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JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE

Foreign Affairs Subcommittee

Monday, 15 September 2003

Members: Senator Ferguson (*Chair*), Mr Brereton (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Bolkus, Cook, Eggleston, Chris Evans, Harradine, Hutchins, Johnston, Sandy Macdonald, O'Brien, Payne and Stott Despoja and Mr Baird, Mr Baldwin, Mr Beazley, Mr Bevis, Mr Byrne, Mr Edwards, Mr Laurie Ferguson, Mrs Gash, Mr Hawker, Mr Jull, Mr Lindsay, Mrs Moylan, Mr Nairn, Mr Price, Mr Prosser, Mr Scott, Mr Snowdon, Mr Somlyay and Mr Cameron Thompson

Subcommittee members: Mr Jull (*Chair*), Mr Laurie Ferguson (*Deputy Chair*) Senators Bolkus, Cook, Eggleston, Chris Evans, Ferguson (*ex officio*), Hutchins, Sandy Macdonald, Payne and Stott Despoja and Mr Baldwin, Mr Beazley, Mr Bevis, Mr Brereton (*ex officio*), Mr Byrne, Mr Edwards, Mrs Gash, Mr Hawker, Mr Lindsay, Mr Nairn, Mr Price, Mr Prosser, Mr Scott, Mr Snowdon and Mr Somlyay

Senators and members in attendance: Senators Eggleston and Stott Despoja and Mr Bevis, Mr Edwards, Mrs Gash, Mr Jull, and Mr Cameron Thompson

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Australia's relationship with the Republic of Indonesia, focusing in particular on building a relationship that is positive and mutually beneficial.

The committee shall review the political, strategic, economic (including trade and investment), social and cultural aspects of the bilateral relationship, considering both the current nature of our relationship and opportunities for it to develop.

WITNESSES

**GRIFFITHS, Mr Ellis, Director of Planning and Policy, Department of Culture and the Arts,
Western Australia 449**

LUCAS, Ms Allanah, Director, ArtsWA, Department of Culture and the Arts, Western Australia 449

MORGAN, Dr Gary John, Executive Director, Western Australian Museum 449

Subcommittee met at 5.39 p.m.

GRIFFITHS, Mr Ellis, Director of Planning and Policy, Department of Culture and the Arts, Western Australia

LUCAS, Ms Allanah, Director, ArtsWA, Department of Culture and the Arts, Western Australia

MORGAN, Dr Gary John, Executive Director, Western Australian Museum

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing into Australia's relationship with Indonesia. The subcommittee took evidence from representatives of the Western Australian government on 18 August by videoconference. Representatives of ArtsWA and of the Western Australian Museum were unable to appear that day. We are pleased to have the opportunity to speak with the representatives from those agencies today by audio conference. The terms of reference for this inquiry require us to examine the political, strategic, economic, social and cultural aspects of Australia's relationship with Indonesia. While we have heard much about some aspects of the cultural relationship—particularly concerning education and language studies—and a little about heritage matters, we have heard a surprisingly small amount about what is being done to foster the relationship around the arts. Your contribution to your government's submission was therefore very much appreciated and I take pleasure in welcoming you to this public hearing today.

Although the subcommittee prefers all evidence to be given in public, should you at any stage wish to give any evidence in private you may ask to do so and the subcommittee will give consideration to your request. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence on oath, I should remind you that these hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and therefore have the same standing as proceedings of the House itself. I invite you to make a short opening statement and then we can proceed to questions.

Mr Griffiths—Thank you. We are thrilled that the committee has paid some attention to what we thought was a modest submission of ours. Committee members would be aware that, in general, the state agencies are very much targeting taxpayers and people within their own jurisdictions, and overseas activity on the whole is reasonably curtailed, being in general a Commonwealth responsibility. But states have increasingly sought special relationships with different parts of the world, for various reasons.

