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DELEGATION TO AUSTRALIA

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**MONTHLY REPORT ON AUSTRALIA**  
*July 2012*

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## 1. POLITICAL SITUATION

*Summary: Politics in July centred on the introduction of the two contentious taxes: the minerals resources rent tax and the carbon tax, fractures between Labor and the Greens and continued speculation over PM Julia Gillard's leadership with one poll perhaps giving Gillard just a glimmer of hope.*

**Labor-Greens spat:** The Greens' blocking of the offshore processing of asylum seekers legislation in June prompted key Labor figures – both MPs and trade union leaders – to take aim at the Greens for their "extremism" and call for Labor to preference the Greens last in coming elections. The Greens hit back accusing Labor of having no principles and "standing for nothing". The slanging match left observers bemused, pointing out that Labor will need the Greens vote to avoid a complete whitewash at the next election, where they will also need the support of the Greens in the Senate to ensure the Coalition does not win control of that House as well. Gillard steered clear of the bloodletting on the Greens, instead putting her focus on the Coalition to highlight Industrial Relations as a key issue for the next election.

*Comment: Unable to win the controversy over the carbon tax, and having no solution to the asylum seeker impasse, it is little wonder that Gillard is looking elsewhere for the Coalition's Achilles' heel.*

**Leadership speculation:** PM Gillard escaped a bullet when Labor managed to scrap a win in a state by-election in Victoria. There were no bouquets for Gillard but at least it stopped another round of blame-shifting to add to her already unpopular standing. Leadership speculation was further fuelled when the Government Whip Joel Fitzgibbon gratuitously opined on a TV current affairs program that "unpopular leaders would eventually no longer be leaders". The comment opened yet another spate of Gillard attacks across the media depriving her of the clear air she and Labor needs need to revive their fortunes. Many attribute the leadership scheme to former PM, Kevin Rudd though he himself has been silent on the issue simply re-stating his position that he would not challenge the PM again.

**Polls – a glimmer of hope?** While polls come and go, the latest monthly Fairfax/Nielsen poll published on 30 July is particularly interesting for the data it includes on a wider range of topics. The poll might also give Gillard just a glimmer of hope.

The poll still finds Labor's primary vote rising 2 points but remaining at a parlous 30%. The all-important **two-party preferred vote** shows the Coalition with a commanding 6-point lead 56% (-2) to Labor's 44% (+2). The two-party vote reflects a 6% swing to the Coalition since the last election, enough to deliver it an extra 29 seats if the swing was uniform at the election. Labor's minority govt currently holds a majority of just one.

On the **preferred prime minister** rating, Tony Abbott leads Julia Gillard 48% (+2) to 43%(+1).

On overall preferred leaders, the poll finds **Kevin Rudd** remains **twice as popular** as Julia Gillard 60% to 31%, and **Rudd is also preferred to Tony Abbott** 57% to 36%.

*Comment: This does not mean Rudd would win an election against Abbott.*

Yet 61% of Labor voters believe the party must stick with Gillard, with only 36% supporting a change.

Nearly two-thirds of Labor voters say the party should direct preferences to the Greens in a rejection of the campaign against the alliance partner led by key Labor officials.

But a glimmer of hope comes by on the survey about the **carbon tax**. Just one month after its introduction, the poll finds far fewer voters believe the carbon tax will hurt them now they have experienced it but the policy is still unpopular and so is the govt that introduced it.

- Today only 38% of voters think they will be worse off, down from 51% a month ago.
- 52% now think the tax would make no difference to them, up from 37% a month ago.
- Only 5% of voters think they will be better off, same as last month.

