

## INTRODUCTION

Somos21 is an organisation promoting greater connectivity and collaboration with and between young professionals in Australia and Latin America to deliver positive personal, professional and social impact.

Latin America will become increasingly important to Australia over the next 10 years as the region's economies grow in similar key markets and industries.

We established Somos21 to fill the void that currently exists in Australia with regard to Latin American relations, and to enhance our focus and capacity as a nation to capitalise on the opportunities the Latin American region and its people present.

We appreciate that there is only so much we can do without the commitment and support of a Latin America-conscious foreign policy at the national level, and so we are hoping this submission will provide the Australian Government with adequate impetus to enhance its focus on this region in future foreign policy decisions.

Our submission is primarily expressing the needs and observations of Australia's foreign policy as it relates to the Latin America region and has been prepared based on:

- i. Our broader thoughts regarding Australian foreign policy, as expressed in the Preamble, which relate to the specific questions raised in the #fpwhitepaper Call for Submissions.
- ii. Our observations over the past 18 months as an organisation operating across Australia and Latin America, engaging with key stakeholders from government, industry and civil society.
- iii. Contributions from our network of Australian and Latin American professionals across Australia and Latin America who are actively seeking greater opportunities to engage productively and collaboratively across these two regions

We have also based our submission on the following assumptions:

- i. That's DFAT's purpose remains unchanged: *To help make Australia stronger, safer and more prosperous by promoting and protecting our interests internationally and contributing to global stability and economic growth.*
- ii. That DFAT's core objectives remain unchanged – i.e. to: *advance Australia's security interests internationally; shape the regional and international environment and strengthen global cooperation in ways that advance Australia's interests; open up new markets and create conditions for increased trade and investment to strengthen our economy and create jobs; lift living standards and reduce poverty in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond; project a positive and contemporary image of Australia as a destination for business, investment, tourism and study; and provide high-quality passport and consular services to Australian citizens.*

With these assumptions in mind, we have prepared the content of our submission in alignment with the six key focus areas of the DFAT portfolio. While we have obviously not been able to cover all aspects of Australia's foreign policy and its associated implications for our network of professionals across Australia and Latin America, we are hoping that the submission will at least provide an insight into some key areas of consideration, and initiate more robust, ongoing dialogue between our organisation and those Australian government agencies which are developing policies and programs of relevance to the Australia-Latin America relationship.

## PREAMBLE

### 1. Australia's National Interests

Defining Australia's national interests requires an honest and inclusive reflection of the multicultural communities which currently constitute the Australian social fabric.

Australians are acknowledged to be inclusive, fair, grounded, supportive, open-minded, innovative and independent. The challenge lies in ensuring that as a country we exhibit these same values in our foreign policy.

A change in approach is necessary as the nature of global relations is no longer regionalised – the world is so intimately interconnected that geographic proximity is no longer the primary indicator of strategic interest.

Improvement in our foreign policy requires a paradigm shift in our view of Australia's position in the world and our key strengths in the global network.

### 2. Diverse interests that span the globe

Australia's diverse interests, strong relationships, and positive reputation as a trade and development partner provide us with a unique opportunity to position ourselves at the centre of various cross-regional initiatives. We have the capability and capacity to broker commercial, social and economic development opportunities between countries and regions, and could do so successfully if we strategically and proactively positioned ourselves to do so.

We can deepen and diversify key relationships through a more honest and transparent acknowledgement of our interests and commitments, and a bipartisan agreement on long term objectives and commitments regarding Australia's place in global society.

The greatest global issues impacting Australia's security and prosperity are:

- i. the undeniable socio-economic impacts of climate change and the implications for industry, local and regional communities, and international trading partners;
- ii. the management of growing protectionist and nationalist sentiment in a multicultural society and a truly globalised world.

By defining a Strategy for Australia – with clear long term objectives which are agreed to by all parties – as the roadmap for the country moving forward, Australia would be best placed to address these issues both domestically and internationally.