As our submission states, in August 1990 an MOU was signed between the Western Australian state government and the East Java province. Under that agreement, we were able to develop a modest, initially more enthusiastic program of cultural exchange. The emphasis of that agreement changed as other agencies within government tended to shift their gaze to other regions, thinking that there may have been greater benefits in terms of trade and other outcomes for the state. But the Western Australian Department of Culture and the Arts and some of the other agencies within the portfolio have always maintained a very keen interest in this kind of relationship building, and an understanding, I believe, that it is a long-term and very painstaking commitment.

We are still very pleased with some recent developments. Just some two years ago, in partnership with Murdoch University, we were able to secure a purpose-built pendopo to house the gift that the East Java province made to the state of Western Australia in 1993. That has seen a little resurgence in interest and has certainly provided free and open access to schools and students of culture, language and music, in a very strong program at Murdoch University. The department supports that activity through some funding on an annual basis.

Generally things had slowed down probably before the recent tragic events of one year ago. There is an underlying commitment to the belief that there are important opportunities in developing both understanding and future relations in the region and that the arts, culture, sharing knowledge, research and similar activities that are undertaken, albeit on an ad hoc and piecemeal basis at this time, have a great potential to assist Australia's relationship with Indonesia.

CHAIR—Did you say that you started the project not long after 1990? I did not quite hear that.

Mr Griffiths—In August 1990 the MOU was signed between the state government and the province of East Java.

CHAIR—Looking back over those 10 years, overall would you describe it as a success? What particular aspects stick in your mind as being particularly positive in developing relationships between the two communities?

Mr Griffiths—I will call on Allanah Lucas in a minute to talk about some of the specific exchanges, but I think the success has been that we have done it at practitioner level and put real people doing real things in contact with each other, rather than people like ourselves—not that we are not real people. It is artists and people making things. There are a couple of very good examples that Allanah Lucas can mention.

Ms Lucas—We said in our submission that we had some major initiatives that worked very well, one of these being the Black Swan Theatre Company's project based around *The Year of Living Dangerously*. I think perhaps what was significant about that event was all the work that went into it. I think Andrew Ross spent months on end in Indonesia and Black Swan actually brought over artists from Indonesia at various points to interact here. It was showcased at the Perth International Arts Festival. It was given very high profile, whilst at the same time maintaining what Ellis described as a kind of people level—that is, the real contact between the practitioners and the actual practice itself.

Obviously on one part, because of language and because of drama in the Western world having a different kind of meaning, I suppose, all sorts of interesting issues had to be dealt with. But, even in that process, the cultural exchange that went on between artists and designers, incorporating music and, of course, puppetry very much in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, brought a very strong integration of two cultures that many audiences came and enjoyed. In fact, an exhibition was attached to it as well, and we had a photographer, Francis Andrijich, who went up and did a whole lot of very good social photography of people in Indonesia. That was another element of the whole project that built up on the cultural exchange. That one was particularly

high profile and highly successful. I know that Black Swan has tried to continue some further little projects et cetera, but it has been difficult in the current context.

Another initiative was the Gilgamesh project. It was another one that had high profile at the Perth International Arts Festival. A great deal of work had been going on, obviously for many years, behind the scenes, including particularly the WA Academy of Performing Arts, with students involved as well. This was a kind of tri-cultural event because it was Australia, Indonesia and India, with three major artists coming from each country.

That was another very exciting exchange. It had its issues and problems but they were all very much worked through on that highly creative front. The result was quite stunning, particularly when you are talking about the dance elements of *Gilgamesh*. Those were the two projects that we found were perhaps the highest in terms of working from the basics right through to a high-profile level event. They were not done in a year; they took years and years. We have been trying to develop the textiles connection and the crafts connection. That is not so easy because we are talking about individual artists without the framework of an organisation to back them. So that is proving to be bit more difficult. But we do have textile artists in Western Australia that have formed themselves into an exchange group and they are working hard in trying to make these connections.

CHAIR—That is the next step in the project. Have you any other irons in the fire or any other thoughts as to where you would like to go with it in an ideal situation?

