

Minister for Foreign Affairs, The Hon Julie Bishop
Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, The Hon Steven Ciobo
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
White Paper Public Submission Process

28 February 2017

Dear Minister Bishop and Minister Ciobo,

The undersigned are pleased to present this written submission to your department's request for submissions to its White Paper. The views expressed in this document will be supplemented by a public consultation to be undertaken at DFAT's NSW offices on 3 March 2017.

The creation of the DFAT White Paper comes at an important time for Australia's role in the region. We acknowledge and agree with Minister Bishop's comments: the dynamics of our region are changing rapidly, requiring a considered response from Australian business, NGOs and the government.

We believe that building strong relationships with young leaders across the region is vital to supporting Australia's national interest, and will support DFAT's stated objective of maintaining strategic and political stability in the region.

As its commitment to a number of youth-directed programs shows, the government already understands the importance of building relationships with young people (most of which address students aged 16 - 25). The New Colombo Program, Australia Awards scholarships and short-course programs, and a wide number of government-supported bilateral exchange programs all acknowledge the value of early engagement with the region's young population.

Important work is also being done in the community to enhance Australia's soft power in the region, in part by our organisations. Over the last seven years, via the work we are undertaking, an increasing cohort of young Australian volunteers and their peers across Asia have made significant contributions to Australia's regional standing. Our organisations target "young professionals" (largely in the ages 25 – 35), an area where there are few other formal initiatives underway. In our work, we are contributing:

- ~3500 young leaders across Indonesia, India, China, Vietnam and Japan are engaged annually by our organisations to participate in bilateral or multilateral events involving Australia
- ~\$1.5m of finance and volunteer-hours mobilised annually to support these initiatives
- Large and expanding network of people, resources and commentary emanating from these youth organisations into the broader community

The value of this work for Australia – and the government – has been considerable. Young people from a wide range of cultures, industries, disciplines and backgrounds enjoy the opportunity to learn about Australia, to have positive interactions with Australia, and in many cases to continue relationships with Australia that first began during university study and require ongoing nourishment. The advantages to Australian industry and government are manifold:

- Access to high-quality talent for Australian businesses
- Development of a large, cross-industry network of people with favorable disposition towards Australia

- Engagement with an age group where there is limited existing government or industry infrastructure and which maintains relationships that generally emerged during studies in Australia
- Very low capital costs for government and sponsoring businesses, but with a high financial and soft-power ROI
- Opportunity for the government to engage with high-profile individuals outside of a political or formal setting

The work our organisations undertake develops a critical asset that will benefit Australia's long term interests in the region: strong relationships with future leaders. We have no doubt the government agrees with this assessment, but we believe it should cooperate with our organisations more closely to ensure it maximizes the value of the work we are doing for the long term benefit of Australia, its industry and its people.

DFAT should harness the individual work being undertaken by each of our organisations by having a consistent, planned and systematic approach to youth engagement:

- Establish a youth-advisory committee to meet twice annually and advise the government on important aspects in regional youth affairs
- Annual consolidation of youth recommendations – an output of most of our dialogues – to examine collective recommendations on how to improve bilateral ties across the region
- Develop a systematic approach within government to collect and utilise the networks and relationship generated by youth groups and ensure they are nourished and maintained
- Guarantee of \$30,000 - \$50,000 per organization on an annual basis for the next three years to reduce the administrative burden of fundraising every year. This is the range of funding our organisations typically receive from the government, so this is a cost-neutral recommendation that will provide us stability of funding to enable organisations to commit to more long-term planning. We would request that an allocation of funding along these grounds not exclude us from seeking additional project-based funding from bilateral organisations (e.g. Australia Indonesia Institute or Australia-China Council).

We look forward to working with the department and discussing how these proposals can be implemented. We believe that the hard work and commitment of volunteers in our organisations has generated a considerable asset for Australia's soft-power. We are willing to work closely with DFAT and the Australian government to ensure the benefit of our work is properly incorporated into the government's overarching foreign policy and ensure its full value is reaped by the nation.

We look forward to presenting these ideas to you on 3 March and to any further discussion about how we might implement these changes.

Yours Sincerely,

Bede Moore (Founder & Chair, CAUSINDY)
 Mathew Benjamin (Program Director, AsiaRecon)
 Karan Anand (Chair, Australia India Youth Dialogue)
 Nicholas Mark (Chair, Australia Indonesia Youth Association)
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