Such a Strategy would not only provide the certainty and assurance local and international businesses, investors, research institutions and not-for-profits need to successfully position themselves for future growth with both the Australian and international markets, but also provides a stable platform for engagement with the international community on issues of critical global and long term significance.

### 3. Influential player in regional and international organisations

Maintaining a focus on regional organisations which promote our engagement with the Asia-Pacific region is critical. That said, promoting greater involvement and focus on regional organisations in other parts of the world in which we have a connection, interest and/or presence (be it due to trade,

national security, research collaborations, investment, private sector / civil society activity) would be highly beneficial. Globalisation and ease of capital mobility (be it human or financial) means that Australia can no longer afford to focus solely on the Asia-Pacific region.

Internationally, Australia would definitely benefit from supporting and engaging more dynamically with the UN and its associated agencies. There are very few Australian-based opportunities for people to work and engage with these organisations, and this should not be the case. Supporting, promoting and creating a stronger presence of UN-based agencies in Australia, would enable non-State entities to engage more dynamically with the international community and would help inform and develop policy and regulatory changes in light of global dynamics.

By taking a more active stance in international organisations, and allowing Australians the opportunity to engage more actively in these organisations from Australia, we can enhance our understanding of and networks within the UN system and maximise our global influence as a nation.

#### **4. Ambitious in grasping economic opportunities**

Given changing nature of business, greater support, incentives and opportunities should be provided for small to medium enterprises seeking to engage internationally. The government should be actively supporting and promoting the activity and effectiveness of the various regional and bilateral chambers of commerce.

To take advantage of opportunities in the global economy Australia needs to be better attuned to global markets, trends and developments. The degree of international news coverage in Australian media is far from sufficient to enable international awareness, and internationally focused skills should be required within one national curriculum for primary and secondary students. Europeans will generally speak a minimum of 3 languages. If Australia wishes to compete in this global economy, it needs to start building the capacity of its population to operate globally, and to better leverage the global capabilities we have given our multicultural society.

#### **5. Confront range of strategic, security and transnational challenges**

Australia can best deal with instability beyond our borders by increasing the support and engagement provided to communities who originate from the affected areas. By empowering them to empower and support their families back home we can have an enormous impact both domestically and internationally.

A more prosperous, peaceful and stable region will result from a more inclusive and user-centred approach to program and policy development and implementation.

#### **6. Range of assets and capabilities to pursue our national interests**

Australia has all the assets and capabilities it needs to successfully advance its foreign policy interests in future – however, it appears to lack the systems and processes to effectively identify and leverage these capabilities. Ensuring ambassadors have the regional knowledge and linguistic capabilities to integrate effectively into local society and engage in depth on topics of social, economic or political significance should be a priority – and yet this is not the way appointments appear to be made.

Relationships, trust and understanding are critical to Australia's success in foreign affairs and trade. It is hard to develop these effectively when postings are only for period of three years, and when

representatives lack the linguistic skills to hit the ground running. DFAT has enough multilingual resources and regional experts within its ranks to be able to successfully commit only resources who are experts in a specific region to represent our country's interests in that region. There may be a very logical reason why DFAT does not do this, however it would be great for the reasoning to be communicated as it seems quite strange.

To work more effectively with other sectors, the Government would benefit from engaging people from these sectors within their ranks to broker and facilitate those relationships. Equally, a true understanding of the motivations, drivers, and challenges faced by these sectors in their international operations would greatly enhance Government's ability to support and promote their interests both domestically and internationally.

## LATIN AMERICA AND AUSTRALIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

### A. International Relations

Australia's focus for international relations has long been centred on the Asia-Pacific region – which was justifiable for a period given our geographic proximity and the need to secure strong relations and stability in the region.

Today, this sole regional focus is no longer sufficient, or beneficial for Australia's position in the global economy. We need to be more proactively engaged in international relations beyond the Asia Pacific region, particularly as our population and our economy continues to grow through immigration and investment from all corners of the globe.

Our commitment to global themes needs to be upheld within both our domestic and foreign policy, not only in terms of our policy commitments but also in the way we engage with other regions and communities.