Mr Griffiths—Part of the disappointment that we have had is that it has been very difficult to generate any kind of resource at the other end to make it a mutual exchange. A great deal of the cost of any of these projects has had to be found at the Western Australian end. That has presented difficulties for our relatively small-scaled state arts agency.

Mr EDWARDS—Can you expand on the difficulty that you have had in generating a reciprocal arrangement with Indonesia? Is that difficulty based on funding or is it an attitudinal thing?

Mr Griffiths—It is both. Also, it possibly relates to the particular province that we established the memorandum of understanding with. It was not necessarily one of the better resourced areas, although not the poorest either by any means. There were also some difficulties in getting the right bureaucratic arrangements because a lot of their arts responsibilities and their definition of what was included in the arts fitted more in their education portfolio, so sometimes we had to talk to more than one agency to make things happen. So there were both. There were limited resources at the other end and there were just different arrangements and configurations.

Mr EDWARDS—Have you attempted to use any of the federal agencies in an endeavour to better establish relationships? I include in that the Australian ambassador. Have you had any relationships with them at all?

Mr Griffiths—Certainly from time to time. We chair a committee that includes representation from DFAT, Austrade, the Western Australian Department of Industry and Resources, tourism and two others. The committee tries to promote and coordinate the use of arts and culture in international exchange, and we enjoy a very good, open line of communication. It is just that it is

not really our major focus or our core business. From time to time, we have also tried to influence priorities in various other federal bodies.

Dr Morgan—I would make the observation that these types of products need not be unduly expensive. There is quite a spectrum of appropriate developments that could be considered to encourage a better appreciation between Indonesians and Australians. By way of example, we certainly have the intellectual capacity and the infrastructure at the Western Australian Museum—and I know that some other organisations in Western Australia would have complementary skills—to develop small, very mobile packages which would give insights into various elements of Australian culture, including Indigenous culture and modern contemporary Australian culture. We can certainly develop those as small touring packages. We are already doing that through themes and topics which are directly relevant to Western Australia. Being a state museum, that has to be our No. 1 priority, as Ellis was emphasising. However, we certainly do have the capacity to produce not dissimilar products to accompany engagements of various sorts with Indonesia. I think that there is a great deal of opportunity there which need not cost an arm and a leg, so to speak.

Mr EDWARDS—From what you are saying, you seem to place some importance on these relationships.

Dr Morgan—Most certainly, yes. I speak on behalf of my organisation rather than perhaps the state or the nation. The Western Australian Museum has a long history of working in Indonesia, with Indonesians. That includes quite a wealth of scientific endeavour that we have undertaken in Indonesia since the mid-1980s. That has resulted in some invaluable scientific outcomes and a much better understanding of the biological relationships between South-East Asia and Australia—that is, work around Wallace's line and so on. That has been complemented by the work of some of our staff on the culture of Indonesia. We have a number of staff members who have a particular interest in that area and in the cultures of that part of the world. In terms of our strategy as an organisation, we see great importance in developing products that relate to the Indian Ocean, which is of particular regional significance for the cultural organisations of Western Australia. So, yes, I certainly do believe that that is an important area for us. But, as Ellis has said, in terms of our overall service delivery it is something that we have to fit around the important task of servicing the people of Western Australia. But we most certainly could do so, I would suggest, without enormous additional resourcing.

Senator EGGLESTON—I notice that in your submission you talk about cultural exchange programs involving artists coming to WA and going to Indonesia, and also bilateral involvement in festivals. You have mentioned schools. You have also mentioned that funding is a problem. I just wondered to what degree the education departments in East Java and Western Australia support the kinds of exchanges that you are promoting. Is there any degree of ministerial contact between the Western Australian Minister for Education and Training and the East Javanese minister for education, and any other minister responsible for this sort of cultural area in East Java?