*Comment: This is what PM Gillard and Labor was eagerly hoping for, that voters seeing the impact of the carbon tax in practice would refute the long-running fear mongering of the Opposition and other tax critics. The Government will be hoping for continued improvement in the coming months. In this regard it will recall that when PM Howard introduced the Goods and Services tax (GST) in 2001, it was also unpopular in the electorate but as time wore on, it won general acceptance. The big difference however is that John Howard put the GST to the people before the election, while Julia Gillard is perceived as having broken an election promise in introducing the carbon tax having explicitly stated no such tax would be imposed under her Government. We will need to wait for further polls to see if this poll is the start of a general swing, or prove it is just an aberration. Voters' declining distaste of the carbon tax also has to translate to a more favourable view of Julia Gillard and Labor. Given the acrimonious views of several Labor MPs towards Kevin Rudd at last February's leadership challenge, it is difficult to see him being re-invited to assume the leadership. But if Gillard fails to revive her and Labor's standing in the polls over the next few months, enough MPs could turn to an alternative leader with a number of names being countenanced including Crean, Smith, and Carr. This interim leader would give younger ambitious potential leaders such as Shorten and Combet time to hone their skills but remain untarnished by what presently looks like being a humiliating loss at the next election.*

## **2. INTERNATIONAL ISSUES**

### **Second Australia-Indonesia Annual Leaders' Meeting**

PM Julia Gillard and Indonesian President Yudhoyono met for the annual Australia-Indonesia Leaders' meeting in Darwin on 3 July. The joint communiqué highlighted the two countries' enduring and wide-ranging cooperation, and among new announcements was Australia's increasing of the number of work and holiday visas available to Indonesians; confirmation that the first round of the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations will take place head of the annual Trade Ministers' meeting later this year; a memorandum of understanding for the transfer of four Australia C-130 aircraft to the Indonesian air force (also see Leaders' remarks).

Later in the month, FM Carr visited Indonesia during which he met with Indonesian Foreign Minister Natalegawa on 16 July. The Ministers discussed the bilateral partnership, along with regional issues such as the importance of a code of conduct for the South China Sea and engagement with Myanmar (see statement).

### **Foreign Minister attends East Asia Summit and ASEAN meetings**

FM Carr participated in the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference +1 session on 11 July in Phnom Penh, where he discussed Australia's approach to security challenges, while ASEAN ministers expressed appreciation for Australian development and economic cooperation support. The Meeting also agreed to broaden maritime cooperation (see Chairman's statement). At the East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers' Meeting on 12 July, FM Carr encouraged cooperation to implement a 2011 Australia-Indonesia disaster management initiative (see Chairman's statement). FM Carr also attended the ASEAN Regional Forum.

### **Australian American Leadership Dialogue**

A high-level group of Australian MPs attended the 20<sup>th</sup> Australia-American Leadership Dialogue in Washington DC and New York in mid-July, including the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness Craig Emerson, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations Bill Shorten, former-PM Kevin Rudd, Opposition Leader Tony Abbott, and Deputy Opposition Leader Julie Bishop. The closeness of the Australia-US relationship was reflected in speeches by Emerson and Shorten, while in an emotive speech to the Heritage Foundation, Tony Abbott observed that "*Australia's relationship with America does not isolate us from our neighbours. It makes us a better neighbour. Our ties with the US give Australia more standing in the region. Conversely, our standing in the region makes us a more valuable ally for the United States.*" Abbott's speech was later criticised by PM Gillard, particularly its highlighting of Government defence budget cuts.

### **Australia pushes for global Arms Trade Treaty**

FM Bob Carr was also in the United States in early July, where in Australia's statement to the UN Arms Trade Treaty Conference on 3 July he pushed for a comprehensive agreement and committed to Australia providing financial assistance to help developing countries implement the Treaty when it is concluded.

### **PM Gillard honours visiting Zimbabwean PM**

Zimbabwean Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai visited Australia and New Zealand, holding formal discussions with PM Julia Gillard on 23 July (see comments from the PM's spokesperson). During the visit, PM Tsvangirai sought to encourage bilateral trade and investment, and proposed Australia lift its sanctions on Zimbabwe (see ABC TV interview), with PM Gillard responding by asking the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to review current restrictions. Media reporting of the visit also cited the European Council's conclusions on Zimbabwe, issued on 23 July.

