



# Australian Institute of International Affairs

## Submission to the Foreign Policy White Paper

28 February 2017

The Australian Institute of International Affairs ([internationalaffairs.org.au](http://internationalaffairs.org.au)) is an independent, non-profit organisation that promotes interest in and understanding of international affairs in Australia. The AIIA was formed in 1924 as a branch of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) and established as a federal body in 1933. The AIIA provides a forum for discussion and debate but does not seek to formulate its own institutional views.

The AIIA achieves its mission through:

- More than 200 events per year nationwide
- Books, journals and online publications
- International dialogues
- Youth and community programs

In 2017 the AIIA was ranked top think tank in the Southeast Asia and Pacific region in the Global Go To Think Tank Index for the third consecutive year.

### **Foreign Policy White Paper Question 6**

***What assets will we need to advance our foreign policy interests in future years? How can we best use our people and our assets to advance Australia's economic, security and other interests and respond to external events? How can Government work more effectively with non-government sectors, including business, universities and NGOs, to advance Australia's interests?***

Australia cannot control the crises and challenges it faces in international affairs. As a result, Australia should seek to build its capacity to respond appropriately and to capitalise on whatever opportunities arise in a changing international environment. The AIIA recommends that Australia's strategy focus on building capacity in three broad areas:

1. Improving Australia's Diplomatic Capacity
2. Engaging the World through Public Diplomacy
3. Building Australians' Skills and Understanding of International Affairs

Recommendations in each area are outlined below.

## **1. Improving Australia's Diplomatic Capacity**

Australia needs to build its structural capacity to ensure its security and prosperity in the long term. It is vital that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) be appropriately resourced to pursue this agenda.

It has long been known that Australia was underinvesting in its diplomacy; a 2011 Lowy Institute study showed that Australia had the smallest network of diplomatic missions of all the G20 countries and only nine out of 34 OECD countries studied had fewer diplomatic missions than Australia. More recently, Australia has expanded its diplomatic representation, opening new missions in China and Papua New Guinea in pursuit of its economic diplomacy objectives. This is an important development and should be continued. The AIIA commends the endeavour of maintaining a strong diplomatic network across the globe that will help Australia to stay relevant and able to exert its influence. This modest investment needs to continue and increase. Appropriate funding for DFAT would be an investment with a big impact as a proportion of the federal budget: DFAT's funding base is low at one-twentieth of the Defence budget, which aims at a spending target of two percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Australia should also aim to restore its overseas development assistance (ODA) and increase it gradually to reach the international benchmark of 0.7 per cent of total GDP.

While the AIIA accepts that there is a need to curtail public expenditure, it believes that the importance of promoting Australia's foreign policy interests in the face of unpredictable international developments warrants increased spending, as DFAT manages the key interactions between Australia and the world. The ongoing imposition of an efficiency dividend will affect DFAT's capacity to formulate and deliver policy due to the inevitable reduction of staff. With the 2016-17 budget estimating a continuous decrease in expenditure on areas including foreign aid and diplomacy over the next three years, any further tightening of the budget for DFAT will have implications for Australia's influence globally. Australia should aim to meet the average budget that OECD countries allocate to their foreign affairs departments as a benchmark.

## 2. Engaging the World through Public Diplomacy

The Australian government should strengthen its engagement with overseas audiences to reinforce Australia's presence and influence at a global level. How Australia and the Australian people are perceived by the citizens of other nations is one of Australia's key interests.

Australia influences how it is seen in the world, and particularly in its region through public diplomacy. Public diplomacy refers to communications by a country which attempt to influence the views of foreign publics. Accurate and credible information is required to promote effective public diplomacy. In Australia's case, its formulation should stem from awareness that the image Australia presents to the world is often one that does not match Australian self-perceptions.

Australia should prioritise and invest in best practice to engage international audiences through its public diplomacy including:

- Conducting public diplomacy that aims to engage in dialogue rather than self-promotion
- Continuing to improve DFAT's digital diplomacy capacity to increase exposure of Australia to foreign public networks online
- Recognising the importance of international broadcasting services and social media as powerful public diplomacy tools
- Engaging Australian overseas communities to support public diplomacy activities
- Using links formed by education in Australia to develop and maintain influential connections abroad
- Properly resourcing cultural diplomacy as a low-cost way to engage with foreign publics

Australia should continue to seek cost effective and creative ways of engaging the world and building relationships with audiences in countries that are of priority for Australia's immediate and long-term foreign policy objectives.