Mr Griffiths—We are not aware of any, but we really should not speak on behalf of our colleagues in the Department of Education and Training. We are from the Department of Culture and the Arts and we have a different line of accountability to our own minister. In general, from our perspective, the relationship traditionally has tended to be driven more by our industry and

commerce colleagues, with cultural exchange or a cultural component to any kind of program being there as an add-on, not as the core of it. I do not think education has figured very largely in the process at all.

Senator EGGLESTON—Thank you. I just wondered whether your artists who go to Indonesia, although they are going to participate in festivals and so on, might at the same time be involved with schools. That seems to me to be an area where there would be a great opportunity to provide greater understanding of each other's cultures by involving children and university students.

Mr Griffiths—Yes, I would agree. With every Western Australian artist or person connected with our portfolio whom we have assisted to Indonesia we have always insisted on a training or education component to their visit. We have always sent them up to do in-service training for other professionals, whether they be theatre technicians, lighting people, actors or whatever crafts might be involved. We have always insisted that a visit not be ephemeral, that it have substance, and that they spend some time there—no less than three or four weeks—to get to know people and to develop opportunities to impart skills and the like. We have tried to do that the other way as well—to insist that the masters of gamelan or puppetry that have come to Western Australia also have the opportunity to interact with our profession masters, right down to trainees in our tertiary institutions.

Senator EGGLESTON—Does ArtsWA pay the fares and completely cover the costs of Indonesian artists who come down to WA?

Ms Lucas—There is a mix. We tend to provide funding towards project costs. We never fund anything totally, so we expect those who receive funding to find sponsors or other forms of support. We prefer it to go to the Western Australian component, but obviously if we fund a project we do not trace whether this bit goes to an airfare for an Indonesian artist to come back or whatever. Certainly in the Black Swan case they were supported mainly for their artists going over to Indonesia.

Mrs GASH—How aware are the community of the projects that you are running with Indonesia, and how well do they accept them?

Mr Griffiths—I must emphasise that these are relatively low-key projects. There is a reasonable amount of understanding within the arts and cultural sector that from time to time these opportunities arise and that they are supported, but it is by no means a large-scale, systematic project. I doubt that there is much community awareness other than that of people who have an interest in arts and culture and would see it in our annual reports and the like.

Mrs GASH—Is the aim of your projects with Indonesia purely for the cultural arts world, so to speak?

Mr Griffiths—No. If we were resourced differently we might do things differently. I think there is a belief and an understanding that we are operating within the Australian nation, that there are very many different cultures represented here, but that we also are situated in South-East Asia and in the Indian Ocean context in general and that our artists and our cultural workers benefit from time to time from these sorts of exchanges. They occur with many different

countries. As I said, I do not think it is a systematic program. It is almost demand driven. In other words, if a group of people come to us and say, 'We've got this fantastic idea or collaboration that we've negotiated with Indonesia or some other country,' that would be judged on its merits in terms of its artistic and cultural exchange benefits.

Mrs GASH—Is the project funded totally by the state government or is private enterprise involved in it as well?

Mr Griffiths—There can be different mixes of funding. Sometimes proposals have been brought to us which we have funded partially—as Allanah mentioned, we never fully fund anything. They will often have raised some sponsorship or some private benefactor might have contributed. It is generally mostly state money.

Mr BEVIS—Do you conduct similar programs with other nations or other provinces?

Mr Griffiths—The Western Australian state government has five sister state agreements. Our involvement very much targets those in the first instance. Those sister states are Zhejiang Province in the People's Republic of China, Hyogo Prefecture in Japan, Tuscany in Italy, East Java in Indonesia—and I think I am about to be embarrassed by not remembering the fifth. We will let you know what the fifth one is.

Mr BEVIS—Drawing on your experiences with those other provinces and areas that you have a sister state relationship with, are the programs similar? What can we learn from them that might be relevant to the relationship you have with Java?

Mr Griffiths—I think they have all waxed and waned, because different governments here have had differing priorities on trade strategies and the like. Hyogo was very strong in the late eighties. There is a strong presence now and about a year ago they signed a recommitment there. Every year, in the context of these agreements, there are meetings at which priorities for the forthcoming year are discussed. The administration of those agreements is coordinated through our Department of Industry and Resources, so I really should not speak on their behalf.

