



Bahasa cuts 'risky'

Lack of Indonesian language courses sparks concern

By JESSICA NICO

A MURDOCH University professor has warned that the rapid decline of Indonesian language learning in Australia could have consequences for international relationships between the two nations.

South East Asian Studies lecturer David Hill said the number of people studying Indonesian is declining by as many as 10,000 annually, despite it being dubbed a 'nationally strategic language' by the Australian Government.

Prof Hill said the decline had been steady but relentless in the last decade and at least five university Indonesian programs had closed in the past eight years.

"Australia's relationship with Indonesia is one of the most important international relationships we have because whatever

happens, we will always live next door to them, so we have to manage that relationship in the most productive way," he said.

"Like any relationship, we have to communicate and understand the different perspectives in the relationship, and the only way we can do that is to understand the language; if we don't, we can't understand the forces that drive that society, such as culture, religion and politics.

"There are all kinds of ways that we need to relate to and work positively with Indonesians, and that is at risk if we don't have competent Indonesian-speaking graduates."

In a bid to combat the decline, Murdoch hosted the National Colloquium on the Future of Indonesian in Australian Universities last week, which brought together

language experts and universities from across Australia.

The colloquium aimed to come up with concrete proposals to reverse the trend.

Murdoch student Tamsyn Butler had to move to WA from Tasmania because of a lack of Indonesian courses in that State's universities, but she was forced to change universities after two years because the course was cut.

"I had to swap universities when a Bahasa Indonesian course was cut at Curtin University, which wasted a lot of HECS and time," she said.

"This was because there were only four students who had chosen to continue the course through to the second semester in their second year."