

Australia's engagement with the Korean peninsula

Introduction

- 1.1 From time to time, the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade conducts broad ranging inquiries into Australia's relations with major countries. Recently, such inquiries have focused on Australia's near neighbours in the Pacific Rim such as Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. This report, however, focuses on North-East Asia with a review of Australia's relationship with the Republic of Korea (RoK) and developments on the Korean peninsula.
- 1.2 Australia has a significant trading relationship with the RoK, but the Committee has widened the scope of this review to include issues such as cross-cultural understanding, and relations between Australian and Korean institutions, both government and non-government.
- 1.3 The inquiry also includes the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) under its terms of reference because developments on the Korean peninsula have the potential to impact seriously on regional trade, stability and security.

The current importance of the Australia—RoK Relationship

- 1.4 The importance of the Australia – RoK trading relationship is substantial. The RoK is the 10th largest economy in the world and the 3rd largest in Asia.¹ In 2004, the RoK was Australia’s 4th largest export market and trading partner.² Broadly speaking the relationship is complementary – Australia exports natural resources to the RoK and imports manufactured goods from the RoK.³
- 1.5 While Australia’s trading relationship with the RoK remains substantial, there is room for much more growth. In addition to the already established trade in primary resources, energy and manufactured goods, there is potential for expansion in areas such as food and entertainment services, automotive parts, financial services, tourism and educational services as well as collaboration in research and development.
- 1.6 In recent years, the RoK has begun to look beyond its immediate region and broaden the scope of its foreign relations. It has negotiated Free Trade Agreements with Chile and Singapore and hosted the 2005 APEC summit.⁴ Similarly, Australia has increasingly focused on closer relations with the countries of Asia, citing this engagement as an ‘abiding priority in Australian foreign and trade policy.’⁵
- 1.7 Enhanced cultural understanding between Australia and the RoK will be an important aspect to closer relations in the future. With the 6th largest Korean population outside of the RoK in Australia, the opportunity for expanded cultural understanding between Australia and the RoK is great.
- 1.8 The RoK and Australia share a range of strategic interests. RoK troops have served in East Timor and are currently serving in Afghanistan and Iraq. The war against terrorism, support for the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and events on the Korean peninsula are issues that have the potential to impact on regional security and will continue to draw Australia and the RoK together.

1 DFAT, *Submission No. 21*, pp. 269, 276.

2 DFAT, *Submission No. 21*, p. 283.

3 DFAT, *Submission No. 21*, p. 283.

4 DFAT, *Submission No. 21*, p. 272.

5 DFAT, *Advancing the National Interest: Australia’s Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper*, 2002, p. xv.

A brief history of Australia's relations with Korea

1884-1950

- 1.9 Australian involvement in Korea was limited in the period prior to the Korean War. In 1884, Presbyterian missionaries from Australia arrived in Korea and, over time, a small number of Koreans were brought back to Australia for vocational and religious training.⁶ Australian missionaries remained in Korea until the end of World War II.
- 1.10 In 1947, the United Nations (UN) voted to establish a Temporary Commission on Korea and, a year later, the United Nations Commission on Korea (UNCOK). Australia was a founding member of both Commissions. One of its delegates helped draft the UNCOK resolution, which was passed during a period when Australian External Affairs Minister Herbert Evatt was President of the United Nations General Assembly.⁷

The Korean War and beyond

- 1.11 Australia's bond with the RoK was solidified in 1950 when North Korea attacked the South. Australia contributed more than 18,000 troops to the United Nations contingent, which fought to defend South Korea. Australia lost 339 soldiers in the conflict, and since that time, the Korean people have acknowledged and been grateful for the 'assistance and friendship that Australia extended to them' in their time of need.⁸
- 1.12 Following the end of hostilities in 1953, Australia became a member of the United Nations Committee for Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea, a position it held until the dissolution of the Committee in 1973. Australia was also one of the first countries to open an embassy in Seoul (1962), thereby extending formal diplomatic recognition to the RoK.⁹

6 O Yul Kwon, Gregory J Trotman, *Australian Perceptions of Korea: Need for Korean Studies, Korea Observer* (Winter 2002): pp. 33-4.

