



Submission No 59

Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Timor-Leste

Name: Mr Luke Gosling

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee

Submission to the
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Luke Gosling, Darwin NT

1. Bilateral relations at the parliamentary and government levels;

Our deep relationship with Timor-Leste goes back to the Second World War where a group of Australian Commandos with the help of the Timor-Leste people operated from late 1941 until late 1942. The Timorese people suffered greatly, with at least as many civilian casualties as our Forces suffered in the entire War. For a small population that loss was huge. The Commandos and their Timor-Leste colleagues conducted a classic guerilla Warfare campaign against the Japanese Imperial Forces and a unique bond was formed that was covered in a film I co-produced, screened on Channel 9, called "A Debt of Honor".

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofAK6roD4dY&feature=youtu.be&noredirect=1>)

The title came from a comment by General Peter Cosgrove, Commander of the Australian-led International Force for East Timor (INTERFET), that our intervention was in part repayment of that debt of honor from World War II. Our ongoing relationship with Timor-Leste is an essential one and one that is taken very seriously and taken to heart by people in Darwin, Palmerston and the Top End.

The Parliamentary Friends of Timor-Leste group plays an important role in navigating a course for our relationship that connects and strengthens our bonds with our good neighbors and friends in Timor-Leste and the work of ALP International has similarly been providing an important link through capacity building for better governance and more transparent processes in Timor-Leste political parties.

2. Aid, including support with governance issues;

Australia has a significant aid relationship with Timor-Leste, that is producing results particularly in the area of governance and health. Programs such as the Seeds of Life boost agricultural yields, but importantly does so with the involvement of local people in the selection of the best tasting seeds and the most acceptable vegetables in the development of sustainable agricultural methods and so on. By combining Australian agricultural science with Timorese needs and culture we not only help end malnutrition but can assist communities in developing an economy beyond subsistence. It is a low fraud, high result approach. Our aid however must be integrated. We need to ask if there is now extra produce which can be sold? Are there roads to get it to market? Are there adequate storage facilities?

Australian aid is also greatly under-appreciated in Timor-Leste. Unlike other aid donors such as China, we do not invest in large-scale infrastructure such as sporting

fields or grand public buildings, so our investment is not immediately apparent. AusAID has recently conducted rebranding and more work must be done so that people can see that more rice, more medical centres, better education and training, more clean water, is possible due to the help of Australia. Otherwise, when Australia talks of the aid it sends, there is a public sense in Timor-Leste that it does not reach the people and is lost in fraud or to highly paid foreign consultants.

3. Economic issues, including trade and investment;

People in Darwin have for many years been assisting with the development of infrastructure and the private sector in Timor-Leste. This has provided jobs and investment for the development of Dili from the ashes.

Business people from Darwin are today working in Dili and the Districts to rebuild Timor-Leste and the people of Darwin, Palmerston and the Northern Territory as a whole are very keen to engage with Timor-Leste. Members of the NT Chamber of Commerce and Industry recently travelled to Dili as a trade delegation and I have discussed with them the possibility of a trade show of NT business visiting Dili as part of the Australian Government's Asian Century Business Engagement program. The need for this was evident from their visit as a trade show allows Timor-Leste Government and business people to see and hear about the goods and services Darwin can offer, while also developing two-way business connections. Essential to any such venture is the preparatory work on the ground and the follow up after the trade show, such as the business matching, relationship development and establishment of solid partnerships on the ground.

The Timor-Leste commercial environment is transforming at great speed. Comments relayed by the trade delegation and comments I've heard over the past couple of years when visiting Dili are "*This place changes every 6 months*" and "*you don't want to wait another two years before getting involved here, by then it will be too late*". Too late, because many others, from further afield, are seeing the development and potential of our neighbour, Timor-Leste.

Upcoming trade visits include up to 50 Swiss business people in early May 2013 and the hosting in June by the Government of Timor-Leste of the '*Investors Conference of Economic and Commercial Cooperation between China and Portuguese Language Countries*'. This said, the clear message from the Timor-Leste Government is that Northern Territory businesses are most welcome and need to be present on the ground and from the President of the National Petroleum Authority - "*There is a need to work with Northern Territory companies to develop partnerships and facilitate joint actions*" – Mr G. da Silva, President

For many years Australia and indeed Darwin was the source of supply for 90 percent of goods for Timor-Leste. The environment has changed and we now need to be proactive, we now need to work to stay connected and we now need to get back on the ground as these large international investors arrive in Dili.

An Austrade officer stationed in Dili would be well placed to promote goods and services from a range of Territory and Australian organisations and businesses. I stress again that our proximity, even in Darwin and Palmerston, is not enough, we need people on the ground in Dili.

4. Cultural, educational and scientific relations and exchanges;

Cultural

The D-Tour concert series has been an initiative of Skinnyfish Music in Darwin and Ego Lemos, a high profile artist from Dili. The tour has been championed by Kirsty Sword Gusmão as it reflects another way in which our two countries are collaborating. This is in the third year of the D-Tour program. There have been two pilots, one in Dili and then last year in Darwin.

