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Asian languages 'a priority'

Addressing the National Conference of the Asia Education Foundation on behalf of the Australian Government, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education, Senator Scott Ryan, told delegates that Australia needed to increase Asian language teaching and outlined the way in which this was being addressed.

He went on, "... the region has changed immensely as has Australia, as have the challenges we face and the opportunities offered. According to the Asialink index, our engagement with Asia has multiplied 4.5 times since 1990, compared with just 2.5 times with the rest of the world. While Asia is already the most populous region in the world," he told delegates that Australia must always be mindful that "in the future, Asia will also be home to the majority of the world's middle class".

"The work of the foundation is more relevant and necessary than ever so that all Australians, and particularly young Australians, can make the most of the opportunities in the region. One of the most radical changes over the past two decades has

Diary Dates

July 16 4pm "*Macropus portugalensis*; a kangaroo-like creature drawn in an early Portuguese manuscript". Ian Cowan.

August 6 Collegiate lunch noon for 12.30; Bryan Furnass "Do we need carbon for transport?"

August 14 ANUEF Biannual Lecture by Professor Helen Small, University of Oxford 6pm, Haydon Allen Lecture theatre. "*The value of the humanities*". Also, in the "Meet the authors" lectures organised by Colin Steele:

August 7— Greg Combet—*The Fights of My Life*, Manning Clark 2

August 19 — Geraldine Doogue, Alannah MacTiernan and Julie Bishop, *The Climb: Conversations with Australian Women in Power* — venue will depend on the nature of the conversation and ANU security.

Parking spaces – page 19

been growth in the ease of communication. While people can communicate across countries and continents with ease, they still need the necessary skills and intercultural understanding if they are to take full advantage of the opportunities on offer."

"Australian schools and other educational institutions play a critical role in terms of deepening and strengthening our knowledge and understanding of our region and in developing a broad cultural literacy. By developing these skills, we pave the way for young people to create meaningful international partnerships. We must equip students to take part in the economic and social opportunities both within the region and globally.

"As long ago as 1980, Stephen Fitzgerald emphasised the importance of education for international understanding. He called for "the study of other civilisations and peoples" in Australian schools recognising that this leads to a deeper understanding of the nature of human beings. More recently, a teacher interviewed for the 2013 Deakin University Asia Literacy and the Australian Teaching Workforce study commented that language learning 'opens your eyes to cultural differences' and that 'it also challenges you to better understand your own culture'. This latter, reflective, element includes understanding what historian David Walker calls 'the Asia within Australia now and in the past'.

"The 'Asia within Australia' now includes the impact of Asian migration. Indeed, more people from Asian countries live, study and work in Australia now than ever before. Close to 1 in 10 Australians identifies with Asian ancestry. And just a few years ago, in 2010-11, for the first time in Australian history, Britain lost its crown, no pun intended, as our main source of new permanent residents—more people moved to Australia from China than from any other country.

"In 2011–12, India was the principal source country of permanent migrants to Australia. The 'Asia within Australia in the past' includes interactions between Indonesian fishermen from Makassar and indigenous communities in Northern Australia before 1788. It includes Chinese miners in the goldfields, and those who came here from the 1950s under the original Colombo Plan.

"As well as the support the Asia Education Foundation provides for the delivery of studies of Asia in Australian schools, funded by the Australian Government, there are a number of initiatives underway. Our signature measure is the New Colombo Plan, providing a strong basis for future people-to-people and institutional linkages within the Asia-Pacific region. Back in 1950, the architect of the original Colombo Plan, Sir Percy Spender, Minister for External Affairs in the Menzies Government, recognised that Australia's future depended 'upon the political stability of our Asian neighbours, upon the economic wellbeing of Asian people, and upon the development of understanding and friendly relations between Australia and Asia'.

"The original Colombo Plan brought thousands of Asian students to Australia. Many of these students are now in leadership positions in politics, business and academia in their respective countries, and know Australia better for having studied here, both through their own experience, but likely more importantly, the links, relationships and networks established."

"The New Colombo Plan will provide many future Australian leaders with a deeper and more nuanced understanding of contemporary Asia, one that is partially only developed by spending time there. Under the Plan, scholarships and mobility grants offered to undergraduate students for study and internships in the Asia-Pacific region will make them work ready. They will underpin the development of professional connections in the region and their study experience will link directly to career opportunities."

"The pilot phase of the New Colombo Plan has already commenced supporting Australian undergraduates going to four destinations: Indonesia, Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. In Indonesia, for example, the Foreign Minister, Dr Marty Natalegawa, who studied in Australia himself, has offered to host New Colombo Plan interns at Indonesia's foreign ministry."

