

CHAPTER V

AUSTRALIA'S PRESENT AND FUTURE ROLE IN THE ASEAN REGION

(a) ASEAN: Trends and Prospects

5.1 Consideration of both recent and possible future trends in Australian policies towards the ASEAN region needs to begin with a recognition of the contribution which ASEAN has already made to regional stability and economic growth. Southeast Asia is a region of great diversity in the character of its peoples, states and political and economic systems. The region is open to extensive influence by the major powers and it is continuing to experience rapid socio-economic change. Internal political change continues, as does the potential for tension in inter-state relations. In this context ASEAN has made a substantial contribution not only to stability and economic growth but to the self-confidence of its member states. The direct contributions which ASEAN's own economic co-operation programs have made to the regions' very impressive economic growth have so far been modest. But ASEAN, by moderating tensions among its members and fostering networks of official and private sector communication, has created a spirit of trust and confidence which has enhanced the growth prospects of its members' economies. For many in the region, ASEAN symbolises the international respect which the region's economic dynamism has engendered.

5.2 The continued viability of ASEAN is in the interests both of its members and Australia. A number of factors may affect the prospects for ASEAN's consolidation and further development. Internal developments in the member states will be one key influence. Since its formation, ASEAN has been characterised by a high degree of continuity among its members' leaderships. Three

of the original five members have not experienced a change of head of government since the Association's formation (i.e. Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore). ASEAN has had no difficulty in accommodating the changes of leadership in Thailand and Malaysia, because in each country there has been a consensus among leadership groups about the value of ASEAN. However, should an ASEAN member experience internal political change bringing to power a leadership group with substantially different values to those shared by ASEAN's members, ASEAN consensus and solidarity might be more difficult to sustain. A second key factor will be ASEAN's continuing ability to moderate pressures for inter-state tension among its own members, which the Committee has suggested has so far been achieved with notable success. A third key factor will be ASEAN's ability to accommodate differing orientations among its members towards regional security issues and the roles of the major powers as it continues to press for a revision of the situation in Cambodia. A fourth important factor is likely to be ASEAN's degree of success in pursuing substantive economic co-operation which can give the Association's *raison d'etre* a stronger economic dimension.

5.3 The precise ways in which ASEAN may evolve are not easily predictable, but the capacity for co-ordination and cohesion which ASEAN has demonstrated since 1975 suggest that membership and support will continue to serve its members' regional and international interests for the foreseeable future.

b) ASEAN and Australia: the present relationship

5.4 Australia has developed a wide-ranging series of relations with the ASEAN states and with the Association itself. A number of important Australian interests are embodied in these relations:

- . The ASEAN region is of major strategic importance for Australia, which has an enduring interest in the region's stability and freedom from major power interference or domination. The contribution which ASEAN has made to regional security has been of direct benefit in improving Australia's own security.

- . A substantial and growing portion of Australia's merchandise trade is directed to the ASEAN region. Valuable opportunities exist for the further expansion of trade in both the merchandise and services sector.

- . Australian interactions with ASEAN members have increased in recent years through immigration, through extensive cooperation in relation to Indochina refugees, and through the acceptance by Australia of large numbers of ASEAN students.

5.5 The relationship between Australia and the ASEAN region has been comparatively brief. It has only been possible to develop any extensive political relationship with the ASEAN members since the end of World War II and Australia's association with ASEAN as a group is just a decade old. These relationships have been developed in a time of very rapid and extensive socio-economic change in the region, considerable problems of inter-state tension (especially up to the late 1960s) and a growing sense of regional identity and self-confidence among the ASEAN states. Australia, too, has been changing; its society has diversified considerably (stimulated by immigration from a wide variety of source countries) and its economy has both developed and been subjected to structural pressures through recent problems of economic recession.

5.6 In view of the short time-span which has been involved, the development of Australia's relations with ASEAN can be fairly termed a success. Concord has predominated over discord and many important areas of co-operation have been pursued to mutual benefit. It is most important that the positive, steady pursuit of shared interests should continue, as previous Chapters have sought to make clear.

c) ASEAN and Australia: Future Prospects

5.7 However, while achievements so far may be viewed favourably, the Committee sees a pressing need for a more concerted attempt to consider carefully Australia's present and future role in relation to ASEAN and the Southeast Asian region. While Australia and the ASEAN members share a series of mutual interests, Australia is not necessarily perceived as pursuing a consistent set of policies which support its frequently expressed interest in, and commitment to, the region. Indonesia's Centre for Strategic and International Studies, for example, argued in its submission that,

