the ARC supported five projects with Malaysian collaboration and these were valued at a total of around \$2.4 million. It should be noted that the data relates to intended collaboration as identified on research funding proposals. The ARC does not collect data on the level and extent of the collaboration on ARC-funded projects.

ARC participation in activities in events held in Malaysia

In June 1999 Professor Vicki Sara, then Chair of the ARC, was a member of Australian delegation to the Australia-Japan Joint Science and Technology Consultative Committee (JSTCC) and visited Kuala Lumpur on the way home. The delegation attended a meeting

between Australia-Malaysia Senior Officials meeting for Science and Technology Cooperation.

The ARC participates in international research policy forums and in October 2001 Professor Sara attended the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Meeting held in Penang. Professor Sara joined the Australian delegation at the Science and Technology Policy Forum: *Science Technology and Innovation for the New Economy: Building Capacity across APEC*. Professor Sara was the Issue Chair for the principal theme *Developing Science and Technology Networks*. The discussion distilled practical lessons for APEC member economies and identified explicit recommendations for further science and technology cooperation.

Malaysian delegations visiting Australia

Recent instances of ARC participation in meetings with Malaysians delegations are listed below. In all three instances the ARC was invited to attend the meetings by other Australian agencies or universities.

- In July 2006 the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee invited Dr Mandy Thomas, ARC Executive Director, Humanities and Creative Arts, to attend a meeting in Sydney with a group of Malaysian University Vice-Chancellors.
- In August 2005 a five-member delegation from Universiti Putra Malaysia met with several ARC executive staff to discuss the evaluation of research funding and industry links. The team leader was Professor Dr Mohd Shahwahid Haji Othman, Director, Rainforest Academy. The delegation was accompanied by Professor Tim Turpin, Acting Director, Australian Expert Group in Industry Studies, University of Western Sydney.
- In April 2005 the Department of Education, Science and Training invited Dr Thomas to attend a meeting with a Malaysian delegation which was in Australia to study benchmarking and best practice, primarily in higher education and with a particular focus on research. The delegates were Professor Dato' Khoo Kay Khim, Professor Emeritus, University of Malaya; Datuk Mustafa Bin Mansur, President of the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers; and Dr Abdul Rahim Bin Ahmad, Director, Community College Division, Ministry of Higher Education.