"If Australians are to make their way in the world, we cannot simply rely on other people speaking our language. But, and I realise this is not news to this audience, we are at a very low point in our engagement with languages other than English in our schools and tertiary institutions. We are one of the most successful culturally diverse societies in the world, yet the take-up of languages in our schools and tertiary institutions has been in decline for a long time. In 2010, only 11 per cent of students at Year 12 were enrolled to study a language other than English."

"The government is determined to revive languages education and we recognise our leadership role in achieving the ambitious target of 40 per cent of Year 12 studying a language other than English in a decade. One of the problems with language learning in Australia has been the piece-meal approach in the way language education is offered. So we are aiming to develop continuous access or a 'cradle to grave' approach to language education from early childhood through to senior secondary school years and beyond.

The ability to learn a language is greatest in a child's early years, and early exposure to language learning provides a platform for encouraging learning in the later years of education. Introducing foreign language exposure in preschool provides a longer period for which a child's language learning can take place."

"The recent budget delivered a commitment for a one year pilot of online foreign language learning for children in preschool programs, known as 'Early Learning Languages Australia' or ELLA. It is envisaged that up to 40 providers of preschool programs across Australia will participate in the trial in 2015, with children studying one language for the calendar year through the online program. We will also continue to prioritise the development of the national languages curriculum for study in mainstream schools.

"New funding has been provided to develop the curricula for Hindi and Turkish, as well as for the historically significant languages of Classical Greek and Latin, and for AUSLAN. The addition of these languages not only enables a greater choice and diversity for students but also signals the importance of language education itself across a broad range of languages.

“Confirming our election commitment, we have also engaged the Asia Education Foundation to undertake comprehensive research with stakeholders into ways to encourage more secondary students to continue language study in senior secondary years. The research will inform all Australian governments on practical, implementable ways they could work with stakeholders so high school students can continue foreign language study in senior secondary years.

“The Foundation has also done great work providing support to schools to foster connections within the region through successful models like the Building Relationships through Intercultural Dialogue and Growing Engagement, known as the BRIDGE project.

BRIDGE provides an important tool for teachers to positively engage students in learning about Asia and building intercultural understanding. As part of the BRIDGE program we’ve funded additional Asia literacy projects in Australian schools:

- *The Leading 21st Century Schools: Engage with Asia* project supports principals and school leaders to develop strategies and resources to support the implementation of the Australian curriculum and encourage students to engage with Asia.

Since 2008, the program has supported 1100 principals to build Asian Literacy in their schools and promote within school principal networks.

- The School to School Partnerships with Business project is helping to link businesses, students, teachers and school communities within Australia and internationally, building upon the success of the Asia Literacy Ambassadors project.

“This project has provided exposure to 324 schools, had 372 Ambassadors registered and reached over 18,000 school children.

“It should also be noted that the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group led by Professor Greg Craven has been asked by Minister Pyne to look at foreign languages education, so teachers of these subjects have sufficient depth of content knowledge and relevant pedagogical expertise.

“And our Teach for Australia program which fast tracks high calibre non-teaching graduates into disadvantaged secondary schools will shortly include the aim of 40 per cent of participants recruited into the program specialising in foreign languages.

“The higher education reforms announced in the budget will also have a positive impact in this area. In the budget, we announced that from 2016 the demand driven funding system will be expanded to include subsidised student places in all diploma, advanced diploma and associate degree courses offered by accredited higher education institutions. This means universities will be able to expand their diploma of language programs on the basis of student demand. Now the way will be open for universities to encourage more students to pursue a diploma of languages alongside their degree.

“We estimate that freeing up places in sub-bachelor courses will create around 35,000 additional student places per year by 2018, a substantial boost to choice and opportunity for students across Australia.

“Professor John Hajek, of the University of Melbourne, who is also president of the Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities, has recently said that ‘stand-alone subsidised diplomas could attract fresh recruits to language courses and give universities an incentive to open new programs.’ He also said, ‘...the ability to supply student demand with uncapped diplomas might encourage some institutions to bring in new language programs, or expand existing ones’. So this is a very positive development for our future development in languages education.

“I believe we are at an important moment in continuing our deepening engagement with Asia as the government begins to roll out the New Colombo Plan, rebuild the international education sector and revive languages education in this country. The Asia Education Foundation has played an important role for more than two decades in this area, and I thank you for the invaluable contribution you will make through this conference and in the years ahead....”