There is currently a virtual abyss between the Australian Government's public statement of commitment to global issues and their policies and actions they adopt both nationally and internationally to address them. This has significant implications and risks for our reputation within the international community.

Below are just three examples of global issues for which Australia's actions both domestically and internationally do not align with DFAT's stated values, policies or commitments. These observations are merely to highlight the need for a prescriptive foreign policy which goes beyond commitments, and ensures that issues that are of national and global significance are given the focused attention they deserve.

- i. **Climate change:** Despite our adoption of the Paris Agreement, including an ambitious target to reduce emissions by 28% below 2005 levels by 2030, we don't have a federal carbon policy and are the only country in the world to have instigated and removed a price on carbon. We also fail to promote an active renewable energy industry, despite having the most appropriate geographical conditions on the planet and some of the most advanced research, technological innovation and expertise in the field which we continually lose to foreign nations.

Climate Change is undoubtedly a field in which Australia has the capability, expertise and the natural and human capital to become a global leader – both from a mitigation and adaptation perspective. The opportunities for research collaborations, industry partnerships, technology and knowledge transfer, and high level policy and management exchange and advisory, particularly with the Latin American region which shares similar geographic and climatic conditions to Australia, are endless.

Equally, Australia has a lot to learn from Latin American cultures which maintain a strong connection to nature and the environment, a stronger appreciation of the fundamental ecosystems which support our existence, and a national recognition of the importance of maintaining the integrity of these fundamental ecosystems in the face of a changing climate.

A large proportion of professionals in our network are engineers, and many of them are seeking opportunities to engage in renewables and environmental engineering related opportunities between the two regions as they are aware of the synergies and market potential. As such, they are surprised and disappointed by the lack of activity and professional opportunities in this field.

- ii. **Human rights:** Despite being an original signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we do not necessarily demonstrate this commitment with regard to issues of international relevance. For example: the offshore processing, detention centres, and the blatant mistreatment of refugees in the system is a point of increasing shame for Australians; the poverty, inequality and injustice faced by our indigenous communities, and the poor standards of health, education and sanitation in remote indigenous communities, are inconceivable given our status as a developed nation; our handling of the situation on Norfolk Island, with residents being forced to become Australian citizens against their will, has been described by some members of the international community as one of the most underhand, unethical, and unjustifiable territorial takeovers committed by a democratic nation this century.

Recent political suggestions that the Australian Commission for Human Rights should be disbanded is another indication of the lip service we pay as a nation to an issue of fundamental significance nationally and globally.

With regard to the Latin American community, Australia's commitment to the protection of fundamental human rights for those people who come to our country to live, work and travel is often called into question. We promote our education sector, yet do not regulate the education agencies to ensure protection of incoming students. As a result, students arrive having paid their university fees and become trapped in compromising financial positions due to false messaging and misleading information regarding work opportunities and cost of living in the country. In addition, international students are not entitled to student travel concessions in certain states, which significantly increases the cost of their experience and, given their vulnerable financial status, are often caught in compromising work arrangements where they are trapped and coerced into working in unfavourable conditions or without pay with no recourse for action.

On the DFAT website we say that "a commitment to human rights reflects our national values

and is an underlying principle of our engagement with the international community.” This is not really evident in our dealings with the international community either on or off our shores. As a nation whose values are inherently aligned to fundamental human rights, we really need to ensure they are proactively integrated at the forefront of both our domestic and foreign policies. We can't just assume we have this covered. Capacity building around human rights, particularly for government and industry players representing Australia internationally, and prescriptive inclusion of human rights causes in our policy and procedural documentation is critical to ensuring we maintain our national values and positive reputation on the world stage.

*iii. Indigenous peoples* Despite adopting the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (after embarrassingly being one of only four countries to vote against it in 2007), we still see incredible inequality and disadvantage within our indigenous communities. Unlike some other nations, we are not proactive in integrating indigenous knowledge, culture and learnings into our policies and management approaches, nor do we effectively and positively acknowledge, support and promote the culture and heritage of our Indigenous Peoples at a national level. It is not to say the Government is not taking this issue seriously – undoubtedly it is. However, there is much healing to be done given actions of the past, and there is much opportunity for improvement in our engagement moving forward.