'Rhetorics have it that Australia forms part of Southeast Asia. Consequently, her future lies above all in the region and in fostering good, neighbourly relations and co-operation with the countries of the region. But such rhetorics have not always been translated in terms of Australian policy towards the region, particularly as regards ASEAN, which does not seem to rank high in Australia's order of priorities ... apart from lip service.'¹

An Australian observer (Professor Mackie) commented in the same vein that '... the ASEAN nations are understandably puzzled by the zigzags and inconsistencies in our regional policies and the discrepancies between our rhetoric and our actions there'.²

5.8 The Committee suggests that if such perceived gaps between Australia's rhetoric and its policy commitments are to be minimised, there is both a need to establish and define the priority which Australia seeks to accord to ASEAN in the context of its wider pattern of foreign policy interests and a need to try to match accorded priority with consistent policy commitments. The Committee sees a number of considerations as being relevant to these tasks:

- . Australia needs to define and elaborate its interests in ASEAN and in the Southeast Asian region, in the context of its other international associations. The Committee recognises the difficulties involved in attempting to establish precisely priorities for particular nations or regional groups in Australia's foreign relations and the undesirability of attempting to fix such priorities rigidly. The Committee does suggest that the ASEAN countries should be assigned a priority in Australian policy-making at a level which is equivalent to that accorded to Australia's other major international political and economic relationships (for example with Japan, China and the EC) and which is exceeded only by the ANZUS alliance and our concerns in relation to the global balance of power and the maintenance of international peace. Such an assignment of priority would clearly not involve the notion of an Australian commitment to agree with any policy propounded by individual ASEAN states or ASEAN as a group; neither Australia nor ASEAN would expect or accept this. It should mean that Australia's interests in relations with ASEAN will be carefully considered in the formulation of policies on political and security issues, economic relations and educational, social and cultural interactions.

- . Australia needs to widen appreciation in the ASEAN region of Australian interests and policies. Extensive discussion and consultation is necessary if Australia wishes to avoid further uncertainty about its role or its degree of commitment to the ASEAN region; this is especially necessary in the context of policies towards Indochina.

- . Pursuit of cooperation with ASEAN should be based on the recognition that Australia's political culture and processes are substantially different from those of the ASEAN states and these differences are unlikely to diminish. Even with a concerted effort to promote mutual understanding, differences of perspective on some socio-political issues (for example, human rights questions and the role of the media) are likely to persist. The quality of the Australia-ASEAN relationship should not be indicated by the attainment of a complete identity of outlook and viewpoints, but the achievement of a pattern of growing political, economic, educational and social interactions. The Committee's proposal concerning the establishment of an Australia-ASEAN Council is very relevant in this context.

- . Australia should try to ensure that the various strands of its policies towards the ASEAN region are mutually consistent. Rhetorical commitments to the ASEAN region need to be backed up by consistent pursuit of shared political and economic interests. It should be noted that rhetorical assertions about the importance of the ASEAN states to Australia can easily lead to false hopes and expectations about the degree to which Australia will, on specific political and economic issues, be prepared to accommodate ASEAN interests. Too much fulsome rhetoric from Australia will be an impediment to the relationship.

- . It should also be recognised that the interaction between political and economic policies can be important in the ASEAN relationship. For example, if Australia is to be able to develop its service industries' involvement in the ASEAN region, the degree to which such involvement is likely to be welcomed will be influenced by the degree to which Australia is seen as politically interested in, and sympathetic towards, ASEAN interests.

5.9 As Chapters II, III and IV have emphasised, Australia has extensive opportunities to consolidate its association with the ASEAN region, especially in economic, social and educational fields. If Australia is to be well-placed to pursue these associations, the Committee feels that several major policy areas require careful and detailed consideration:

- . Australia needs to pursue immigration and refugee policies mutually acceptable to it and to the ASEAN countries.
- . Policy towards overseas students from the ASEAN region needs to be able to accommodate both ASEAN demands and Australia's own educational needs and interests.
- . Australia needs to pay much greater attention to the need to promote Asian studies in Australia, not just in the area of specialist studies, but to assist interested sectors of the community (especially in business) to become more aware of the opportunities to be gained from association with the ASEAN region and more knowledgeable about ways of pursuing such associations. The proposed Asian Studies Council, which is supported by the Committee, could make a valuable contribution in this area. The evidence

received by the Committee indicates that there has been a striking disparity between the degree of Australian rhetorical statements on the importance of Asia in general and ASEAN in particular, and the degree of support and planning being directed towards Asian Studies. In the long run it is most important that the Australian government is able to pursue its policies towards the ASEAN region in the context of a more informed base of public awareness of the region and access to information about it.