Young researchers off to Germany

Fifteen young Australian researchers are heading to Germany this week to meet with Nobel Prize winners in the fields of physiology and medicine.

The 64th Lindau Nobel Laureates Meeting (29 June – 4 July 2014) brings together 600 young researchers from 80 different countries to interact with giants in these fields and build networks with other researchers. Overall 20,000 researchers applied worldwide. The 15 Australians chosen went through a rigorous selection process by the Australian Academy of Science.

Academy President Professor Andrew Holmes said it was an extraordinary opportunity for Australian early career researchers to engage with the global scientific community. “Australia is still quite isolated which makes international networking opportunities like this crucial for young researchers to establish relationships that carry through their careers,” he said.

One of the successful applicants is ANSTO’s Catriona Wimberley. Catriona’s research interests are in medical physics and medical imaging, with a focus on using PET imaging to study brain diseases, such as Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease or epilepsy. Catriona employs mathematical models to study the neurochemical functioning of the brain. Specifically, she uses experimental PET imaging data to predict disease course and response to therapy.

Federal Trade Minister [Andrew Robb](#) and Australian Nobel Prize winners [Professor Brian Schmidt](#), [Professor Elizabeth Blackburn](#) and [Professor Barry Marshall](#) will participate in the event.

There will also be a panel discussion on women in science hosted by Adam Spencer, the University of Sydney's Mathematics and Science Ambassador and involving immediate past President of the Academy Professor Suzanne Cory.

The Australian International Day has been made possible due to sponsorship and support from the Department of Industry, The Group of Eight Australia, Austrade, Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation, [Department of Education](#), [CSIRO](#), [Defence Science and Technology Organisation](#), the [Science and Industry Endowment Fund](#) and the [Australian Academy of Science](#).

The researchers come from all over Australia. A full list of the researchers can be [found here](#).

New Colombo Plan scholars congratulated

Universities Australia has congratulated the 40 undergraduate students who have been awarded scholarships under the government's New Colombo Plan to study in Indonesia, Japan, Singapore or Hong Kong.

Chief Executive of Universities Australia, Ms Belinda Robinson, said, "These pioneering Australian and New Colombo Plan ambassadors will study at leading universities in the Indo-Pacific region, participate in a work placement, develop greater cultural awareness, learn a language and build networks that will endure for a lifetime."

At the awards dinner, hosted by the patron of the program, the Governor-General, General Sir Peter Cosgrove AK, MC (Retd), Foreign Affairs Minister Julie Bishop commended Australian universities for the magnificent effort they had made in supporting the program.

Ms Robinson said, "Our universities have been delighted to get behind this unique program because of the exciting opportunity it represents, not just for their brightest students but for those who Indo-Pacific relations in the same way that its predecessor, the Colombo Plan, did decades ago.

"The program has the potential to transform, not just the educational experience and global outlook of our students, but for Australian education to international students, staff and student exchanges, research collaboration and transnational education.

"The combination of study and work experiences in these countries means not only a more in-depth, well-rounded exchange experience, but it facilitates academic and business links that will not end when the students return to Australia," she said.

Ms Robinson said that Universities Australia, in partnering with the government on the [World Class](#) promotional program, to have Australian university students increasingly see overseas study as a normal part of the of undergraduate experience.

For all the latest from and about Australia's universities visit www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au

Rethink wanted on student fees

Universities Australia has called for a rethink on the design of the proposed changes to the student loan program and the 20 per cent cut in the government contribution to student fees. The call comes as Universities Australia released new modelling on the combined impact that the proposed changes to the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) and the reduction in Commonwealth support would have on student debt and payback periods.

Applying reasonably conservative assumptions, the modelling shows that student debt levels are likely to at least double. Amongst the changes announced on budget night was the proposal to increase the annual indexation applied to HELP debts from the existing CPI to a rate equivalent to the yield on the Treasury 10 year bond rate capped at six per cent a year. The modelling applies interest rates of CPI, four, five and six per cent.

It also provides three fee scenarios: low, medium and high. At the medium fee increase scenario, and with a four per cent interest rate, an engineering graduate working full time faces a HELP debt of between \$98,952 and \$113,169 and would repay it over a period of 20-25 years. This is compared with \$46,701 to \$49,284 debt and 14 to 18 years' repayment time under the existing arrangements.

A nursing graduate under a medium fee increase scenario who works part time for six years after working full time for six years will pay off their student loan of \$51,620 over 20 years, compared with 17 years to repay a HELP debt of \$24,646 under the existing arrangements.

