Introduction

On 8 August 1967, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand formed the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Australian Government and Opposition responded promptly. The next day, Paul Hasluck, the Minister for External Affairs, endorsed ASEAN’s aims of accelerating ‘the economic growth, social progress and cultural development of the region’, and of promoting ‘regional peace and stability’. These objectives, he said, ‘had Australia’s full support’.¹ For his part, Opposition leader Gough Whitlam, speaking on 17 August, said that the formation of ASEAN was a ‘natural development’. In addition, it had historical significance because it ‘was the first occasion on which Indonesia has been associated with all her immediate neighbours’ and because it was ‘the first occasion on which Singapore, a Chinese State … has been associated with Malay nations or other peoples in the region’.²

Despite these favourable remarks, there was at that time good reason to doubt whether ASEAN would become a durable regional organisation. Its founding members, as Whitlam noted, were highly diverse. They were rivals and in some cases recent enemies. Previous efforts at indigenous regional cooperation and organisation in Southeast Asia had not succeeded. In the event, however, while ASEAN has gone through some difficult times, it has gained in profile and significance. It has developed traditions of and mechanisms for consultation and cooperation, which have helped it to maintain peace among its members. Its style of cooperation has been attractive to all the states in Southeast Asia and its membership has accordingly expanded from

the original five to 10. An additional neighbouring state, Timor-Leste, is interested to join. ASEAN has become essential to political and economic cooperation in Southeast Asia and has developed a broader regional and international significance.

ASEAN has also become central to Australia’s relations with Southeast Asia. In 1974, Australia became the first external country to develop a formal multilateral relationship with ASEAN. Australia as a dialogue partner has, since 1980, taken part in consultations at the time of ASEAN’s annual foreign ministers’ meetings and has many other sectoral consultations. Australia has also participated in other ASEAN-sponsored institutions, including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) (at foreign minister level) and the East Asia Summit (of heads of government), which provide dialogues that include the ASEAN members and the major powers, including the United States, China, Japan and India.

Australia’s economic and people-to-people linkages with the ASEAN region are very extensive in many areas. The ASEAN countries, with a total population of over 620 million people and an estimated combined gross domestic product in 2014 of US$2.5 trillion, are important economic partners for Australia. Australia’s total merchandise trade with ASEAN in 2013–14 was over A$100 billion, about 15 per cent of Australia’s trade overall, making the ASEAN members collectively Australia’s second largest trade partner. Australia’s services trade with the ASEAN group was valued at over A$20 billion. The two-way investment relationship was, in 2014, valued at about A$140 billion, with ASEAN investment in Australia at A$111 billion and Australia’s investment in ASEAN members at A$29 billion. Economic relationships are supported by the ASEAN–Australia–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement, which was inaugurated in 2010 and is Australia’s largest multilateral regional trade agreement. Development assistance has also been significant, with Australia in 2015–16 providing over A$770 million in bilateral and multilateral contributions.

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4 Australia’s bilateral aid in 2015–16 was provided to Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam. See Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ‘Where We Give Aid’, dfat.gov.au/aid/where-we-give-aid/Pages/where-we-give-aid.aspx (accessed 1 October 2015).
People-to-people associations enmesh Australia and ASEAN. There were, in 2011, over 650,000 people in Australia who were born in ASEAN countries. Education has been a particularly important element in the relationship and constitutes Australia’s largest services export to ASEAN members. There were 614,327 enrolments by students from ASEAN countries in higher education in Australia in the decade from 2002 to 2012, and over 100,000 students from ASEAN members study in Australia each year. Australians are also gaining increased interactions with ASEAN members through education; the Australian Government’s ‘New Colombo Plan’ (inaugurated in 2013) will increase the number of Australians who will study for at least part of their degrees in ASEAN member (as well as other Asian) countries.

Australia’s ASEAN relationship has attracted some increased attention from analysts. Jiro Okamoto has provided a detailed account of the economic relationship between the two sides. Sally Percival Wood and Baogang He have edited a valuable collection of papers on a number of aspects of relations. The relationship has also been evaluated in a study edited by Anthony Milner and Percival Wood for Asialink at the University of Melbourne.

This monograph seeks to contribute to the subject by providing a concise account of the origins and phases of development of Australia’s relations with ASEAN, the role ASEAN has played in Australian foreign relations since the 1970s, and the ways in which the two sides have collaborated, and at times disagreed, in the pursuit of regional security and stability. Chapter 1 begins with a review of Australia’s engagement with Southeast Asia in the years immediately before the formation of ASEAN and then discusses the origins of ASEAN and the first phase of Australian policies towards it with the inauguration of multilateral relations in April 1974. Chapter 2 covers relations between 1976 and 1983 under Malcolm Fraser’s government when interactions were dominated by trade and economic issues.

