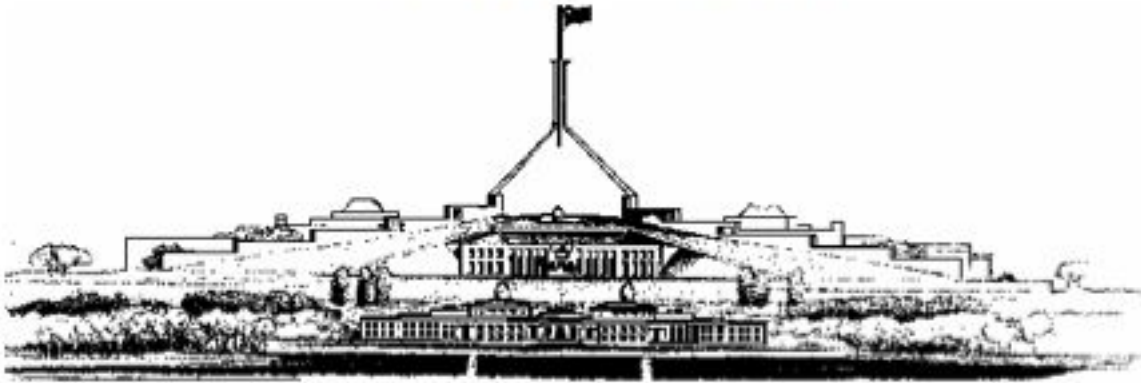




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**PROOF**

**MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

**Indonesian Language in Australia**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 14 March 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 14 March 2012  
**Page** 37  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Eggleston, Sen Alan

**Source** Senate  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Senator EGGLESTON** (Western Australia) (13:36): I have here a report, *Indonesian Language in Australian universities : strategies for a stronger future*, authored by David Hill from the Murdoch University Asia Research Centre. Professor Hill makes the point that, although two-way trade between Indonesia and Australia has grown by an average of 9.7 per cent per annum since 2006 and the Australian government has shown its support for a closer relationship with Indonesia, going right back to supporting their claim for independence in 1945, Australia's inclination and preparedness to learn the Indonesian language, Bahasa Indonesia, has steadily declined.

In the decade from 2001 to 2010, enrolments in Indonesian language studies nationally dropped by over 40 per cent, at a time when the overall undergraduate population in universities expanded by nearly 40 per cent. This is while the number of Chinese students studying in Australia remains about 10 times that of Indonesian students studying in Australia, despite Indonesia being our closest neighbour. Indonesia has a great future ahead of it in terms of economic development. It is going to be one of the tigers of South-East Asia, with enormous economic progress to be made.

It is very important and in Australia's overall national interests that Australians learn to speak Bahasa Indonesia, because it makes such a big difference when you are trying to do business in a country if you can communicate in the country's language. Recently, although we say we wish to develop better relationships with Indonesia, the fact remains that our relationship with Indonesia has been very much up and down. The recent ban on live cattle exports to Indonesia illustrated, many people feel, Australia's lack of understanding of Indonesia and Indonesian culture. It has resulted, sadly, in many official circles in Australia being regarded by Indonesians as still having the mentality of white colonialists, with very little understanding of Asian culture.

That is why the Asia Research Centre at Murdoch University is pressing for the teaching of Bahasa Indonesia to be resumed in schools and taken up in universities. Murdoch has recommended that the teaching of Bahasa be designated as a strategic national priority and that the Australian Research Council and the Department of Education, Science and Training be

requested to recognise this in prioritising funding for both research and teaching in Indonesia.

There were 20 recommendations in the report by Professor Hill, which would require funding of some \$98 million over the next decade to achieve. These are objectives which he feels are necessary to bring Australians up to the required level of skill with Bahasa Indonesia to enable us to maximise the opportunities that Indonesia is offering this country.

One of the most important things is that there should be more student exchanges between Australia and Indonesia and also more business and government exchanges because these help to build bridges and friendships which very often promote the development of agreements of various kinds, whether they be with academics, businesspeople or individuals. It is important also for us to encourage more Indonesian students to study in Australia. Even though Indonesia is our closest neighbour, there are only some 19,000 Indonesian students in Australia. By contrast there are, I believe, 230,000 Chinese students in Australia. The numbers of students in Australian universities from Indonesia have been declining, and school enrolments in Indonesian programs across the country have been declining by at least 10,000 students per year.

One thing which is not happening is that Australians are not going to study in Indonesia. Between 2007 and 2011, only 53 Australian students per year enrolled in an Indonesian university for a study program of one semester or more. The exchange of students and encouraging Australians to go to university in Indonesia to do specific courses or postgraduate courses would greatly help build the relationship between our two countries.

I remember that in 2003, as part of an Australian parliamentary delegation, we met a group of Australian alumni in Surabaya. There were a lot of people there, from graduates in engineering who graduated in the 1950s under the Colombo Plan through to a lady who had only recently graduated from Curtin University in Perth. They told us that, I think, four members of the Indonesian cabinet were graduates from Australian universities. That is the kind of dividend that pays off. By having Indonesian students coming to our country and by having Australian students going to Indonesia and learning more about Indonesia and

Indonesian, when Australians go there, they are able to communicate with the local people.

Australia's somewhat negative perception of Indonesia is also compounded by the current level and wording of the travel advisory which states:

We advise you to reconsider your need to travel to Indonesia, including Bali, due to the very high threat of terrorist attack.

That has been in place for the past decade. The Australian government says the advice is not intended to be interpreted as a ban on educational exchanges with Indonesia, but I think it needs to be reviewed. I seek leave to table the report from Murdoch University *Indonesian language in Australian universities: strategies for a stronger future*.

**Senator Kim Carr:** What is the report?

**Senator EGGLESTON:** It is an academic report. It has been published, Senator. I do not think there is anything controversial about it.

Leave granted.