Universities Australia's Chief Executive Belinda Robinson said. "The combination of higher HELP debt levels and the cut to the government contribution to course fees could be expected to result in students facing higher debts and longer repayment times than needs to be the case in a more competitive, fee-deregulated environment. This modelling shows that parents taking time out to work part time to raise children would be particularly hard-hit by the new arrangement.

"In reviewing these two key aspects of the government's reform agenda, we should apply a principles-based approach that puts access, affordability as well as quality ahead of all other considerations," Ms Robinson said.

The modelling can be accessed [here](#).

High Court rules chaplaincy 'invalid'

In Senate Question Time, on June 19, the Attorney-General, Senator Brandis, said, "This morning the High Court gave judgement in the Williams and The Commonwealth (No 2). The effect of the Court's decision is that the Commonwealth's National School Chaplaincy and Welfare Program are invalid.

"The basis of the decision is that the School Chaplaincy is invalid because the Court found it is not supported by any legislative head of power in the Constitution. In particular, the Court decided that the program was not a benefit to students within the

meaning of section 51 (xxiiiA) of the Constitution and was therefore not supported either by that or by any other constitutional head of power. "

"It is important to note that in arriving at that conclusion, the Court did not deal with the merits of the program, merely that the question of whether it fell within a particularly constitutional definition."

Asked by Senator Seselja (Lib.ACT) what implications the decision may have for any other Commonwealth Government programs, Senator Brandis said, "The Court did not deal with any other Commonwealth programs. It did not consider the broader question of whether Division 3B of the Financial Management and Accountability Act was a valid law. It merely decided that insofar as that Act purported to validate the School Chaplaincy Program, it was ineffective because the School Chaplaincy Program was not supported by any constitutional head of power. The Court did not decide that any other Commonwealth program was invalid. ..."

He went on, "It follows from the Court's judgement that Commonwealth payments to persons under the School Chaplaincy Program were invalidly made. The effect of the decision is that these program payments, totalling over \$150 million, are now debts owed to the Commonwealth under the Financial Management and Accountability Act. However, under that Act, the Minister for Finance has the power to approve a waiver of debt of an amount owing to the Commonwealth which totally extinguishes that debt."

The Minister for Finance, Senator Cormann, has agreed to waive the program payments made to date "to provide certainty to funding recipients that these debts will not be recovered in consequence of that decision".

Museum conference invitation

ICOM-ICTOP will hold its [annual conference](#) in Hanoi and Ha Long Bay, Vietnam, from **October 21-25, 2014**.with themes addressing:

1. Rethinking Museums & Sustainable Development for the Global Profession; and
2. Postcolonial Museology, Appropriate Capacity Building and Regional Engagement

The conference will be an intensive professional development program in partnership with ICOM Vietnam, Vietnam Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the International Institute for the Inclusive Museum with the support of the ICOM Asia-Pacific Alliance.

Applied heritage [workshops](#) will include:

- Museums and Gender Mainstreaming
- Planning for Growth – City Museums
- Ecomuseology and Sustainable Development
- Ethnology Museums in Southeast Asia
- Interpreting Legacies

- Art Museums and Aesthetics
- Professional Development: Community and Global Capacity Building

Visit the conference website to register now:

www.ictop2014.inclusivemuseum.org

Global Partnership for Education

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Brett Mason, announced at a pledging conference in Brussels on 26 June Australia's funding commitment to the Global Partnership for Education—Australia's largest multilateral partner in the education sector.

"This funding is part of Australia's investment in global education, which will boost human development, economic prosperity and security in our region and the world in years to come," said Senator Mason.

Senator Mason highlighted the importance of educating girls and providing access to education for children with disabilities. Senator Mason met European Union representatives responsible for foreign and development policy to discuss enhanced cooperation on development priorities.

Senator Mason also visited Switzerland to represent Australia at the 46th annual Tidewater meeting in Ittingen from 29 June to 1 July, attended by OECD government officials and development organisations to discuss international development policy.

Appointments to improve teacher quality

There will be a greater focus on teacher quality with two new appointments to the Board of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), the organisation leading national work to lift the quality and status of the teaching profession, The Minister for Education, Mr Pyne, announced on July 1.

He has appointed Professor John Hattie as the new Chair and Mr John Fleming as deputy chair of the AITSL Board. The Minister also thanked the outgoing Chair, Mr Tony McKay, and the outgoing Deputy Chair, Professor Bill Louden, for their fine stewardship of AITSL over the past few years.

"As the new Chair and deputy chair, Professor Hattie and Mr Fleming will play important roles in refocussing AITSL's work to closely align with the government's approach to teacher quality under the Students First initiative," Mr Pyne said.