There is a great opportunity to leverage the knowledge and strength of the Latin American indigenous communities to support our Indigenous Peoples to recover the power of their cultural identity. After decades of policy and engagement which has drawn them away from their traditional lands, cultures and rituals, providing them with the opportunity to reconnect, and to learn from other indigenous communities about approaches for maintaining and fostering their cultural heritage and traditional knowledge whilst integrating in modern society.

Latin America provides a unique region for such knowledge sharing as many countries in the region share the same experience of having marginalised indigenous populations who have had to fight (and continue to fight) for their rights, to maintain their connection to the land, and to retain their identity in the face of a dominating colonial culture. Providing our Indigenous Peoples with a connection to Latin American indigenous communities would provide them with an empowering insight into the opportunities and benefits of retaining that cultural connection and using it to positively contribute to the sustainable development of their nation.

These observations have been raised in this submission as Latin Americans within our network often express surprise, concern and disappointment that Australia (as a developed nation with strong values) is not managing these issues as effectively as they would have thought, hoped and expected. They often come seeking to learn from the Australian example, only to realise that actually it is Australia that has a lot to learn. We have the capability and capacity to be leaders in all of these fields and to set the global standard, and yet we fail to do so.

If Australia could step away from domestic political positioning and establish a bi-partisan agreement on the role we wish to play in the world, and a shared vision of how we wish to be viewed by the rest of the world, we could effectively align our domestic policy and foreign policy both to that vision and to our values as a nation. That is what other nations expect of us. They look to us as the example. Let's make sure we're setting a good one, and one we can all be proud of!

## **B. International Trade and Investment**

Trade and Investment with the Latin American region has developed significantly over the past few years, though it continues to be focused primarily on traditional industries such as education, agriculture, mining and resources.

The opportunities for trade and investment between Australia and Latin America extend much further than these traditional industries, and while there is interest and opportunity, there is a lack of adequate infrastructure and resources to support the development of these opportunities or to empower companies and individuals to seek and pursue opportunities across the two regions.

Chambers of commerce often act primarily (or solely in most cases) in one region, without coordinating with their counterparts on the other side of the Pacific. Without an effective means of connecting people across the two regions in a format that highlights opportunities, promotes collaboration, and strengthens trust between players across the two regions, identification and promotion of trade and investment opportunities will remain limited. As the central touch point for these Chambers on both sides of the Pacific, DFAT has the potential to play a strong connection role to leverage the activities and synergies of these Chambers to promote greater trade and investment outcomes for interested parties in both regions.

Members of the Somos21 network have expressed frustration that the touch points for support in pursuing trade and investment opportunities are quite unclear. Should they talk to DFAT or Austrade in the first instance? Which Trade Commission should they approach – Australia's or that of their home country? What if they're in Australia? What if they're in their host country? And where do the State-based trade offices fit into the picture? What about DFAT's state officers – are they useful contacts for trade and investment queries or is that not their function?

While the roles and activities of each of these agencies is perfectly clear to those that work in the system, for those that are unfamiliar with the players and the landscape, knowing where to go for advice and which players provide what type of support at which stage in their development, is really unclear, both for Latin American businesses seeking to enter Australia, and Australian businesses seeking to engage with Latin America. This could be simplified by creating a simple web interface (developed, shared, and promoted by all players) outlining who does what, when, and how. This could potentially be supported by an interactive questionnaire that would help businesses and individuals identify which contact point would be best suited to their specific needs.

