




Submission No 31

Inquiry into Australia's Relations with Indonesia

Organisation: Nusantara Indonesian Bookshop Pty Ltd

Contact Person: Mr Bede Harradine
Managing Director

Address: 72 Maroondah Highway
CROYDON VIC 3136

Submission No 31



72 Maroondah Highway
Croydon Vic 3136
AUSTRALIA

Phone (03) 9723 1195
Fax (03) 9723 6650

Email info@nusantara.com.au

Nusantara Indonesian Bookshop Pty Ltd
ACN 077 043 862
ABN 28 077 043 862

25 October 2002

Mr Grant Harrison
Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade
Department of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

EMAIL: jscfadt@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr Harrison,

Please find enclosed our submission to your Committee's inquiry into Australia's Relations with Indonesia.

I have been involved with Indonesia and Bahasa Indonesia since 1975, including as a member or group leader of various delegations/exchange programs to Indonesia, and would be happy to elaborate on any of the points in this submission if required.

Yours sincerely,



(Mr) Bede Harradine
Managing Director
Nusantara Indonesian Bookshop Pty Ltd



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Never has relations with Indonesia been of such monumental national significance to Australia.

Yet, at a time when this is being acknowledged by many at a national level, the Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training has announced cessation of the Commonwealth's support for the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) program.

NALSAS support for Indonesian language programs across Australia has given practical expression to stated national goals. Regular, reliable, substantial and dedicated funding has also permitted the provision to Indonesian language teachers of essential – but otherwise commercially unviable – goods, services and activities.

The loss of specific and dedicated NALSAS or NALSAS-like support will diminish the Commonwealth's actual and perceived commitment to Australia as an Asia-literate society. Coming at a time when events in Indonesia have eroded support for the teaching of Indonesian among some sections of the community, the Commonwealth's decision is a severe blow to the morale of Indonesian language teachers. Inevitably, it will be perceived by other education authorities across Australia as a diminution of commitment, which will contribute to a nationwide collapse of Indonesian language teaching, and the emaciation of providers, both commercial and non-commercial, of related goods, services, and activities.

INDONESIAN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN AUSTRALIA PRIOR TO NALSAS

Prior to NALSAS funding coming on stream in 1994, Bahasa Indonesia language teaching at a school level in Australia was confined mainly to secondary schools. The early 1970s in Australia heralded a golden-age decade for Bahasa Indonesia in Australia. Supported by a ground-breaking ABC Radio course in Bahasa Indonesia, increasing prominence of Bahasa Indonesia at a tertiary and governmental level, and introduction of in-country training in Bahasa Indonesia at Salatiga, Central Java, language studies in Australia expanded rapidly, particularly in Victoria.

By the early 1980s, however, the ad-hoc nature of this commitment, coupled with a paucity of teaching resources, had begun to take its toll, and Bahasa Indonesia went into a deep decline.

By the early 1990s, a renewed commitment combined with a number of new and innovative Australian-produced courses designed specifically for a secondary level to produce an upsurge in interest in Bahasa Indonesia.

THE ROLE OF NUSANTARA INDONESIAN BOOKSHOP

Nusantara Indonesian Bookshop Pty Ltd is the major single supplier of Indonesia-related teaching resources to Australian schools teaching Bahasa Indonesia, and to schools which have incorporated an Indonesia component into their Studies of Asia program.

When NALSAS funding began to flow through in the second half of 1994, Nusantara Indonesian Bookshop was able to expand from a supplier of a limited range of resources, to a profitable supplier of a diverse and expanding range of quality resources sourced from Australia, Indonesia, and across the world.

The services provided by Nusantara Indonesian Bookshop has been a contributing factor in the success of Bahasa Indonesia at both primary and secondary level. As external events has placed Bahasa Indonesia under pressure in recent years, our bookshop has attempted to play a role in maintaining support and morale among teachers.

NALSAS AND THE PROVISION OF BAHASA INDONESIA IN AUSTRALIA

Australia is the only country in the world where Bahasa Indonesia is widely taught as a foreign language. This has important implications.

First, very few printed teaching resources relevant to the Australian context can be sourced from overseas. Conversely, Australian publishers of Indonesia-related teaching resources do not have a ready-made overseas market. This situation is in marked contrast to that which applies to other widely-taught languages in Australian schools, including European languages and Japanese.

Second, Australian-based specialist Indonesian resource suppliers to schools only have a small domestic market to service, with, under normal circumstances, limited economies of scale.

NALSAS changed this matrix.

With regular, reliable, substantial and dedicated funding through NALSAS, numerous Australian publishers have committed to the publication of teaching resources for Bahasa Indonesia.

With the knowledge that schools have access to NALSAS funding, many teachers have self-published teaching resources for Bahasa Indonesia. Other small companies have been established to produce specific and much-needed items such as educational videos.

Additional NALSAS funding, channelled into teacher re-training, workshops, in-country training, and advisory staff, has played a pivotal role in promoting the adoption of Bahasa Indonesia across Australia, projecting its profile, and facilitating its acceptance in the educational community, and through it to the wider society.

Nusantara Indonesian Bookshop is in a unique position to ascertain the impact of the cessation of dedicated NALSAS funding. In speaking with several hundred Bahasa Indonesia teachers over the past few months, the overwhelming reaction is that the cessation of Commonwealth support through the dedicated NALSAS program has come at a critical time in the history of Bahasa Indonesia teaching in Australia, and will therefore have a severe and immediate impact.

WHAT ARGUMENTS HAVE THE COMMONWEALTH ADVANCED TO JUSTIFY THE CESSATION OF DEDICATED FUNDING?