Japan and Tuscany are emerging and I think that reflects the fact that, in both Japan and Italy, there is probably a greater capacity to initiate a more equal partnership, if you like. We are certainly dealing on a fairly regular basis with suggestions, ideas and correspondence emanating from both Italy and Japan. Indonesia and China have tended to be more sporadic. China is emerging, but it has not been strong. However, the 15th anniversary of that partnership was celebrated with a very major exhibition at the Western Australian Museum, as it turns out, only the year before last. So it varies.

Mr BEVIS—You refer in your submission to the scope of the program being greater in those first five years, 1990-95, and then somewhat lesser in subsequent years. What sort of money made the difference in that program? What sort of cost is involved to the state in funding the program at, say, the 1990-95 tempo as opposed to what it might be now?

Mr Griffiths—That is really testing my memory. I would have imagined that the administration of the sister state agreements at its peak in the early- to mid-nineties would have been \$60,000 to \$70,000 per annum and that was all. It is less than that now, given that the

priority seems to have shifted more towards direct trade negotiations rather than the more complex approach.

CHAIR—Do you know of any other relationships between other states and the Indonesian provinces? I certainly cannot think of any that have come up in submissions.

Mr Griffiths—No. We are not aware of any.

CHAIR—I thought that the Western Australian Museum, in its submission, was pretty positive on what they thought they could probably achieve by developing this relationship. They went into the idea of combining some of the travelling exhibitions with trade and the rest of it and they were very positive about being able to expand the whole project with additional support. I guess money is really what it is all about. What additional support do you really need to make the thing tick?

Dr Morgan—As I said a moment ago, by the standards of blockbuster exhibitions, we need not be investing vast sums to establish quite ‘intimate’ products—and I use that word quite deliberately—which can demonstrate quite pertinent elements of Australian society, which can then be toured in Indonesia and which conversely can assist Indonesian organisations in developing products which might well come back here. These can contribute a mutual improvement and understanding of the respective cultures.

Having said that, I would suggest to you that the Western Australian Museum, if it had a budget of somewhere between \$100,000 and \$200,000 per year over a three-year period, could develop an array of relatively small modules which could be useful for a variety of purposes. They could accompany trade delegations or political groups that might be visiting Indonesia. They could be housed in a variety of venues in Indonesia and they could make their presence felt to a fairly wide variety of audiences.

I am speaking particularly from the perspective of what might be called the visual arts but also in terms of the interchange of information about our respective cultures. I would suspect that an exchange program or commensurate program that involved performing arts would be rather more costly, but in terms of the type of products that the museum develops which can lever off our collections, based upon the network of contacts we already have in Indonesia—and we have some very positive contacts in Indonesia of both a scientific and a cultural nature—then for a relatively small sum along the lines that I have just indicated we could develop some very positive things over a period of three years which would be connection points both between this state and Indonesia and, arguably more importantly, between Australia and Indonesia.

CHAIR—Following along from that, it was interesting that the Australian-Indonesian Ministerial Forum, which has been going since 1992, has 11 sectoral specific working groups in trade, industry and investment; education and training; minerals and energy; public works and infrastructure; science and technology; transport and tourism environment; agriculture and food cooperation; health cooperation; legal cooperation; and marine affairs and fisheries. Does the arts community get any input that you know of into any of those arrangements in the ministerial forum, or would the arts be another area that you might be able to add to that list to perhaps make it a bit more relevant?

Mr Griffiths—I am not aware of any input into any of those sorts of processes, and I think that is symptomatic of where our sector lies—that often we are not seen as a core function or even an economic sector. We are often seen as an add-on: ‘We’ll take a trade mission, but let’s take a bit of arts just to pretty it up or for the song and dance part of it.’ I think there is important business conducted within the arts and cultural sector, right through to research programs at museums and the like. I think there is enormous potential for exploring mutual understanding and developing it.