### **3. Building Australians' Skills and Understanding of International Affairs**

Australia needs to consider how it can best utilise Australian people and assets in order to advance Australian interests in the world. The Australian public should be engaged and educated in international affairs for at least three reasons.

First, Australia needs to equip its citizens with the knowledge, tools and opportunities that enable them to make, understand and support wise foreign policy choices. The AIIA arranges various programs that are designed to invigorate wide-ranging and meaningful discussion of international affairs in Australia. It has experience in successfully engaging the broader public through more than 200 events per year across Australia, including a National Conference with 400 attendees. Its publications have a wide reach including the *Australian Journal of International Affairs* (83,419 full-text downloads) and *Australian Outlook* blog (29,000 unique visitors per month). The AIIA engages young people through various initiatives including internships, careers forums, young professional programs, scholarships and youth publications. These efforts result in wide and continuing support and appreciation of Australia's foreign policy decisions.

Second, educating the Australian public on international affairs can generate new ideas for foreign policy. Australia can maximise the utility of this asset through greater collaboration with non-government sectors and resources to provide opportunities for Australians to make inputs to improve the quality of foreign policy. Greater attention should be given to DFAT's International Relations Grant Program (IRGP) which financially assists institutes as well as independent organisations such as the AIIA for projects to support these aims. Other countries have dedicated great investment in this area and reaped the benefits.

Third, alerting Australians to the importance of international affairs can develop into a tool for foreign engagement in the form of citizen diplomacy. Citizen diplomacy, or maintaining people-to-people links and facilitating exchanges between individuals in different countries, creates mutually beneficial opportunities for both individuals and communities to engage with various cultures and people. The promotion of citizen diplomacy encourages

Australians to view themselves as 'ambassadors' for Australia; as representatives of its values, interests and image abroad.

The AIIA applauds the success of initiatives including the New Colombo Plan and Australia Awards that engage and educate Australians on international affairs. Such initiatives not only serve as a platform for enduring relationships to develop at an individual level, the cross-cultural knowledge and skills attained from these experiences can further enrich Australia. The AIIA believes that Australia should continue to fund programs that encourage Australians to build international relationships to ensure that Australia remains relevant in the minds of its neighbours.

There are a wide variety of people-to-people links between Australians and overseas nations that can be further strengthened. These may arise in a range of sectors including science and technology, energy, education, business and tourism. For instance, volunteerism in the form of government initiatives such as the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) promotes cultural understanding through the development of interpersonal relationships with the local population based on daily interactions. The AIIA has facilitated similar links through programs including annual AIIA Study Tours to various nations around the world and hosting second-track dialogues with sister institutes of international affairs. The AIIA recommends that the government actively promote organisations that engage Australians in international affairs to provide opportunities through which Australians can actively contribute and improve their knowledge and skills.

# The Australian Institute of International Affairs National Executive



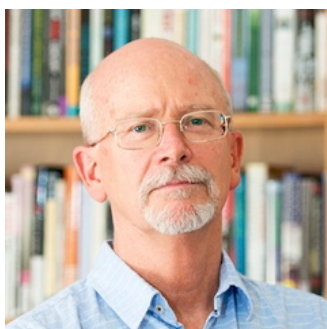
**National President**  
**The Hon Kim Beazley AC FAIA**



**National Vice-President**  
**Ms Zara Kimpton OAM**



**National Executive Director**  
**Ms Melissa Conley Tyler**



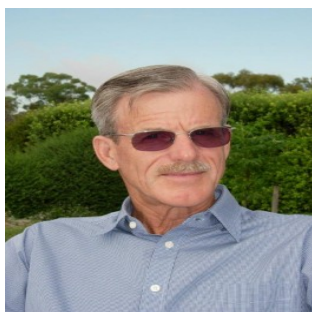
**Research Chair**  
**Professor Mark Beeson**



**AJIA Editor**  
**Professor Nick Bisley**



**Treasurer**  
**Ms Kylie Bell**



**ACT President**  
**Mr Bob Lowry**



**NSW President**  
**Mr Richard Broinowski**



**QLD President**  
**Mr Geoffrey Ewing**



**SA President**  
**Associate Professor**  
**Felix Patrikeeff**



**TAS President**  
**Em Prof Peter Boyce AO**



**VIC President**  
**Mr Patrick Moore**



**WA President**  
**Mr John R Goodlad**