"The first step to achieving a quality education, which is so critical for the future of young Australians and our nation, is to lift the quality, professionalisation and status of the teaching profession.

“I anticipate advice from the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group will lead to significant reform to initial teacher education and that AITSL will play a key role in working with universities in delivering this reform.”

Professor Hattie is Director of the Melbourne Educational Research Institute at the University of Melbourne. His work, including innovative approaches in lifting student outcomes is internationally recognised.

Mr Fleming is Deputy Principal at Haileybury College in Melbourne and a leading advocate of education reform. He supports the explicit instruction method of teaching, where teachers closely direct student learning, and also coaches teachers in strategies to improve students' skills.

Mr Pyne went on, “Since 2010 AITSL has undertaken important work to support teachers and school leaders across Australia. AITSL has developed and implemented many national initiatives relating to professional teaching standards, the quality of initial teacher education, registration, certification and teacher performance and development. Professor Hattie and Mr Fleming bring extensive knowledge and practical experience to these roles making them well placed to make a valuable contribution to AITSL.”

Membership of the AITSL Board of Directors is a fixed-term appointment of up to three years.

Under the Students First approach, the Australian Government will work with the states and territories by focussing on four key areas that will make a difference to students:

- teacher quality
- school autonomy
- parental engagement
- strengthening the curriculum.

For further information, visit: www.studentsfirst.gov.au.

\$22 million for Teach for Australia

The Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne, has announced an increase of \$22 million in funding for the Teach for Australia program which aims to fast-track high-calibre non-teaching graduates into disadvantaged schools through an intensive training program that leads to a post-graduate teaching qualification.

The grant will assist Good to Great Schools Australia to introduce the alphabetic teaching approaches Direct instruction and Explicit instruction into classrooms in remote primary schools. Direct instruction provides step by step lessons that focus on skill mastery and grouping students by ability rather than age. With explicit instruction teachers focus on explanations, demonstrations, feedback and practice until the skill is mastered.

More information about the program is available on the [Teach for Australia website](#).

The minister has announced also \$5 million-worth of specifically targeted grants and fellowships for Teaching-at-Australian Universities, with \$3.1 million towards 22 grants that will help Australia's leading academics create the world's best teaching and learning environment.

According to Mr Pyne, this is part of the government's four-year \$37 billion investment into higher education teaching “and will help us to be a global leader in one of our biggest growth sectors. These grants and fellowships will help drive better quality teaching and learning in a wide range of areas such as indigenous health, maths and agriculture.

Grant recipients will receive government support under the 2014 Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) program.

“We are also committing \$1.8 million to 13 fellowships to help our leading academics continue to be the best in their respective fields”.

The grants and fellowships cover a wide range of areas crucial to quality learning and teaching in higher education, and include:

- A project to ensure that indigenous health programs better help indigenous Australians;
- A project to examine copyright issues to help Australia's higher education sector develop online courses and become globally competitive in that market; and
- Developing online material to better help agricultural students learn mathematics through real world examples.

For a full list of 2014 OLT grant and fellowship recipients see www.olt.gov.au.

Vocational student prize winners

The Assistant Minister for Education, Sussan Ley has announced the Australian Vocational Student Prize winners for 2013 and the Prime Minister's Award for Skills Excellence in School. Visit the 2013 Australian Vocational Student Prize Winners web page for a list of all the winners.

Visit the [2013 Australian Vocational Student Prize Winners](#) web page for a list of all the winners.

Safe schools

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education, Senator Scott Ryan, recently attended the Safe Schools Symposium where the Safe Schools Coalition Australia was launched. The Safe Schools Coalition Australia is the first national program funded by the Australian Government with the aim of creating safe and supportive school environments for same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse people.

The Safe Schools Coalition Australia is managed by the Foundation for Young Australians. For more information, visit the [Safe Schools Coalition Australia](#) website.

Medical research agreement

Joint Australian-European medical research infrastructures will give Australian researchers better access to some of the world's most advanced treatment options as well as access to research infrastructure, according to the Department of Education.

A media release says that the cooperation will help researchers translate Australian medical research discoveries into better diagnosis of medical conditions, new products and new drugs.