### **Parliamentary Secretary attends African Union Summit, visits Europe**

The Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Richard Marles, represented PM Julia Gillard at the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa during July. The Summit provided an opportunity for Australia to continue to foster support for its UN Security Council, but in a television interview, Mr Marles also stressed Australia's recent increased engagement with the continent, highlighting the imminent opening of an embassy in Senegal, Australia's development and humanitarian assistance programs in Africa, and growing commercial interests, especially in the mining sector. Afterwards, Parliamentary Secretary Marles visited Croatia and Romania.

### **New Ambassador to Austria announced**

Foreign Minister Carr announced on 5 July that David Stuart is expected to take up the appointment of Australia's next Ambassador to Austria (with non-resident accreditation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine) in August 2012. Mr Stuart is a senior career officer with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and has previously been posted to Washington, New York and Jakarta.

### **Defence and Security**

#### **Counter-piracy measures discussed at Perth conference**

The Australian Government hosted an international counter-piracy conference in Perth from 16-17 July. The Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Science and Personnel Warren Snowden delivered a paper on behalf of the Minister for Defence, which outlined Australia's counter-piracy efforts and announced the provision of scholarships for West and Central African countries to attend Australian University courses on maritime

security. A [speech](#) was also delivered by the Head of Delegation, outlining the EU's approach to contain and deter maritime piracy, particularly off the Horn of Africa.

### **Australia-United States law enforcement agencies sign agreement**

On 14 July, the Australian Federal Police Commissioner Tony Negus and FBI Deputy Director Sean Joyce signed a Memorandum of Understanding on collaboration in the fight against organised crime and terrorism, while also consolidating cooperation in the exchange of information and resources (see Ministerial [media release](#)).

## **The Pacific**

### **Australia-New Zealand-Fiji engagement discussed at trilateral meeting**

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade invited the EU and other likeminded countries (Japan, United States, France, United Kingdom and New Zealand) to a briefing on the outcomes of the recent trilateral meeting between Australia, New Zealand and Fiji. Following the meeting it was agreed that each country's High Commissioner would be reinstated. Australia will continue to maintain its travel sanctions, albeit with some flexibility for civilian applications (see joint [statement](#)).

### **RAMSI transition discussed at meeting with Solomon Islands leadership**

Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs Richard Marles met with Solomon Island PM Gordon Darcy Lilo and Deputy PM Manasseh Maelanga on 2 July to discuss the future role to be played by the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). In radio [interview](#), Mr Marles spoke of RAMSI's gradual transition to a civilian presence, with the military component likely to withdraw in the second-half of 2013.

## **Development and Aid**

### **Australia to host high-level malaria conference**

Attending the East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers' meeting in Phnom Penh, FM Carr [announced](#) on 12 July that Australia will host the Malaria 2012: Saving lives in the Asia-Pacific conference, to be held in Sydney from 31 October to 2 November 2012

### **Additional aid for Syria**

On 8 July, FM Carr detailed a further \$A5 million in medical aid and food supplies for those affected by the ongoing conflict in Syria. The aid brings Australia's total contribution to Syria to \$A16 million (see [media release](#)).

## **EU-Australia relations**

### **Third EU-Australia Macroeconomic Dialogue**

On 18 July, the third EU-Australia Macroeconomic Dialogue was held in Canberra and on the COM side was led by Peter Bekx (Director, DG ECFIN) supported by Moreno Bertoldi (HoU). The Dialogue was held in a very cordial manner with a frank and open exchange of views focusing on the European economic outlook (major point of discussion); Australian economic outlook; international and regional economic developments; and G20 issues. Earlier, on 17 July, Mr Bekx delivered a [presentation](#) at the Australian National University's Centre for European Studies.

### **Visit by D-G Ruete**

Director General Matthias Ruete visited Australia during July to take part in Aviation Security meetings. During his visit he also met with officials from the National Transport Commission, the Transport Certification Authority, Intelligent Transport Systems Australia, Vicroads, the Victorian Department of Transport, CSIRO and the Commonwealth Government Department of Infrastructure and Transport.