In responding to criticism of its decision to abandon NALSAS funding, the Commonwealth has provided a number of arguments. These points, and our comments, are outlined below:

COMMONWEALTH ARGUMENT: The Government extended funding in 1999 on the basis that the NALSAS Strategy would become self-sustaining by the end of 2002. State and Territory Governments have been aware of this provision since 1999 and should have factored this into their forward planning.

OUR RESPONSE: The NALSAS Strategy gave the Commonwealth a pivotal leadership role in promoting a policy of strategic national importance. With important national leaders urging Australia to renew its commitment to Asia, why is the Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training so keen to walk away? The NALSAS Strategy, clearly, is yet to become self-sustaining – a reason why a renewed State-Federal commitment to promote the Strategy and to achieve eventual self-sufficiency is essential.

COMMONWEALTH ARGUMENT: The Commonwealth will continue to support the Asia Education Foundation (AEF); it will continue to support the Learning Federation to provide "rich, online resources" for Asian languages, and will continue to fund national curriculum resources.

OUR RESPONSE: While these efforts will contribute to the availability of resource material, they are no substitute for a coordinated national approach, well-funded and well-focused. A focus on so-called "rich, online resources" is indicative of an approach which neglects the totality of needs and concerns of teachers in the classroom today as they attempt to implement the NALSAS Strategy.

COMMONWEALTH ARGUMENT: Far from relinquishing its role in this area, the Commonwealth continues to provide \$20 million a year to education authorities through the LOTE Program to support languages generally in school programs, including Asian languages.

SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE
AND TRADE

AUSTRALIA'S RELATIONS WITH INDONESIA

OCTOBER 2002

OUR RESPONSE: The Commonwealth has backtracked from a targeted program to a general approach which fundamentally and visibly lacks focus, direction, and commitment. Only regular, reliable, substantial and dedicated funding will give ongoing and practical expression to the attainment of the specified national goals of Asia-literacy as outlined by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) a mere eight years ago.

**WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR THE COMMONWEALTH TO MAINTAIN ITS
SPECIFIC COMMITMENT TO BAHASA INDONESIA IN AUSTRALIA?**

In a Press Release announcing the renewal of NALSAS funding on 11 May 1999, Commonwealth Minister for Education at the time Dr David Kemp stated that the Commonwealth had "reaffirmed its commitment to the study of Asian languages and studies in Australian schools."

Dr Kemp noted significant achievements of the NALSAS strategy since 1994, but pointed to the need "to consolidate and build on these successes", adding that "it is important that students and teachers continue to acquire sound skills and positive educational outcomes."

While the current funding period from 1999-2002 has realised significant educational outcomes, it is generally acknowledged that the period since 1994 has been too short to consolidate the stated goals of NALSAS. Indeed, it is our submission that the withdrawal now by the Commonwealth from its leadership position in this area will create confusion as to the Commonwealth's commitment.

It is our conclusion that Commonwealth and State educational authorities must actively, repeatedly, and creatively reinvigorate the 1994 decision by COAG to pursue the NALSAS strategy, for the following five reasons:

FIRST AND FOREMOST, the Commonwealth must reclaim its leadership role at the forefront of a national strategy to make Australia Asia-literate. To end dedicated funding at this critical stage will send a message – and an unwelcome example - to State and Territory educational authorities that it is not prepared to back a commitment with dedicated financial resources.

SECOND, a reinstatement by the Commonwealth of dedicated funding will help to end the confusion arising from the mixed messages emanating from our nation's leaders.

In a speech to the Australasia Centre of the Asia Society on 16 October 2002, Federal Treasurer Peter Costello warned that "at these points of crisis we must not withdraw [from Asia]. We must heighten our engagement and our cooperation. We must work together. Australia stands ready to do so."

The current Chief of the Defence Force, General Peter Cosgrove, told Australian school principals on 30 May 2002 that "I am especially encouraged to learn that Japanese and Indonesian are among the four priority languages designated under the Commonwealth national Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools Program (NALSAS)."

Yet, by withdrawing from NALSAS at such a critical time, Dr Nelson as Minister for Education, Science, and Training has sent to Australian teachers, students, parents, and the general community precisely the opposite message.

THIRD, reinstating dedicated funding for Bahasa Indonesia will strengthen the position of Bahasa Indonesia in Australia at a time when events in Indonesia have eroded support among some sections of the community. Given events in East Timor, the political turmoil in Indonesia since 1998, and the tragic events in Bali in October 2002 and its uncertain aftermath, the slashing of dedicated funding is a cruel and catastrophic blow to all teachers of Indonesian across Australia.

FOURTH, a reinstatement by the Commonwealth of dedicated funding for Bahasa Indonesia through NALSAS will give the Commonwealth a pivotal role in securing renewed commitments from State and Territory educational authorities as our nation renews its commitment to a region with which, as Peter Costello has said, "we must heighten our engagement and our cooperation".

FIFTH, a reinstatement by the Commonwealth of dedicated funding for Bahasa Indonesia through NALSAS will give certainty and support not only to teachers in a difficult period, but to specialised suppliers of goods, services, and activities whose role has been critical to the success of the NALSAS strategy.

We urge the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade to recommend to the Parliament and to the Commonwealth that Australia strengthens its engagement with Asia in general, and Indonesia in particular, by renewing its commitment to regular, reliable, substantial and dedicated funding through the NALSAS or a NALSAS-like strategy in Australian schools.

In times as uncertain as these, Australia must capitalise on its comparative advantage in its comprehension of the Asia region. A short-sighted decision to back-peddle on a generational funding commitment after only eight short years may, indeed, come back to haunt us all.