

Some suggestions for questions for the DFAT representatives appearing before the JSCOT hearing on Monday 26 February 2007:

Background: The National Interest Assessment is derisory. The Committee should not allow DFAT to get away with shoddy paper work on such an important issue:

Q. Why has the National Interest Assessment not addressed, as required, 'the economic, environmental, social and cultural effects of the proposed treaty' and why has the consultation required with 'State and Territory Governments, industry and community groups and other interested parties' not been undertaken, or is incomplete?

Note: these are the requirements set out in the JSCOT documentation on Committee establishment, role and history. <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jsct/ppgrole.htm>

Background: Perceptions are everything and, rightly or wrongly, there is a community perception, or a perception in some quarters, that this treaty is being rushed (some might even say 'bulldozed') through at the expense of Australia's human rights commitments and by paying the high price of renewing cooperation with the well-known, very unsavoury TNI (Indonesia army).

Q. Everyone understands and accepts the sensitivities in Indonesia and in the Australian-Indonesian relationship. Do DFAT and the Government accept that similar sensitivities exist in the Australian community, too, and that they are significant enough to need to be addressed? What is being planned?

Q. What assurances has Australia received that the TNI (the Indonesian Army) has changed its spots to warrant the renewed cooperation forecast in the Treaty? And what efforts are being made to address Australian community concerns about Australia's human rights obligations, especially as these apply to Papua?

Because CLA reps have experienced extraordinary ignorance within the government and department on the subject of Papua in the past, it would be interesting and revealing for the Committee to ask DFAT reps what they know about the background of Papua, why it has been a difficulty in the Australian-Indonesian relationship, and why Australia will need to keep a particular eye on it for the foreseeable future. If they are less than well aware of the historical perspective, the Committee could suggest that they need help to get it right – perhaps by the Parliament using independent expertise to assist them to monitor the situation (as flagged in the CLA submission):

Q. Would DFAT officials agree that knowledge of the history and evolution of a situation helps to understand the present and make the best recommendations for the future? Would they please tell the committee what they know of the background of Papua and why it has been a difficulty in the Australian-Indonesian relationship?

The public documentation is not helpful in showing comparative aid flows over time to this very major recipient of Australian aid (or indeed to any other recipient). It would be useful to flag the Parliament's interest in the aid issue, especially to Eastern Indonesia, and the Parliament's intention to monitor it:

Q. Can DFAT provide the Committee with a statement of the comparative aid flows to Eastern Indonesia, including specifically to Papua, for the past 10 years, the sectors which have been beneficiaries, and a statement of intent for this aid for the next triennium?