### **Fourth round of EU-Australia Framework Agreement negotiations**

The 4<sup>th</sup> round of negotiations took place in Canberra on 26-27 July. The round enabled a number of issues to be resolved and agreement to be reached on several articles. Some of the more controversial issues remain open, namely the institutional framework and linkages with other agreements, language concerning the article pertaining to intellectual property and the nature of the partnership between the EU and Australia (in particular whether it should be labelled as a strategic partnership or not).

## **3. SECTORAL ISSUES**

### **Trade and Investment**

#### **Important progress noted at latest TPP round**

The 13<sup>th</sup> round of Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations were held in San Diego from 2-10 July, with Australia reporting of good progress made in the customs, cross-border services, telecommunications, government procurement, competition policy and cooperation and capacity building working groups (see Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's update).

#### **Coalition grapples with foreign investment policy**

The Liberal and National parties' ongoing internal deliberations over the Coalition's foreign investment policy towards agriculture came to the fore following a speech delivered by leader Tony Abbott to the China-Australia Chamber of Commerce in Beijing on 24 July, in which he stated that: "*An incoming Coalition government would welcome Chinese investment on the same basis that we welcome investment from other countries*", before adding, "*It would rarely be in Australia's national interest to allow a foreign government or its agencies to control an Australian business*". Treasurer Wayne Swan pounced on this, accusing Mr Abbott of putting a question mark over the state enterprise guidelines which were first incorporated into Australia's Foreign Investment Policy in June 2010. Senior Liberal MPs have disputed this, claiming that Mr Abbott was merely restating the existing foreign investment review process. The Coalition's flagged policy eventually emerged as a discussion paper on 3 August, seeking comment on the strengthening of the review process for proposed foreign acquisitions of agricultural land or businesses, and the creation of foreign ownership register for agricultural land, the latter option having already being mooted by the Government in June.

#### **New pathway to step up negotiations on trade in services**

On 6 July, Trade and Competitiveness Minister Emerson welcomed a statement by 44 World Trade Organization members (including Australia) which commits them to intensifying negotiations on an agreement on global trade in services.

#### **Easier access to the WTO by LDCs**

On 26 July, Minister Emerson welcomed the decision by members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to streamline the process under which Least Developed Countries (LDCs) join the organisation.

#### **Further review into Australia's anti-dumping system**

On 4 July, Home Affairs Minister Clare announced a review to consider whether Australia needs a specialist agency to investigate complaints about anti-dumping. Former Victorian Premier John Brumby will lead the review.

### **Economic and Financial Affairs**

#### **Economic data update**

Retail sales (4/7) rose by 0.5% in May to be just 3.5% higher than a year ago; while sales of new motor vehicles (17/7) in June decreased by 0.6%, but increased by a strong 18.4% year-on-year. Building approvals (31/7) decreased by 2.5% in June, following a 27% hike in May,

to be 10.2% higher year-on-year; while housing finance (11/7) for owner-occupation fell by 1.2% in May to be 4.5% higher annually. House prices increased by 0.5% in the June quarter to be 2.1% lower annually. The rate of increase in private sector credit (31/7) is beginning to pick-up, increasing by 0.3% in June and by 4.4% annually.

The monthly deficit on trade in goods and services (5/7) was lower than expected at \$A0.2bn in April, a marked improvement on the deficit of A\$1.3bn in March. Credits rose by 3% in the month to \$A26.1bn, while debits fell by 1% to \$A26.3bn

The June quarter 2012 inflation (released on 25/7) also showed the headline inflation falling to a 13 year low (June 1999) at 1.2% annually and by 0.5% for the quarter; and while the RBA's preferred underlying inflation (weighted median) increased by 1.9% annually, just outside the RBA's target band of 2-3% over the cycle. Annual increases in producer prices (23/7) for the year to June were also contained and were just 1.1% higher for final stage prices and 1.4% higher for both intermediate stage prices and preliminary stage prices.

### **Monetary Policy**

On 3 July, the Board of the Reserve Bank of Australia announced that it had decided to keep the cash rate unchanged at 3.5%, following reductions totalling 75 basis points in the previous two months, with monetary policy settings are now considered to be moderately stimulating growth. The minutes of the meeting revealed that the Board considered the settings as appropriate 'given evidence of slower global growth and the low rate of inflation in Australia'.