For more information, access:

<http://education.gov.au/news/australian-european-medical-research-infrastructures-join-forces>

Budget Based Funded Program Review

The Assistant Minister for Education, Sussan Ley, has released the final report of the Budget Based Funded (BBF) Program Review. More information about the BBF Program and the review is available on the BBF website or access:

<http://education.gov.au/news/budget-based-funded-programme-review-released>

\$24m for research hubs

The federal government has committed some \$23.9 million to establish seven new industry research hubs that will address critical industry challenges across areas such as mining and resources, grain improvement, aquaculture and manufacturing. These new research hubs will support collaborative research and development projects that address challenging industry issues. The Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne, said, "Indeed, 26 industry partner organisations are contributing more than \$36.4 million cash and in-kind for these new research projects".

For more information, access:

<http://ministers.education.gov.au/pyne/critical-industry-issues-be-addressed-through-seven-new-research-hubs>

Have your say

Inquiry into tax disputes launched

Submissions to the House of Representative's Tax Committee has inquiry into tax disputes are due by 4 July 2014. The inquiry will be covering all categories of taxpayers and including:

- fair treatment and respect of taxpayers
- how the ATO uses performance information in managing tax disputes
- whether the legal framework could be updated to encourage earlier dialogue between taxpayers and the ATO, such as through alternative dispute resolution and real time compliance strategies
- whether a separate agency should manage ATO litigation, whether the ATO should have a separate appeals area, or if current arrangements should continue
- comparisons with revenue agencies overseas.

As part of the inquiry, the committee has requested the Inspector-General of Taxation to conduct a formal review into tax disputes in relation to large businesses and high wealth individuals. The committee will concentrate on small business and individuals generally. The Inspector-General has not previously conducted an inquiry at the request of a parliamentary committee.

Committee Chair John Alexander said, "Through the Committee's work to date, the ATO has made clear their efforts to promote taxpayer confidence and trust in the system. This inquiry will assist the committee to ensure these goals, particularly with regards to mechanisms for dispute resolution."

"We are pleased to ask the Inspector-General of Taxation to conduct a formal review as part of our inquiry. The Inspector-General has a good track record and we look forward to benefitting from his expertise."

Although the committee will receive evidence of individuals' experience with the tax system, it will not act on behalf of individual taxpayers in the inquiry. Full details are available on the committee's website. <http://www.aph.gov.au/taxrev>.

For further information: contact the committee secretariat on 02 6277 4821, or by email: taxrev.reps@aph.gov.au.

Departments on environmental regulation

Key government departments of industry and the environment appeared at a public hearing in Canberra on July 3, as part of the inquiry into streamlining environmental regulation, 'green tape', and one stop shops for environmental assessments and approvals.

Committee Chair, Mr Alex Hawke MP, said “The committee is actively investigating environmental regulation, and is interested to hear how it fits within the government’s deregulation agenda. We look forward to hearing in detail from departments involved with administering federal environmental laws.”

Further details about the inquiry, including submissions and the terms of reference, are on the committee’s website at <http://www.aph.gov.au/greentape>; or contact the secretariat on (02) 6277 4580, email environment.reps@aph.gov.au or visit the committee’s webpage at <http://www.aph.gov.au/environment>

Go North, young man

Minister for Trade and Investment Andrew Robb has announced that the federal government will host a Northern Australia Investment Forum in the second half of next year, bringing together international investors, to promote and secure investment in Northern Australia.

In his keynote address to the Australian Davos Connection Northern Development Summit in Townsville, Mr Robb said that Northern Australia will be a centre of international investment due to the potential for large-scale international projects to be built across hundreds of thousands of hectares of arable soil land in diverse sectors.

“On account of an exploding middle class across the Asia Pacific this will be the century of food, water and energy security,” Mr Robb said.

“The region’s middle class is set to grow from 600 million to more than three billion over the next 20 to 30 years and Australia is geographically and economically placed to provide that security to our neighbours in North.

“Individual enterprises involving 30,000 hectares of sugar, or 20,000 hectares of fruit and vegetable crops, or 75,000 to 100,000 hectares of specialist crops will resemble mines in their capacity to largely or fully fund water, power and transport infrastructure, except they will be exporting a renewable resource.

“The Etheridge Integrated Agriculture Project west of Georgetown for example would involve 50,000 hectares of irrigated cropping, including sugar and sorghum. There would be significant infrastructure investment, including dams, a sugar mill, ethanol production and power generation facilities,” he said.

Mr Robb said Free Trade Agreements recently concluded with Japan and Korea, and other bilateral (China) and regional trade and investment agreements in advanced stages of negotiations would “provide a much stronger network of country-to-country partnerships to support these opportunities.”

The development of Australia’s North presented an opportunity to grow the Northern international tourism market to two million visitors a year by 2030, and provide further opportunity for Australia’s indigenous people.