Leveraging synergies in terms of marketing and promotion of trade and investment opportunities in the region would also be a useful way to increase interest and drive more dynamic engagement with the region. The UK, for example, has one central agency and website which consolidates all the information from each of the Latin American Embassies and Trade Commissions so that relevant contacts and opportunities across the region are centralised and easily accessible to those businesses seeking to engage with the region. Such a site (admittedly done slightly better!), showcasing investment opportunities and including contact details for all key players (including Embassies, Trade Commissions and Regional and Bilateral Chambers of Commerce on both sides of the Pacific) would prove incredibly beneficial, providing a central repository of information for anyone interested in engaging in trade and investment between the two regions.

It is also often raised that Australia's network of Free Trade Agreements with Asia and the Americas places it in a unique position to broker trade and investment between the two regions. This is an

opportunity that should be leveraged while it is still a reality. It is only a matter of time before direct relations between key Latin American and Asian economies are established, and it would be remiss of Australia not to position itself proactively and effectively before this happens.

Beyond direct trade and investment, collaborative engagements to share knowledge and enhance productivity across key sectors will prove invaluable over coming decades. Also, as the Latin American community in Australia continues to grow we are bound to see an increase in small scale entrepreneurial businesses, with trade and investment relations and opportunities between Australia and Latin America increasing accordingly. Support for these pioneering small to medium enterprises would greatly benefit the future growth of trade and investment in the region, and yet currently the focus is predominantly given to the small number of large companies operating across the two regions.

### **C. Aid and Development**

With the recent commitment by the international community to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, there is a great opportunity for Australia to focus its international aid and development programs on outcomes-focused initiatives aligned directly to the targets and indicators defined by the global community.

Acknowledging that the deployment of official development assistance to countries outside the Asia Pacific region may not fall within the remit of the nation's development agenda or budget, a targeted development program aligned to the SDGs and centred around research and industry collaborations to deliver on SDG objectives would simultaneously promote trade and investment objectives, whilst delivering outcome-focused development projects and initiatives.

While Australia has "phased out" its aid program to Latin America, the region is among one of the most popular and appealing for young Australians with an interest in international development and social impact. One of the key focus areas for Somos21 (based on the interests and inputs of our network) is Social Impact, and many of the professionals across our network are actively working in the NFP sector or establishing social enterprises which promote social impact outcomes in the Latin American region. They often express disappointment that there are not more opportunities to engage and contribute in a more formal capacity to development initiatives in the region.

Given that the major countries in the region boast consolidated democracies, strong institutional frameworks and robust financial systems, the region would also be highly receptive to Australia's focus on aid for trade, private sector development, and domestic resource mobilisation. Also, the fact that countries in Latin America have a similar geography and climate to Australia means that there are also huge development benefits to be gained from sharing our expertise in key development areas such as water, energy, health and agriculture (among others).

There is obviously a need to be selective, targeted and considered in the allocation of our foreign aid budget, and while we understand that our focus as a nation will continue to be on the development challenges in the Asia-Pacific region, we also believe there is great potential to develop more formal, innovative, low-cost programs and mechanisms that leverage our capability and expertise in key areas to promote greater development outcomes in the Latin American region.

### **D. People to People Links**

While relationships have been established between Universities, and scholarship programs have been supported by the Australian Government, to promote greater mobility of students between Australia and Latin America, these are not being leveraged as much as they could be to generate productive people to people links between Australia and Latin America, links which drive long term value and engagement.

Alumni networks are inherently managed as one way systems – used by universities to connect with their alumni and share information. Often what Latin American alumni are seeking are opportunities to stay connected with Australia (generally through relevant professional activities), not with their specific University.

By creating a platform which allows Latin American alumni to connect both with each other, and with other professionals in Australia and Latin America who are interested in the Australia Latin America relationship, we empower them to take the initiative, connect, and collaborate to develop new ventures and opportunities. The same platform can be used by universities, embassies and HR/recruitment firms to connect with alumni/diaspora/talent in specific locations and/or areas of expertise.

This platform has been proposed and developed by Somos21 in beta form, with the verbal support of the GRULAC Ambassadors in Australia, international recruitment firms, and select Australian Universities, to address this issue. A hackathon is currently being proposed in collaboration with University of Melbourne and other Victorian-based universities to further explore potential technical solutions to these issues and to strengthen alumni engagement, industry experience, and research collaborations between Australia and Latin America. Support from DFAT for the development of such platforms and technological solutions would go a long way to strengthening people-to-people links between Australia and Latin America.

