

# **REPORT ON AUSTRALIA'S *DOCUMENTS ON* *AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN POLICY* PROJECT**

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The Historical Publications and Information Section of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is responsible for the production of the *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy (DAFP)* series. In addition to publishing this series of official diplomatic documents, the Department produces a series of historical monographs entitled *Australia in the World* and has produced other historical narratives on an *ad hoc* basis. The three historians that make up the section also handle queries relating to Australia's diplomatic history and foreign affairs and trade policy making from within the department, other government agencies and organizations, academic institutions, scholars and students, and the general public.

Australia's Historical Documents Project was established in the late 1960s by Paul Hasluck, the then Australian Minister for External Affairs, and set up an Advisory Committee to consider the manner in which the project should proceed and the nature and composition of an Editorial Advisory Board. After studying a number of overseas projects, it was decided to adopt the United States format, which established an editor and an Historical Office within the Department of State, and to appoint an Editorial Advisory Board on which there would be strong academic representation.

## **Document Series**

The series began in November 1971 with the Australian Government's acceptance of the recommendations contained in the first report of the Editorial Advisory Board that the initial series to be published would cover the years 1937 to 1949. This period, from the last of the inter-war Imperial Conferences through the Second World War and up to the end of the tenure of H.V. Evatt as Minister for External Affairs, was a major formative stage in the development both of the Department of External Affairs and of Australian foreign policy. Volumes in the series were to cover all aspects of Australian foreign policy over a particular period. The first volume, covering the years 1937 to 1938 was published in 1975.

Sixteen volumes have been published in this now completed first series of *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy*. There were, however, several changes made to the original content guidelines. In the later stages of the first series three separate volumes on Australia and the independence of Indonesia from 1947 to 1949 were included. It was also decided to cover the period 1948 to 1949 by one volume which dealt with *The (British) Commonwealth, Asia and the Pacific* and another volume which dealt with Australian foreign policy beyond Australia's immediate Southwest Pacific region. This last volume in the first series of *DAFP* was published in 2001.

During the 1937 to 1949 publications period, the Australian also published two special supplementary volumes: one entitled *My Dear P.M. Letters from R.G. Casey to S.M. Bruce 1924–29* and the other entitled *Letters from a 'Secret Service Agent' F.L. McDougall to S.M. Bruce 1924–29*. The first of these covered correspondence between the then Australian Prime Minister and his liaison officer with the British Cabinet and Foreign Office, during the time when Australian foreign policy was made in London, and the second between the same Prime Minister and his trade adviser in the United Kingdom.

In 1997 the Department published the first volume in the second series of *DAFP* which covers the period from 1950 onwards. The principle of this series is thematic. Each volume covers an important issue and theme not only in Australian foreign policy but also in trade policy, reflecting the amalgamation of the Australian Departments of Foreign Affairs and of Trade in 1987. The first volume, *The Australia–Japan Agreement on Commerce 1957*, was published to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the signing of the agreement. This volume dealt with the negotiation in the 1950s of Australia's first and most important trade agreement with an Asian state, an agreement which laid the foundation for Australia's fuller engagement with the Asian region.

To this point in time, all document volumes were compiled from records outside the 30-year closed period but, following the example of our counterparts in the United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Australia has faced the challenge of publishing from within this period. This important innovation in the Australian series of *DAFP* was taken in 1998. For some twenty years there had been considerable Australian public interest in the events leading up to the Indonesian incorporation of Portuguese Timor in 1976. Responding to this public interest the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Downer, authorised the Historical Documents Unit to assess all relevant files of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and to publish a volume containing the most important documents in a book entitled *Australia and the Indonesian Incorporation of*

*Portuguese Timor, 1974–1976*. The Minister decided to release simultaneously to the public all official diplomatic records relating to this incorporation excluding only Cabinet records intelligence material. The *Australia and the Indonesian Incorporation of Portuguese Timor, 1974–1976* volume has thus established the precedent for the further publication of documents volumes on material less than thirty years' old and otherwise unavailable under Australian law to the general public. Both our Editorial Advisory Board and the Minister for Foreign Affairs have accepted this principle.