### **Economic forecasts**

*The Economist* (7/9) July poll of GDP forecasts puts the Australian economy amongst the world's best performing developed countries, with an expected GDP growth for Australia of 3.3% for 2012 (up from 2.9% on the previous month's forecast) and 3.2% for 2013 (down from +3.3%). Australia's inflation is forecast at 2.1% for 2012 (down from 2.2%) and 2.7% for 2013 (unchanged). The current account deficit as a percentage of GDP is expected to be 3.5% in 2012 (up from 3.2%), increasing to 4.2% in 2013 (up from 4.0%). *The Australian Financial Review* quarterly survey of forecasts (2/7) showed downward revisions in growth for 2012 to 3.0% (*cf* 3.2% in April) and no change for 2013 at 3.5%.

### **Brisbane to host G20 Summit in 2014**

On 11 July, PM Julia Gillard, together with Deputy PM and Treasurer Wayne Swan announced that Queensland's capital city Brisbane will host the G20 Leaders' Summit on 15-16 November 2014. PM Gillard also said that the preceding G20 Finance Ministers' meetings will be held in regional locations in Queensland (confirming on 5 August that Cairns will host one of these meetings), while the various preparatory G20 meetings will take place across Australia. In chairing the G20 during 2014, Australia will join Russia and Mexico in the G20 troika from 1 December 2012.

### **Bilateral dialogue established on use of renminbi in regional trade and investment**

Visiting Hong Kong, Deputy PM and Treasurer Wayne Swan, together with Hong Kong Financial Secretary John Tsang, announced a new private sector dialogue to involve senior business leaders on renminbi trade and investment in the region. The dialogue will start in Sydney next year and be facilitated by the Australian Treasury, the Reserve Bank of Australia and the Hong Kong Monetary Authority. The announcement follows the three-year RMB 200 billion currency swap arrangement signed between the Reserve Bank of Australia and the People's Bank of China in March this year.

### **Third EU-Australia Macroeconomic Dialogue**

On 18 July, the third EU-Australia Macroeconomic Dialogue was held in Canberra (see *EU-Australia relations*)

## **Regulatory Issues**

### **Council of Australian Governments' meeting splits on party lines**

At the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) meeting held in Canberra on 25 July, PM Gillard was only able to secure the in-principle agreement of the Labor states of South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory to launch the first stage of a National Disability Insurance Scheme from July 2013. Despite earlier bipartisan support for the major reform, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria (all led by Coalition governments) were unwilling to agree on funding arrangements for the trial stage, although amidst public pressure the latter two states conceded to the PM's demands two days later. COAG also agreed to establish an independent review of construction industry costs, amid concerns over the sector's competitiveness (see [communiqué](#)).

## **Agriculture and Fisheries**

### **Consultation on draft Biosecurity legislation**

On 4 July, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator Ludwig, [announced](#) a phase of public consultation on the draft Biosecurity Bill and the Inspector-General of Biosecurity Bill (exposure drafts), with comments due by 10 August. The Bills are intended to provide a modern and transparent framework legislation, and while the Australian authorities have indicated that they do not expect the legislation to make access to the Australian market any more difficult and will allow for more flexible mechanisms for meeting Australia's conservative Appropriate Level of Protection (ALOP).

### **National Food Plan green paper launched**

On 17 July, Senator Ludwig launched a 284pp National Food Plan [green paper](#). The green paper seeks views on possible future food policy options, including: food security; market access; supply chain relationships; research and development; infrastructure; land use; skills; ongoing food policy development; and disaster mitigation. Comments on the Green paper are due by 30 September.

### **Lithuanian super-trawler to come to Australia**

A Tasmanian company is bringing a Lithuanian super-trawler to Australia to fish for small, pelagic species. Despite the fact that the company would be bound by Australia's quota system and other fisheries rules, the use of such a large vessel has attracted the ire of recreational fishers and some environmental NGOs (see [media coverage](#) and an Australian Fisheries Management Authority [media release](#)).