The difficulty that I think we have is that a lot of our sector is probably already successful in exports and the like to the rising middle classes in Indonesia, but in terms of selling or importing products from there, the markets are quite different in terms of their tastes et cetera. There would be some way to go before it could be a strong commercial relationship, but in terms of promoting understanding and the like I think there are enormous possibilities, like the ones Gary mentioned.

Senator EGGLESTON—I have just a small add-on. What you have just mentioned are really quite small amounts of money. You said your program is funded to the extent of \$60,000 or \$70,000 a year, and you said that with \$200,000 you could do a lot more. Have you ever given consideration to seeking some kind of support from the department of foreign affairs for the programs you are offering? Obviously, if there were more money, it would be more successful. It seems to me that it could be a good way of spending some federal ‘aid’ money in terms of enhancing people’s understanding of each other’s cultures, were some federal money to go into the kind of program you are offering.

Mr Griffiths—Thank you for that suggestion. We are always very pleased to spend federal money! Seriously, I am not sure that we have specifically tested the aid area but we have certainly had dialogue with both the Australia Council and DFAT, and the foreign minister has an international cultural committee that we try to keep in touch with. They have met here once. Thank you for that suggestion. We can certainly follow up on that.

Mr EDWARDS—I have two short questions. The first one is to you, Gary, but I would appreciate any comment from Allannah or Ellis. Have you noticed any change in attitude by the people in Indonesia that you are dealing toward Australia post Bali or post the war on terror? If so, have you had to devise any new strategies to deal with that?

Dr Morgan—Yes, there has been some degree of change, but I think it could be described as a mutual uncertainty as to what the future holds and a mutual concern that the future, if it takes the wrong track, has a number of very negative aspects and connotations to it. Our involvement with Indonesia and Indonesians is somewhat less now. There are a number of programs which have been noted in the briefing we provided, for which you will see we had intentions, which are on hold. We have a number of projects which we would like to advance on but the political uncertainty and the uncertainty of the reception that Australians might receive in certain areas of Indonesia have quite justifiably ceased them for the time being.

At a one on one level in terms of individual staff members with individual Indonesians, the relationship is still by and large very good and there is a great desire by and large for Australia and Australian institutions to be involved with Indonesia because we are seen to have a great intellectual resource. We are respected in terms of our academia and our institutions and we have

done some good collaborative projects with them in the past. So I think at that level there is a continued desire for a good working relationship but it certainly has been impacted upon by the overall air of uncertainty.

Ms Lucas—The artists who have been working, and continue to work, with Indonesian artists—and I am mainly talking here about visual arts and craft artists at the moment—have reported that there is no change in terms of how they are developing work or ideas or concepts with them. But, as Gary put it, there is that uncertainty about whether they can actually exchange and what the circumstances will be and where they are going to do it. Those sorts of factors are there but the relationship is good. That is what they have reported.

Mr EDWARDS—The only other question I was going to ask was whether any of you had picked up any impact of the travel advisories relating to Indonesia.

Ms Lucas—That is what the artists were talking about mainly: that that had an impact on them in terms of their own concerns about travelling to Indonesia. So that was the only thing.

Dr Morgan—Certainly, like other organisations within Australia, we are treating the situation in Indonesia with great care. Our staff are not going to areas where we feel there is a potential for risks to them, and that obviously has impacts in terms of the ongoing programs and, indeed, the potential to establish new ones.

Mr EDWARDS—Thanks very much. I do not have any further questions. I congratulate you on the work that you are doing. I think it is going to have more importance in the future. Good luck.

CHAIR—Thanks you very much indeed for giving up your time today. If there are any matters on which we might need additional information, the secretary will be in touch. Thank you again for your cooperation. As the arts were part of our charge on this particular inquiry, thank goodness you put in a submission.

Resolved (on motion by **Senator Eggleston**):

That this subcommittee authorises publication of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Subcommittee adjourned at 6.19 p.m.