Another precedent was established in 2003 when the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade published with the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade a joint volume of Australian and New Zealand documents entitled *The Negotiation of the Australia New Zealand Closer Economic Relations Trade Agreement 1983* to celebrate the 20th anniversary of this very important economic agreement between the two countries. Other thematic volumes published in the second series of *DAFP* to date include: *The ANZUS Treaty 1951, Australia and Recognition of the People's Republic of China, 1949–197, Australia and the Formation of Malaysia, 1961–1966*, and *Australia and the Colombo Plan, 1949–1957*. The first of a two volume publication, *Australia and the Independence of Papua New Guinea, 1966–1975*, is due for publication in 2006 as part of Papua New Guinea's 30-year celebrations. The other volume pending at present is *Australia and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty*.

### Narrative Histories

In addition to the document volumes, a small number of major narrative histories have been undertaken on an *ad hoc* basis. A two-volume history of Australia's engagement with Asia entitled *Facing North: A Century of Australian Engagement with Asia* was commenced in 1999 with the first volume published in 2001 and the second in 2003. Currently a narrative history, *Australia and the Cairns Group*, is in progress and is due to be published in August 2006. The selection of this last topic highlighted problems that have to be faced in working from documents from within the closed period. Initially, this project was to be a documents volume but there were departmental concerns that the proposed release of recent documents could affect the sensitive and ongoing Cairns Group negotiations. The decision to shift the project from a document to narrative form was a compromise that enabled the topic to be well-researched and sourced from the documents without revealing supplementary matter and/or comments that might affect the current process.

The most recent undertaking in the Australian documents program has been the launch in late 2004 of a new series of *ad hoc* occasional papers entitled *Australia in the World: The Foreign Affairs and Trade Files*. This series aims to widen the readership of Australia's international relations history through a straightforward narrative form but sourced almost entirely from files held in the National Archives of Australia. Each study is to cover a single issue, event, theme or service that has been managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in pursuit of its goal to protect and advance the overseas interests of Australia and Australians. Reflecting the ongoing importance to Australia of close engagement with its Pacific Island neighbours, the first history in this series was *Australia and the origins of the Pacific Islands Forum*. The second, '*Not a matter for negotiation*': *Australia's commitment to Malaysia 1961–1966*, is due to be released this year. This publication is the first that will be a companion narrative to a documents volume. In this case, *Australia and the Formation of Malaysia 1961–1966*, published earlier this year. There are two further studies in progress. The first is the history of the Australian passport, undertaken to mark the release of the new biometric series of travel documents and Australian Passport Act; and the second is an account of the negotiation of the 1976 Australia–Japan Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, commissioned as part of the Australia–Japan 2006 Year of Exchange celebrations to mark the 30th anniversary of the treaty. This publication will be another that will reference documents from within the closed period.

### Electronic Publishing

DAFP volumes can be viewed free of charge online at [www.info.dfat.gov.au/historical](http://www.info.dfat.gov.au/historical). A comprehensive and searchable website of published historical volumes up to 1997 was launched in early 2003. The volumes, a number of which are out of print, have been digitised by the process of optical character recognition (OCR) with an accuracy rate of 99.99026%. Each volume may be searched for key words and more complex searches may be undertaken across volumes. In addition, the subject indexes for each volume have been digitised and hypertext-linked to the relevant documents.

### Distribution

The key market for the above publications is academics, students, journalists and foreign and trade policy practitioners. The Department produces a print-run of 1500 copies of each volume (500 hardcover and 900 paperback). Approximately half the print-run is distributed within Australia and through Australian posts overseas. The remainder are sold

commercially through booksellers and the Department's website. The paperback edition has proved popular with academics, journalists and students— being portable and easier to manage when undertaking detailed research.