### **Head of Australian fisheries authority criticises EU Illegal Unreported and Unregulated Fisheries Regulation**

During a recent informal meeting with the Delegation, the head of the Australian Fisheries Management Authority denounced the EU IUU Regulation as expensive and difficult to comply with, and tantamount to a non-tariff barrier.

## **Environment**

### **Carbon price commences**

Australia's politically divisive and controversial carbon price of \$A23 / tonne commenced on 1 July. The government is hoping the Opposition's attacks on the scheme will have less traction as Australians see the many dire predictions don't eventuate. Strangely, the government's advertising campaign promoting the various household compensation measures does not even mention the carbon price or the reasons for its existence. The Opposition vows to repeal the legislation.

## **Transport and Infrastructure**

### **Visit by D-G Ruete**

Director General Matthias Ruete visited Australia to take part in Aviation Security meetings (see *EU-Australia relations*).

## **Information Society**

### **Minister responds to OECD broadband rankings**

In a [media release](#) issued on 18 July, the Minister for Broadband Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, reacted to the release of the OECD's latest [broadband statistics](#) by claiming that they reinforce the need for the Government's National Broadband Network (NBN). According to the OECD data, Australia fell three places to just 21<sup>st</sup> out of 34 for fixed line broadband penetration as of December 2011 (24.6 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, just below the OECD average of 25.6).

Minister Conroy stated that "*The OECD's figures continue to demonstrate the importance of rolling out the NBN to all Australians*". In contrast, the opposition communications spokesman, Malcolm Turnbull attributed Australia's worsening performance to the slow pace of the roll-out of the NBN, with the Coalition opposition continuing to prefer a more rapidly deployed "fibre-to-the-node" network, as opposed to the NBN's "fibre-to-the-home" approach.

## **Science and Innovation**

### **New Super Computer for SKA**

A new \$A33 million supercomputer will be installed at the purpose-built Pawsey Centre in Perth. Once operational in March 2013, the supercomputer will process data generated by the Australian Square Kilometre Array (SKA) Pathfinder (ASKAP) radio [telescope](#).

### **Australians help to discover new particle**

Australian scientists have contributed to the international [discovery](#) of a new particle believed to be the Higgs boson - a scientific breakthrough generations in the making. Melbourne University Professor Geoffrey Taylor led the group of Australian scientists involved in the research. Australian scientists are able to access the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) at CERN, thanks to an agreement with ANSTO. In addition to fundamental science accelerators, like the LHC, a range of smaller accelerators, such as the Australian Synchrotron, have applications including the study of protein structure and new pharmaceuticals. ANSTO also has two accelerators at its Lucas Heights.

## **Immigration**

### **Possible agreement with Indonesia on asylum seeker searches**

At the Australia-Indonesia annual Leaders' meeting (see *International*), PM Gillard and Indonesian President Yudhoyono discussed the importance of the Bali process in combating human trafficking and people smuggling. Subsequently, an [ABC report](#) on 1 August quoted Indonesia's Defence Minister referring to an impending agreement that would allow the Australian navy into Indonesia's search zone without having to ask permission, however ministerial spokespersons from both Australia and Indonesia later said the plans were still being formulated. More than 1000 asylum seekers a month now arrive from Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

## Image of the month



The entry into force of the Government's carbon pricing scheme on 1 July 2012 (see *Environment*) prompted PM Gillard and senior Ministers (including Climate Change Minister Greg Combet, pictured driving) to fan out across Australia to sell the scheme's benefits and promote related compensation payments. With Opposition Leader Tony Abbott having claimed that putting a price on carbon would wipe certain towns (such as South Australia's Whyalla) off the map, Trade and Competitiveness Minister Craig Emerson could not resist lampooning Mr Abbott and broke into song (specifically a 1970s Australian pop classic by Skyhooks) at the end of an [ABC TV interview](#) on 2 July.

Source: *The Canberra Times*, 3 July 2012