This year D-Tour will be held in both cities. 14th September is the Darwin Concert – a ticketed event at the Darwin Entertainment Centre. This will be followed by workshops in both the NT and Timor-Leste with both Australian and Timor-Leste musicians involved before the concert finale in Dili. The Dili concert will be held on 22nd September. This concert is free and is broadcast across East and West Timor. Skinnyfish are currently in discussions with Timor-Leste Government about hosting the Dili component of the D-Tour concert series and it is hoped that private sector and Australian Government funding can be utilised to support this important cultural bridge in the coming years.

Sport

An initiative of the Timor-Leste community in Darwin is the football/soccer “Timor Cup”. Last year the event was held in Darwin and planning is underway for an event in Dili this year where teams of players from Timor-Leste communities around the world will gather in Dili to play for the Timor Cup. This initiative is strongly supported in Dili and is another great example of our community working for greater connectivity. Craig Foster from SBS reported on the Timor Cup in Darwin last year which included teams of players from around Australia and his interest and ongoing support will ensure a national audience in Australia.

There is also an AFL football championship in Timor-Leste. The national team are the Timor-Leste Crocs and is selected from the four team domestic competition. The Crocs have competed in a series of football events in Bali over the past six years, have toured to Darwin twice and to Melbourne and Sydney as a participating team in the AFL International Cup. The sport has been reliant on Australian expat, Police and Defence Force members giving their time to develop the club and the uptake by juniors through Auskick. For the sport to develop or even maintain the current local interest there needs to be an Australian Volunteer International or Australian Youth Ambassador based in Dili to work with AFL Northern Territory and the AFL Timor-Leste committee.

There are other longstanding sporting links through competitions such as the Tour de Timor cycling event to be held 2 – 7 September this year and the Darwin Dili Yacht Rally departing Darwin on Saturday 13 July for the 425 nautical mile journey to Dili.

Medical Training

Darwin now has a medical school, combining the talents of educators at Charles Darwin University and hard working staff at our world class Royal Darwin Hospital. There would be strong support in both Darwin and Dili to see Timor-Leste graduates of this school working in the Dili National Hospital or one of the regional Timor-Leste hospitals.

Timor-Leste is setting up a School of Nursing and maybe this is another option for our International Aid program to show some tangible results. St John of God staff are doing an excellent job at the Dili National Hospital and as time goes on we will have more health professionals that are experienced and capable of working effectively in Timor-Leste.

Education

The Dili International School (DIS) has reached its 10th birthday this year and should be recognised for their excellent work in support of the Timor-Leste and International children that attend. The school has a scholarship program for Timor-Leste children and the Timor-Leste PM also sends his children to DIS. The results are intelligent, worldly, well-educated children that will lead the nation into the future. At DIS there is nation and relationship-building in action through high quality international education and for around \$10–15 thousand per Timor-Leste child it would be an excellent investment to have Federally funded scholarship positions in this Australian run International school.

To my knowledge DIS is yet to receive Australian Federal funding, however it is such a powerful ambassador for our country and our relationship with Timor-Leste that any such support would be a great investment in the future of our bilateral relationship. We should be very proud of DIS, what the school has achieved and what it will produce for this young nation.

School exchanges from Australia have continued in an ad hoc way through the years and provide students an invaluable experience of the way people live in our near neighbor - just one hour flight from Australia.

5. People to people links;

The Sister City and Friendship groups around Australia are a great way for Australians to become involved in people to people links with Timor-Leste. The Dili-Darwin Sister City Committee is seeking to assist the Dili District administration with waste management challenges and is an example of where local Government can work with the community to contribute to finding solutions. As I write there are young Timor-Leste adults in Darwin on work experience exchange and additionally

we have been providing support to an NGO in Dili working with youth called Action For Change.

6. Defence cooperation and those aspects of regional security that affect Timor-Leste.

As a member of the Australian Defence Force, I was fortunate to spend a year as the Commander of a Battalion Advisory Detachment with the 2nd Battalion of the F-FDTL (Timor-Leste Armed Forces) at Metinaro base in 2005.

We focused on skills development including medical and communications and started the capability for F-FDTL engineers to engage in nation-building projects such as school construction as well as initiating Disaster preparedness/emergency management through joint operations that responded to simulated disasters. This type of work has broadened and is vital for our combined and joint work for regional security and response to natural disasters.

The work of the Defence Cooperation Program (DCP) is vital to staying connected to the expanding Armed Forces in Timor-Leste and the range of combined and joint training activities being undertaken. The International Security Force has completed its mission and it is the ongoing work of the DCP that will ensure our continued strengthened relationship with the Timor-Leste Armed Forces and Veterans Community for decades to come. DCP staff should be Timor-Leste literate, not just in terms of speaking Tetun or Portugese but in their understanding of the rich culture and complex history of Timor-Leste.

Note: My sincere thanks goes to Mr Murray Hird from NT Chamber of Commerce and Industry – Trade Start for his input from the NT Trade Delegation to Dili, March, 2013.