

## Background to the Delegation

### The Delegation

- 1.1 Each year a parliamentary committee delegation of up to six members travels to two countries in the Asia Pacific region. These delegations are designed to promote a greater understanding of key regional issues and to strengthen inter-parliamentary relations. In 2011 members of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (the delegation) were selected to visit Indonesia and Tonga. The delegation undertook this visit in September 2011.
- 1.2 The delegation was led by the Hon Alan Griffin MP and comprised of: the Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP, Senator Helen Polley, Senator Scott Ryan and Senator Gary Humphries. At the time of the delegation visit, Senator Humphries was a participating member of the committee.

### Australia's engagement in the region

- 1.3 Australia plays a significant role in the Asia Pacific region through its overseas aid programs, enhancing the capacity and development of countries in the region. In 2012-2013 the Australian Government will provide AUD\$5.2 billion in Overseas Development Assistance, over 70 per cent will be delivered in the Asia Pacific region.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Senator the Hon Bob Carr, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Media Release, *2012-13 International Development Assistance Budget*, 8 May 2012.

- 1.4 One key area in which Australia is involved is providing assistance for good governance programs in the region. It is recognised that good governance can positively impact on other aspects of development. Governance aid has focused on strengthening formal political institutions and processes, building more effective relationships between government and communities, and developing leaders. This has included providing support to parliaments, political parties and in the conduct of elections.
- 1.5 The effective conduct of elections is an important component of good governance and viable democracies, and was of particular interest to the delegation.
- 1.6 In response to the March 2009 report *Power to the People: Australia's support in strengthening political governance in developing countries*, the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) committed to providing support based on full electoral cycles. AusAID draws on the Australian Electoral Commission's (AEC) expertise for relevant programs in the region.
- 1.7 In Australia, the AEC is responsible for conducting federal elections and referendums, and maintaining the Commonwealth electoral roll. The AEC also provides a range of electoral information and education programs and activities, and can conduct elections for industry and organisations on a fee for service basis.
- 1.8 The *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* allows the AEC to provide assistance to authorities of foreign countries and organisations on matters relating to elections and referendums, subject to the approval of the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The AEC's work in the Asia Pacific is funded primarily by AusAID, under a Strategic Partnership Agreement. In recent years the AEC has undertaken electoral support activities in East Timor, Indonesia, Kiribati, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Tonga.
- 1.9 The AEC is one of the founding partner organisations in the Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRIDGE) initiative, an international collaboration that provides practical capacity building workshops for electoral administrators. In 2010 the BRIDGE initiative won the United Nations Public Service Award in the category of 'improving the delivery of public services'. BRIDGE courses have been conducted throughout the world, including Indonesia and Tonga.

## Objectives

- 1.10 The delegation's objectives for the visit were to:
- strengthen parliamentary relationships and cooperation with Indonesia and Tonga; and
  - gain an understanding of the democratic developments in these countries and the electoral support that Australia provides.

## Structure of report

- 1.11 A program of the delegation's meetings and activities is outlined in Appendix A. Chapter 2 focuses on the delegation's visit to Indonesia. Chapter 3 covers the visit to Tonga. Each chapter provides a general country background, key developments in democratic governance and electoral practice, Australia's engagement in providing electoral support, and the delegation's observations on certain key issues.