“As we create a policy environment that welcomes foreign investment to drive development in the North, more opportunity for indigenous Australia will result, and not just in tourism and resources and energy,” he said. “It will occur across all of the investment sectors such as agriculture, agribusiness, aquaculture, water infrastructure, and all of the infrastructure and services that will support these developments.”

The Development of Northern Australia Interim Report tabled

The Australian Parliament’s Northern Australia Committee has tabled an interim report as part of its inquiry into the development of Northern Australia. Committee Chair, Warren Entsch, said: “The inquiry has generated a high level of community interest and high expectations. In response, the committee has undertaken an extensive program of travel, comprising 19 hearings and inspections, in a range of locations across Northern Australia.”

The committee has received 287 submissions and 49 exhibits and has programmed six, week-long public hearing and inspections visits as well as several one-day hearings in capital cities. Amongst its tasks, the committee has been asked to identify significant opportunities for the development of Northern Australia.

“There is potential to expand the resources sector in the North as well as introducing more intensive agriculture, horticulture, and aquaculture,” Mr Entsch said. “There are opportunities to grow both domestic and international tourism, increase education opportunities, and promote research on health, energy and food production in the North. There could also be a more northerly focus of Australia’s defence forces, building on current assets in North Queensland and the Northern Territory.”

The committee has also been asked to identify impediments to developing Northern Australia. “There are a number of major impediments to economic and social development,” Mr Entsch said. “These include the absence of economic infrastructure; the cost of power and water; access to telecommunications; land tenure arrangements; lengthy approvals processes and the lack of consistency of processes and requirements between jurisdictions.

“Also needing to be taken into account are high development costs; availability and affordability of insurance; regular damage to economic and the need to mitigate against weather risks; and small sized and widely dispersed populations which prevent the creation of a critical mass for the provision of infrastructure and services, such as health and aged care services, and education.”

The committee will conclude its evidence-gathering phase with hearings and inspections in the Upper Flinders District, Gulf Country and Weipa, originally scheduled for mid-April, in early July; and additional public hearings in Darwin and Brisbane. The committee will be tabling its final report and recommendations to the Parliament in September.

Information on the inquiry is available on the committee website at www.aph.gov.au/jscna

Would-be engine drivers, unite!

The Australasian Railway Association appeared before the House Infrastructure and Communications Committee at a public hearing on 18 June, representing a diverse range of rail-related interests in Australia, New Zealand and Indonesia. The association's submission to the inquiry highlights a range of planning and procurement issues faced by the wider rail industry.

For example, Australasian Railway Association states that government can reduce the time and financial cost imposed on rail industry participants by reducing or streamlining the requirements of the infrastructure bidding process. This, it says, can be achieved through measures including improved initial concept design specifications and a reduction in the additional material required by government relating to non-design issues.

Committee Chairman, Jane Prentice MP, says rail is one of the most rapidly developing infrastructure sectors in Australia. She noted that major rail projects, both passenger and freight, are in the pipeline around Australia and that "with proposed major developments including high speed rail along Australia's east coast, discussions around future rail infrastructure needs are crucial".

For rail buffs, further information on the inquiry, including the full terms of reference and how to prepare a submission can be obtained from the Committee's website at www.aph.gov.au/ic or from the Secretariat on (02) 6277 2352 or email ic.reps@aph.gov.au or visit the committee's webpage at www.aph.gov.au/ic

Human rights for women and girls

The executive director of the Australian branch of UN Women, Ms Julie McKay, gave evidence at a recent public hearing of the parliamentary Human Rights Sub-Committee which is currently inquiring into human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean – Asia-Pacific region.

Sub-Committee Chair Luke Simpkins MP says the inquiry is timely, "as the Pacific region is a major recipient of Australian aid and the Foreign Minister's recent announcement on development policy identified women's empowerment as a focus area." Earlier he noted that Australia's foreign aid budget will deliver an estimated \$5 billion this year, and each year into the future. "An important part of the inquiry is to examine how much of this will go to support the human rights of women and girls in the region."

Issues considered at the hearing included:

- Violence against women and girls
- Women's leadership
- Economic opportunities for women
- Access to justice

At an earlier hearing, gender experts from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade gave evidence to the inquiry into the human rights issues confronting women and girls in the

Indian Ocean and Asia Pacific region. The Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio budget statements for 2014-15 states that gender equality and women's empowerment will be a key priority across the aid program and Australia will continue to take a lead role on gender equality and women's empowerment in the aid program and advocacy.