DFAT's support of past initiatives such as the Australia Latin America Leadership Program (ALALP) have been incredibly beneficial for promoting people-to-people links between Australia and Latin America. ALALP, which has run every 4 years since 2009, has created an invaluable network of professionals and formed the inspiration and foundation for Somos21. Programs which bring together professionals and students with a shared interest or passion, and which provide an ongoing platform for engagement, are critical. Currently, programs are run, studies are undertaken, and relationships subsequently fade rather than strengthen as there is no platform or framework in place for ongoing constructive, collaborative engagement.

With the dawn of the digital age we have the capability to develop powerful multi-sided platforms which address the needs of all stakeholders and deliver value and impact on a broader scale. Somos21 is currently exploring the power of Blockchain technology to create a dynamic, collaborative international community which connects people across Australia and the Latin American region with value being simultaneously generated, distributed and remunerated by and for members of that community. This is the future of what's possible and it would be great to be able to work with DFAT in developing this technology not only for the benefit of Latin American relations, but also relations with Australia's other priority regions.

#### **E. Australia as Destination of Choice**

To effectively promote Australia as a “Destination of Choice” requires an understanding of why foreigners chose to work, travel, study or live in Australia. We should be seeking to understand those drivers when developing and managing associated policies and programs.

For example, our research and engagement has shown that Latin Americans come to Australia to study for three core reasons:

- Because being a student in Australia gives them the right to work
- Because they need qualifications that are recognised in Australia so they can work here in their field
- Because they want to learn English and enjoy the Australia lifestyle

What are the implications of these insights?

Firstly, we can surmise that the introduction of Working Holiday Visa agreements with Latin American countries may potentially impact on our enrolment figures from that region. Would this be an issue? Not necessarily – though the Department of Education might not be too happy about it. That said, it may result in greater regional tourism and workforce availability as people seek regional opportunities to extend their visa to the full 24-month capability.

Secondly, we might find that a more formal approach to qualification recognition could impact on our enrolment figures for postgraduate students in certain fields. Would that be an issue? Not necessarily. In fact, it might optimise human capital flows between the two regions and enable a critical influx of diverse skills and approaches which would strengthen Australia's capacity and capability in certain fields. It would, however, require a solid understanding of how certain qualifications differ across countries, with appropriate bridging courses or additional micro-credentials being offered to allow for this.

Thirdly, it is interesting that people are not choosing to study in Australia because of the quality of the education or its profile in their home country. Students returning to Latin America from Australian universities have expressed difficulties finding work as the institutions are not well known and the quality of the education is often scrutinized. If the value offering was such that study in Australia was seen to be a strong value add in the local job market when they return home (potentially by guaranteeing industry experience in the Australian market as part of that study experience), then the appeal of studying in Australia rather than elsewhere would be much greater. Promotion of the quality of Australian Institutions in the Latin American market would therefore be a great way of securing Australia as a Destination of Choice for students.

These are just some insights with regard to drivers for students coming to Australia. There are more to be gleaned from additional research into Latin American professionals entering the country on skilled migrant or 457 visas. We believe that by truly understanding these drivers DFAT could more effectively promote Australia as a Destination of Choice within the Latin American region.

We also need to understand those aspects which place Australia's reputation as a Destination of Choice at risk. Over the past 18 months we have received feedback from our network that there is a lack of respect and understanding of Latin American culture and capabilities in the Australian labour market. They have also expressed concerns that their rights are not respected and frustration that despite paying full fees as international students they are not eligible for student concessions on public transport, and local students (not internationals) are prioritised for internship placements.