5.10 The pursuit of closer Australia-ASEAN relations need not involve an attempt by Australia to become 'part of Asia'. Indeed, the very notion of being 'Asian' is in itself unclear; there is no uniform concept of 'Asian identity' with which Australia could properly identify. The pursuit of a generalised sense of Asian identity would be likely to satisfy neither Australia, nor Australia's Asian neighbours and partners.

5.11 The Committee observes that Australia is, however, located in contiguity to Asia (especially ASEAN) and shares important common interests with its Asian neighbours. While Australia's ethnic and cultural identity is likely to remain distinctly different from those of its ASEAN neighbours, increased cooperation between Australia and ASEAN can bring Australia a greater understanding and appreciation of the ASEAN states and substantial mutual benefits. Australia will be affected by, and will continue to be involved in, regional developments. What Australia can most usefully pursue in the context of relations with ASEAN is an improved level of mutual awareness and understanding, increased economic interactions and cooperation on political and security issues to enhance regional security and minimise the destabilising potential of major power interference.

The Hon W.L. Morrison, MP,
Chairman.
October 1984.

1. Evidence, pp.S160-161.
2. Evidence, p.S967.

APPENDIX 1

Conduct of the Inquiry

1. In December 1983, the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence resolved to inquire into 'Australia and ASEAN' and referred this inquiry to one of its three sub-committees. The Sub-Committee on Australia and ASEAN resolved to focus its inquiry on the implications for Australia of political and economic developments in the ASEAN region.

2. The Sub-Committee sought written submissions from both Australian and ASEAN sources. A total of 57 submissions, including 8 from the ASEAN region, were received (and are listed in Appendix 3). The Committee wishes to express its appreciation of the quality and comprehensiveness of most submissions, including those from Commonwealth Departments, the key business councils, the Australian Council of Trade Unions and academic specialists.

3. The Sub-Committee held a total of 21 meetings, including 9 public hearings in Adelaide, Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney, between April and August 1984. Witnesses who appeared at public hearings are listed in Appendix 2. As with the submissions, the quality, volume and scope of oral evidence was generally impressive.

4. The Sub-Committee was particularly concerned to hear the views of ASEAN-based experts. It benefitted considerably from informative discussions in Canberra with the Heads of Mission of ASEAN countries, and with a group of four prominent ASEAN-based academics. A spirited exchange of views took place with a party of ASEAN journalists visiting Australia at the invitation of the Australian Government. The Sub-Committee also met with a number of parliamentarians from the ASEAN region, including the Malaysian Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry.

5. Dr Frank Frost served as specialist adviser to the Sub-Committee, on secondment from the Legislative Research Service of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library. To all persons who participated in its inquiry, the Committee expresses its appreciation.

APPENDIX 2

Organisations or Persons who Gave Evidence at Public Hearings

Amnesty International, Sydney
Anderson, Dr Kym, University of Adelaide
Angel, Dr. J., University of Sydney
Arndt, Professor H., ASEAN-Australia Project, Australian National
University, Canberra
Asian Studies Association of Australia, Sydney
Australia-Indonesia Business Co-operation Committee, Canberra
Australia-Philippines Business Co-operation Committee, Canberra
Australian Council for Overseas Aid, Canberra
Australian Council of Trade Unions, Melbourne
Australian National Line, Melbourne
Australian Shippers' Council, Sydney
Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, Canberra
Aviation, Department of, Canberra

Catley, Dr Robert, University of Adelaide
Chandler, Dr David, Monash University, Melbourne

Education and Youth Affairs, Department of, Canberra
Edwards, Dr Clive, Canberra
Export Finance and Insurance Corporation, Sydney

Foreign Affairs, Department of, Canberra

Girling, Dr J., Australian National University, Canberra

Healey, Mr Derek, University of Adelaide
Hill, Dr Hal, ASEAN-Australia Project, Australian National
University, Canberra

Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Department of, Canberra
Ingleson, Dr John, University of New South Wales, Sydney

Kiernan, Dr B., Monash University, Melbourne

Leigh, Dr M., University of Sydney, Bibliographic Information on
South East Asia
Lim, Dr R., University of New South Wales

Mackie, Professor J.A., Australian National University, Canberra
Mediansky, Dr F., University of New South Wales
Miller, Professor J.D.B., Australian National University,
Canberra

Price Waterhouse and Partners, Sydney

Radio Australia, Melbourne

Skinner, Commander C.J., RAN, Sydney

Thai-Australia Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Sydney
Trade, Department of, Canberra
Transport, Department of, Canberra
Treasury, Department of the, Canberra
Tucker, Dr Ken, David Syme Business School, Melbourne