Further details about the inquiry, including copies of submissions and how to contribute, can be obtained from the committee's website at www.aph.gov.au/jfadt or by contacting the committee secretariat on (02) 6277 2313 or emailing jscfadt@aph.gov.au. **For all other inquiries**, contact the Inquiry Secretary, on 02 6277 4318 or visit the committee website at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt

'Made in Australia' inquiry

The House of Representatives Agriculture and Industry Committee held a public hearing in Melbourne on 20 June as part of the committee's ongoing inquiry into country of origin labelling for food.

Further details about the inquiry, including submissions received and the terms of reference, can be obtained from the committee's website at: www.aph.gov.au/agind. For more information contact the secretariat on (02) 6277 4500, email agind.reps@aph.gov.au

Indigenous alcohol inquiry in WA

The House Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs held hearings in Western Australia, as it continues to gather evidence for the inquiry into the harmful use of alcohol in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The committee will hold public hearings in Perth, Broome and Halls Creek as well as visiting Fitzroy Crossing.

The committee Chair, Dr Sharman Stone MP, said "The committee is aware that there are many groups in WA who are working to reduce the harm caused by alcohol in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Their evidence will be important."

"Evidence from Western Australia suggests that where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are involved in developing strategies of harm minimisation and treatment for alcohol misuse, and where links to family and culture are maintained, programs have achieved greater success.

"Hearings such as these allow the committee to explore in depth what is successful, particularly in terms of community-led strategies and local initiatives."

At an earlier hearing, the Healing Foundation gave evidence on the role of services dealing with trauma and their community healing strategies in addressing intergenerational trauma. As well as providing treatment and support to people affected by alcohol misuse.

In its submission to the inquiry, the Healing Foundation drew the committee's attention to the role of trauma as a key determinant of alcohol misuse, and subsequent alcohol-related harm.

Dr Stone said, "The effects of trauma on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities cannot be underestimated and it is tragic but not surprising that people tend to misuse alcohol. There is increasing evidence that shows that services which adopt a trauma informed approach, incorporate recent learnings about the physical and psychological effects of trauma, and that respect and draw on the ancient wisdom of indigenous cultures are most successful in facilitating healing and recovery."

The full terms of reference are available at www.aph.gov.au/indigenousaffairs.

For background information, contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 62774559 or indigenousaffairs.reps@aph.gov.au

Child Support inquiry begins public hearings

The deadline for submissions to the parliamentary inquiry into the Child Support Program has been extended to 4 July 2014. The additional time will ensure that groups and individuals can make a contribution to the inquiry.

Public interest in the inquiry has been very high. More than 10,000 individuals have completed an online questionnaire which asks about their experiences with the Child Support system, and the committee has received more than 50 submissions from a range of experts and stakeholders.

"There has been an enormous amount of public interest in this inquiry," said committee Chair George Christensen MP. "We want to make sure the committee gives as many people as possible a chance to contribute to the inquiry and make sure their voice is heard."

The inquiry is examining a range of issues to do with the administration of the Child Support Program, in particular payment and enforcement options, flexibility, mediation and links with the Family Court.

At the committee's second hearing in Sydney on 27 June witnesses included Law Society of NSW, Women's Legal Services NSW, Equal Parenting (the Non-Custodial Parents Party) and Professor Patrick Parkinson, who led a Ministerial review of the Child Support system in 2005.

A further hearing is scheduled in Canberra for 17 July when the committee will hear from the Lone Fathers Association (Australia).

Further information about the inquiry, including the first submissions to be published, the public hearing schedule, and 'snapshots' of questionnaire responses, can be found on the inquiry website at www.aph.gov.au/childsupport.

What's On at the ANU?

What's On at ANU is a fortnightly email for staff and students that aims to highlight many of the interesting, enlightening and engaging public lectures, seminars and events happening around the university. All of these events are open to the public. Please check if reservations are needed.

For more information on any of the events listed, or to see a calendar of upcoming events, go to <http://billboard.anu.edu.au/events.asp>

Parking

There are four free car parking spaces for ANUEF members visiting the Molony Room in the Balmain Lane Car Park immediately south of the Molony Room.

ANU Archives supporters can find updated news on the ANU website at <http://www.archives.anu.edu.au/news-and-events-1>

ANUEF room bookings

Requests for booking the Molony Room should be addressed to Judith Caton via email, and these will be forwarded to the committee for approval, and then entered into the diary. A return email will be sent to the organisation confirming the booking. The diary is held in the office. Conditions for the use of the premises will be emailed to users and a copy is on the ANUEF website. Contact Judith Caton on judith.caton@anu.edu.au

The next edition of *Emeritus*, the ANUEF Newsletter, will be published in August, 2014.