The most commonly raised concern is that despite demonstrating unique skills and experience which could enhance Australian capability in certain fields, they are not given the opportunity to engage in these roles. In fact, we had one Brazilian member who was falsely accused of violating the visa system and was forced to leave the country. She is now providing her freight and export expertise in New Zealand where her skills are recognised, respected and rewarded. She was obviously incredibly disappointed that after spending over 5 years of her life in Australia, investing over \$100,000 in education fees, not to mention income taxes, and dutifully meeting and following all established visa requirements and procedures, she was treated like a villain and effectively thrown out of the country.

While we acknowledge that resolution of some of these issues sits with DIBP not DFAT, we still feel they need to be raised, reviewed and circumvented given they impact directly on DFAT's core objective of promoting Australia as a Destination of Choice

#### **F. Travel and Consular Services**

Often visa agreements are determined with terms which are identical for both parties, without thinking about the purpose or objective that the agreement is seeking to promote/facilitate.

For example, working holiday visas are set with restrictions to a specific age group (18-30) The reality is that for Latin Americans travelling to Australia, an international experience in the early stages of their career is considered a strength and value add for their professional profile when they return home.

In contrast, Australians who travel to Latin America for an extended period in the early stages of their career do not necessarily see professional benefits, nor are the experiences, networks and linguistic capabilities they gain valued in the Australian job market.

That said, Australians in the 30-35 age group who have already established a strong career background in Australia, often seek to undertake meaningful work and holiday travel to the Latin American region. The motivation of this particular demographic is twofold: 1) to gain experience in a different market, whilst contributing their skills to promoting development outcomes in less-developed regions of the world; 2) to be able to extend the time spent in the Latin American region so that they can truly immerse themselves in the society and better understand the cultures and people, rather than just passing through in tourist mode.

Latin Americans in the 30-40 age group often travel to Australia in pursuit of the same outcome: foreign market experience, industry connections, immersion and understanding of people and society. For this, they generally travel on student visas to do an MBA or equivalent postgraduate diploma (their spouses are able to work full time under this arrangement which is also a significant value add, with many couples taking turns to study/work to extend their time in the country). Australians, by contrast, do not seek these opportunities in Latin America as the region's MBA and postgraduate degree programs are little known, promoted or valued in the Australian job market.

The benefits to Australia-Latin America relations of tailoring a visa option to promote mobility within this young professional demographic (30-40 age group) are clear, and numerous: stronger strategic people-to-people links in key industries, greater familiarity with working culture and practices, understanding of local operating contexts – including legal and regulatory frameworks, and greater

respect, increased trust and connectivity between Australian and Latin American professionals across both regions.

Too often we fall back on the language issue in Australia, assuming that Australians do not take up opportunities in Latin America because they don't speak Spanish or Portuguese. This is not the case. There are many Australians that speak these languages, and very few travel to Latin America to live, work or study. Equally, there are many Latin Americans who don't speak English and they still come to Australia. Languages are not the block. The block is the perceived value to be gained from the experience. Australians need to be encouraged to travel and work in Latin America, and currently there are no visas in place which promote this as a viable option particularly given the distinct requirements, career paths and market expectations of professionals in both regions.

There is a stronger demand among young professionals for work opportunities with companies operating across Australia and Latin America, than there are companies fitting that description. This is creating a self-perpetuating cycle of limited engagement between the two regions. Until action is taken to actively drive engagement of our young professionals in commercial activities across these two regions, we will fail to develop a pool of executive level resources with the capabilities, networks and expertise to develop, manage and grow future business opportunities.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

As mentioned, this submission seeks to profile some of the issues that have been raised by our network over the past 18 months and to highlight how DFAT and Australia's Foreign Policy can impact on the Australia Latin America relationship.

This is by no means and exhaustive representation of issues or topics of relevance to the Foreign Policy, but we hope it at least provides an indication of the possible opportunities and benefits to be gained from increased focus and engagement with the Latin America region.

Should you have any queries about this submission, or should you wish to explore some of the issues raised in greater depth, we encourage you to contact us at [info@somos21.org](mailto:info@somos21.org).

It would be a pleasure to be more actively engaged in developing a stronger platform and framework for engagement between Australia and Latin America over the coming decades.