

ASEAN-AUSTRALIA SPECIAL SUMMIT

MARITIME COOPERATION FORUM



MARCH 2024 | REPORT

BLUE SECURITY

The Blue Security Program engages with and facilitates high-quality research on issues of critical maritime security across the Indo-Pacific. Bringing together leading regional experts in politics, international law and strategic studies, Blue Security focuses on three key pillars of maritime security: order, law and power.

It produces working papers, commentaries, and scholarly publications related to maritime security for audiences across the Indo-Pacific.

Blue Security is a collaboration between La Trobe Asia, Griffith Asia Institute (GAI), University of New South Wales Canberra (UNSW ADFA), University of Western Australia's Defence and Security Institute (DSI), United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney (USSC) and the Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy & Defence Dialogue (AP4D).

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Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



OVERVIEW

In 2024, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Australia celebrated 50 years as Dialogue Partners. The relationship was strengthened further in 2021, with Australia becoming a Comprehensive Strategic Partner of ASEAN. As the first dialogue partner of ASEAN, Australia and Southeast Asia have enjoyed strong trade, people-to-people relations and leader-level engagement.

To mark this special occasion, Australia held the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in March 2024 in Melbourne, Australia. The Summit brought together leaders from across government, business, research and other sectors from Australia, ASEAN, and Timor-Leste to discuss Australia's cooperation with ASEAN and the future trajectory of the relationship.

Under the leadership of 2024 ASEAN Chair and Prime Minister of Lao PDR Sonexay Siphandone, and Prime Minister of Australia, Anthony Albanese, the Summit was organised around four thematic 'tracks': Business, Emerging Leaders, Climate and Clean Energy and Maritime Cooperation. Alongside this, the Summit held a plenary and retreat for the leaders of ASEAN, Timor-Leste and Australia. The Summit showcased the strong ASEAN-Australia partnership through a series of ASEAN-Australia week events, which included cultural showcases, emerging leaders programs, workshops for policymakers and academics, and networking for business leaders.

For Prime Minister Albanese, the Summit was an opportunity "to discuss the shared challenges facing our region, opportunities to enhance prosperity and how we can build on our strong relationships". This is emblematic of the Australian Government's foreign policy focus on Southeast Asia, led by Foreign Minister Penny Wong.

This report provides a summary of the key issues discussed during the Maritime Conference on Monday 4 March, as part of the Maritime Cooperation Forum. Partnering with the Blue Security Program, the Australian Government brought together nearly 200 maritime experts from ASEAN members states, Timor-Leste and Australia for the Conference, including academics and officials to "generate new solutions to maritime challenges". The Forum took a holistic view of maritime security, exploring both traditional and non-traditional security issues. These themes have been identified as key issues in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, ASEAN Maritime Outlook and the ASEAN Blue Economy Framework.

The Forum focused on four themes which were represented by four panels of Australian, ASEAN and Timor-Leste experts.

- Maritime Security: Challenges and Opportunities for Cooperation
- The Blue Economy
- Environmental Issues: Marine Ecology and Climate Change
- Law of the Sea and Governance

"This forum will focus on what is obvious and salient reality to ASEAN and Australia. Our connectedness in our oceans and seas, and our shared responsibility in their stewardship. Living by the water is a familiar experience to many Australians, the majority of whom live within few kilometres of the coastline. For the 686 million citizens of ASEAN, it is no different. The seas and oceans are synonymous with tradition, livelihood, if not life itself."

Enrique A. Manalo, Secretary of Foreign Affairs

TOWARDS ASEAN-AUSTRALIA MARITIME COOPERATION

The Maritime Cooperation Forum served not just as a stocktake of maritime cooperation between Australia and ASEAN but also as a platform for new ideas on how to strengthen Australia-ASEAN engagement and strengthen "peace, stability and security" in the region.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Philippines Secretary of Foreign Affairs Enrique A. Manalo opened the Maritime Cooperation Conference. In her speech, Foreign Minister Wong warned of "destabilising provocative and coercive actions, including unsafe conduct at sea and in the air and militarisation of disputed features". Wong outlined the challenges for the "region's character" amidst increasing great power rivalry and provocative actors. Wong also focused on the importance of shaping "habits of cooperation", emphasising the need for all of "us to nurture and protect agreed rules, uphold international law, prevent conflict and build strategic trust".

Secretary Manalo highlighted the specific concerns the Philippines faces as an archipelagic nation, including environmental issues. Secretary Manalo also emphasised the challenges to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and tension in the South China Sea. He reiterated the importance of ASEAN as an organisation in resolving tensions and facilitating norms and regional cooperation.