7 Alan Dupont, *Australia's Relations with the Republic of Korea: An Emerging Partnership*, Griffith University: Centre for the Study of Australia-Asia Relations, Australia-Asia Paper No. 58, February 1992, p. 1.

8 Embassy of the RoK, *Submission No. 18*, p. 222.

9 O Yul Kwon, *Australian Perceptions of Korea: Need for Korean Studies*, p. 33.

- 1.13 Australia's trading relationship with the RoK blossomed after the Korean War. A critical point was in 1962, when President Park Chung-hee instituted a series of highly successful five-year plans designed to spur industrial development.¹⁰ Since that time, the RoK has turned itself into an 'internationally competitive and highly industrialized economy.'¹¹
- 1.14 While the 1997 East Asian financial crisis seriously affected its economy, the RoK responded by instituting a series of far-reaching reforms which stabilized the situation and allowed the RoK to emerge from the crisis in a far better position than other affected countries.¹²

Korean migration to Australia

- 1.15 Korean migration to Australia began in the 1970's and has gradually increased over the years. There were 60 Koreans living in Australia in 1970. Today there are approximately 72,963 people of Korean ethnic origin living in Australia. Initial migrants came under family or skilled migration categories; however, since the late 1980's many Koreans have migrated under the business category.¹³
- 1.16 The Korean community in Australia is the sixth largest Korean community outside of the RoK, representing 0.3 per cent of Australia's population but 1 per cent of New South Wales' population. It is a relatively young population with the second generation of Korea migrants just beginning to graduate from schools and universities, yet many in the community have already distinguished themselves in a variety of professional, sporting and artistic fields.¹⁴
- 1.17 In addition, a significant number of Korean-born children have been adopted by Australian families. In 2003-04 there were 98 adoptions, a figure second only to adoptions of Chinese children (112).¹⁵

10 DFAT, *Submission No. 21*, p. 276.

11 DFAT, *Submission No. 21*, p. 276.

12 DFAT, *Submission No. 21*, pp. 277-8.

13 Embassy of the RoK, *Submission No. 18*, p. 242.

14 Embassy of the RoK, *Submission No. 18*, p. 243.

15 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Adoptions Australia 2003-04*, p. 14.

Conduct of the inquiry

- 1.18 In response to the interest of the Committee, on 7 April 2005, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Alexander Downer MP referred to the Committee, an inquiry into Australia's relationship with the RoK, and developments on the Korean peninsula. The Minister agreed with the Committee that the inquiry could serve to enhance Australia–RoK relations and raise Australia's profile as an important source of imports for the RoK economy. The Minister also welcomed the Committee's interest in the serious potential impacts of the current security situation on the Korean peninsula.
- 1.19 The Committee advertised the inquiry in *The Australian* on 20 April 2005. Letters inviting submissions were sent to relevant Ministers, Commonwealth agencies, State Premiers and a wide range of organisations with an expected interest in Australia's engagement with the RoK, and who had an interest in developments on the Korean peninsula. A press release was widely distributed.
- 1.20 The Committee received 58 submissions (listed at Appendix A), 18 exhibits (listed at Appendix B) and took evidence from over 30 individuals and organisations during public hearings in Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney (listed at Appendix C).

Structure of the report

- 1.21 This report continues in Chapter 2 with a discussion of high-level government to government relations, in particular visits involving Commonwealth Government Ministers and Parliamentarians, and high-level defence connections. The chapter also reviews the role of the Australia–Korea Foundation.
- 1.22 Chapter 3 covers the economic relationship between Australia and the RoK and includes a review of the organisations which assist trade and investment. The Committee identifies opportunities to expand intercountry trade and investment. The discussion of economic issues is continued in Chapter 4 in which the Committee identifies and comments on the impediments to the economic relationship.
- 1.23 Chapter 5 discusses cultural interaction between Australia and the RoK and how cultural ties can be strengthened. The theme is explored further in Chapter 6 which focuses on education issues. The chapter

covers the teaching of English and Korean, student exchanges, and scientific research collaboration.

- 1.24 The report concludes in Chapter 7 with a discussion of issues concerning the DPRK. The Committee reviews the DPRK's position in world affairs, the links between the DPRK and the RoK, and Australia's interactions with the DPRK.