Vickery, Dr M., University of Adelaide

Yahuda, Dr M., University of Adelaide

APPENDIX 3

Submissions Provided to the Inquiry

Amnesty International, Sydney
 Angel, Dr J.R., University of Sydney.
 ASEAN-Australia Business Council (ASEAN Section), Kuala Lumpur,
 Malaysia
 ASEAN-Australia Business Council (Australian Section), Canberra
 Asian Studies Association of Australia, Sydney
 Australia-Indonesia Business Co-operation Committee, Canberra
 Australia-Philippines Business Co-operation Committee, Canberra
 Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sydney
 Australian Council for Overseas Aid, Canberra
 Australian Council of Churches, Sydney
 Australian Council of Trade Unions, Melbourne
 Australian Film and Television School, Sydney
 Australian National Line, Melbourne
 Australian Shippers' Council, Sydney
 Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, Canberra
 Aviation, Department of, Canberra

Benard, Mr Yves, Taipei, Taiwan
 Bibliographic Information on Southeast Asia, University of Sydney
 Brown, Mr S.M., JP, Morisset, New South Wales
 Buszynski, Dr Leszek, National University of Singapore.

Campbell, Professor R.S.F., James Cook University, Queensland
 Catley, Dr R., University of Adelaide.
 Centre for Strategic & International Studies, Jakarta,
 Indonesia.
 Chandler, Dr David P., Monash University, Melbourne.

Defence, Department of, Canberra

Education and Youth Affairs, Department of, Canberra
 Edwards, Dr C.T., Canberra
 Export Finance and Insurance Corporation, Sydney

Foreign Affairs, Department of, Canberra

Ghose, Mr Supad Kumar, Dhaka Varsity, Bangladesh
 Girling, Dr John, Australian National University, Canberra

Healey, Mr Derek T., University of Adelaide
 Hill, Dr Hal, Australian National University, Canberra
 Home Affairs & Environment, Department of, Canberra
 Hutauruk, Mr W., Jakarta, Indonesia.

Immigration & Ethnic Affairs, Department of, Canberra
 Industrial Development, Department of, Perth
 Institute of Strategic & International Studies, Kuala Lumpur,
 Malaysia.

Leng, Dr H.S., University of Adelaide
 Lim, Professor David, Griffith University, Brisbane.

Mackie, Professor J.A.C., Australian National University,
 Canberra
 Macnee, Joan, Reservoir, New South Wales
 Miller, Professor J.D.B., Australian National University,
 Canberra
 Murray, Mr B.L., Canberra

National Library of Australia, Canberra

Price Waterhouse & Partners, Canberra

Skinner, Commander C.J., RAN, Sydney
 Summerton, Mr R.B., North Plympton, South Australia

Thai-Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Sydney
 Theeravit, Dr Khien, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand
 Trade, Department of, Canberra
 Transport, Department of, Canberra
 Treasury, Department of the, Canberra

University of Adelaide, Centre for Asian Studies.
 University of Sydney, Centre for Asian Studies.

Wicks, Peter C., Toowoomba, Queensland
 Wilkinson, Mr J., Sydney

APPENDIX 4

Exhibits

1. Report of the Asian Studies Committee to the Fifth Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia.
2. Letter from the Treasury to the Sub-Committee Secretary dated 17 May 1984 concerning Australian bank operations in ASEAN countries.
3. Letter from Department of Trade to the Sub-Committee Chairman dated 28 May 1984 concerning ASEAN investment in Australia, and Australia's overseas aid program.
4. Department of Trade Internal Research Memorandum No. 6, 'Export-Employment Model'.
5. Department of Trade, 'ASEAN-Australia Trade and Trade Relations: Main Elements'.
6. Department of Foreign Affairs, 'Indo-Chinese Refugees: Australia's Resettlement Role'.
7. Letter from the Industries Assistance Commission to the Sub-Committee Chairman dated 3 July 1984 concerning ASEAN import performance and Australian industry assistance.
8. Department of Transport letter to the Sub-Committee Secretary dated 2 July 1984 concerning Australia-ASEAN shipping services.
9. Department of Transport letter to the Sub-Committee Secretary dated 16 July 1984 concerning freight rate comparisons on Australia-ASEAN routes and United States-ASEAN routes.
10. Letter from the Secretary, Department of Education and Youth Affairs, to the Sub-Committee Chairman dated 14 August 1984 concerning Asian studies in Australia.
11. Letter from the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs to the Sub-Committee Secretary dated 13 August 1984 concerning ASEAN students in Australia.
12. Letter from the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs to the Sub-Committee Secretary dated 24 September 1984 concerning settler arrival statistics for ASEAN countries.
13. Letter from the Department of Industry and Commerce to the Sub-Committee Secretary dated 2 October 1984 concerning import penetration and employment trends in TCF industries.