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(which involved considerable discord) and then after 1979 by the regional and international conflict over Cambodia. Chapter 3 assesses relations during the Bob Hawke and Paul Keating governments from 1983 to 1996, when the initial focus was on efforts to alleviate conflict over Cambodia. From the late 1980s, in the context of the decline of Cold War confrontation, relations with ASEAN were central in Australia’s contributions to the Cambodian peace process and to the development of two new regional groups to enhance economic and security cooperation, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) grouping and the ARF. Chapter 4 reviews developments between 1996 and 2007 under John Howard’s government, when ASEAN relations experienced strain in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis and the separation of East Timor from Indonesia. Relations were then redeveloped by both sides after 2001 with the advent of cooperation over multilateral economic relations and the inauguration of the East Asia Summit, which Australia joined as a founding member. Chapter 5 considers relations from 2007 onwards, when Kevin Rudd’s government sought to advance proposals for a wider Asia Pacific Community but met with ASEAN resistance. The chapter discusses efforts to extend Australia’s institutional relations under Julia Gillard’s government amid rising major power tensions after 2009, especially in relation to the South China Sea; the chapter then considers the approaches of Tony Abbott’s government and the ASEAN–Australia Commemorative Summit in November 2014. Chapter 6 in conclusion reviews major issues and patterns in relations since 1974 and outlines key issues that are likely to affect the relationship in the future.

In assessing the evolution of multilateral relations since 1974, the work considers and explores four major themes that are especially relevant:

- the impact of major power relations in East Asia and how they have influenced the context and course of Australia’s interactions with ASEAN;
- the interest which successive Australian governments have expressed since the 1970s in regional communication and détente between the original participants in ASEAN (from 1967) and the states of Indochina and Myanmar;
• the diversity and pluralism in both Australia and Southeast Asia in relation to how to delineate and define an appropriate ‘region’ for cooperation and how this has impacted on the course of Australia’s multilateral relations with ASEAN; and

• the special significance for the multilateral ASEAN connection of relations between Australia and ASEAN’s largest member, Indonesia.

Three additional points should be noted about the monograph and its scope and coverage. In discussing the development of Australia’s ASEAN relations, the work refers at a number of points to major developments in ASEAN itself. This work, however, is not seeking to provide a comprehensive account of ASEAN’s evolution and character. Those issues have been addressed by many other studies, including a comprehensive account of ASEAN by Christopher B. Roberts, and a paper on these issues in 2013 by this author.9

The focus in this monograph is on ASEAN as a grouping and on how Australia has interacted with ASEAN as an association of regional states. The work is accordingly not seeking to cover in detail each of the bilateral relationships that Australia has with the 10 ASEAN members. It will, however, discuss how major individual Australian relationships, particularly with Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, have at times had particular significance for the course of the multilateral relationship with ASEAN overall.

A key issue in the discussion below on regional cooperation is that differing conceptions of how to delineate and define ‘region’ have been significant for Australia and for ASEAN members in the pursuit of regional cooperation. It is therefore important to note at the outset that ‘regions’ in international politics are often not only geographically defined but socially constructed entities, and appropriate definitions of them can be contested. For the purposes of this work, the term ‘Southeast Asia’ refers to the 10 member countries of ASEAN and Timor-Leste. The term ‘East Asia’ refers to the states of Southeast Asia

along with China, Japan, the two Korean states and Taiwan. The term ‘Asia-Pacific’ is a broad concept that refers to the East Asian states just mentioned, along with other interested countries including the United States, Russia, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands and some states in Latin America that have declared significant identities in this wider region. A further regional term, ‘Indo-Pacific’, has been given increasing reference in discussions about regional cooperation in Australia in recent years; this associates the states of East Asia and the Western Pacific (including the US, Australia and New Zealand) with India and the other states of South Asia. The development of these multiple conceptions of ‘region’ reflects the diversity of the states and peoples involved in international relations in Asia and the Pacific and has been a significant part of the context in which Australia’s relationship with ASEAN has developed and evolved since 1974.

It is hoped that this monograph (which was completed in October 2015) will be informative for the reader and that it can contribute to further debate and research on Australia’s interactions with ASEAN and on the long-term significance of ASEAN in Australia’s policies towards Southeast Asia overall.
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