"What happens in the South China Sea, in the Taiwan Strait, in the Mekong sub-region, across the Indo-Pacific, affects us all. Australia will always seek our security within the security of our region. We recognise ASEAN centrality is the key to the region's stability and security. So, we are committed to supporting ASEAN's leadership. We recognise and respect the strength of ASEAN's collective voice, which resonates throughout the region when it speaks of its view. Of the importance of sovereignty and rule. Our region comprises different political systems. However, we share a common interest in maintaining open and transparent communication. These habits of cooperation, these underpin the character of our region. Never underestimate the capacity of norms to underpin the character of a region and of ASEAN's role in enabling and buttressing those norms."

Senator Penny Wong, Minister for Foreign Affairs



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COOPERATION

The maritime security panel laid the groundwork for the Maritime Forum's discussion, drawing upon key themes of the ASEAN Maritime Outlook. Speakers unpacked key security issues in the region, including traditional and non-traditional security issues. Critical areas of concern included how broader regional security issues impact Southeast Asia, including rising US-China tensions, the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and potential conflict in the broader Indo-Pacific. As tensions rise in the region, the Maritime Cooperation Forum emphasised the importance of ASEAN Centrality in regional frameworks. Alongside increased tensions due to great power rivalry, speakers also underscored the importance of working together on dealing with non-traditional security issues, including the threats posed by climate change in the maritime domain. Environmental degradation has effects on coastal erosion, clean energy, piracy, trafficking and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. For Southeast Asian communities, there are increased environmental disasters, poverty and humanitarian crises. Alongside this, pressures on international law of the sea, specifically the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), was presented as a concern for the region, particularly in regard to tensions in the South China Sea. As the Indo-Pacific becomes more unstable, the citizens of Southeast Asia will be affected by conflict and crisis, which makes cooperation and pathways to peace even more pressing.

To accompany the maritime security dimension, regional economists and marine environment experts examined the Blue Economy and environmental issues, drawing heavily from the ASEAN Blue Economy Framework. With an estimated 70 percent of Southeast Asian communities living by the coast, issues such as sustainable fisheries and the marine environment are important for communities across the region. These sessions focused on the Pacific and Indian Oceans, as well as the Mekong River. For Southeast Asia, the Blue Economy aims to support the region's growth by strengthening ocean resources, local communities and blue industries. Speakers called for greater

cooperation and investment in the region's fisheries, aquaculture, tourism and green energy transition. Clean energy, offshore wind and hydropower were areas of focus. Speakers encouraged policymakers to involve local communities, Indigenous peoples and key stakeholders in policymaking and as part of the 'blue economy' vision.

In the marine environment panel, speakers highlighted the importance of sustainable fisheries for marine protected areas, food security, IUU fishing, coastal management, and local ecosystems. Regional fisheries and economies are threatened by an increase in marine plastics and environmental degradation, primarily from climate change. To help mitigate the environmental impacts of climate change, speakers called for strengthening existing international laws, treaties, and norms through the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Marine Protected Areas, Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction Treaty (BBNJ) and ASEAN institutions. This will, in turn, strengthen local economies and food and energy security.

The Forum concluded with a panel on the Law of the Sea and governance. The panel affirmed the importance of international law, particularly UNCLOS, and reflected on how international law can be utilised to strengthen regional governance and the sustainability of the marine environment. Speakers highlighted the militarisation of disputed features, marine autonomous vehicles, and increasing aggression in the South China Sea as key areas of concern. To combat this, some speakers recommended that conflict prevention and dispute resolution can be managed through existing ASEAN frameworks, UNCLOS, and continued work on a South China Sea Code of Conduct. The panel articulated the importance of UNCLOS for activities and claims in the maritime domain, noting the Convention's governance of maritime zones and reflection of long-standing rights and freedoms, such as freedom of navigation. The panel called for greater focus on the Law of the Sea training at the government and local community levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Maritime policies must emphasise the importance of ASEAN Centrality. This includes engaging with all ASEAN states, working towards tailored solutions, and not applying a 'one size fits all' approach.
- States should encourage deeper dialogue and engagement through increased dialogues that identify key areas of concern and cooperation. This can be facilitated through Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues, academic exchanges and greater community and civil society involvement in maritime policy-making.
- Greater investment in local fisheries and clean energy solutions could support sustainable ocean use and help local industries, coastal communities and food security. Cooperation should include industries, local governments and communities.
- Support for more research on healthy marine systems would help us better understand the effects of climate change and other environmental challenges in the maritime domain.
- States should consider increasing funding for coast management initiatives and programs to manage marine plastics.
- Strengthening regional training and capacity building on the Biodiversity Beyond Areas of National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) could work to improve transparency and increase collaboration between Australia and ASEAN regarding marine biodiversity.
- Enhancing Law of the Sea awareness and capabilities through regional training and workshops to increase cooperation and knowledge exchange would strengthen a regional maritime order centred upon UNCLOS.
- Strengthening international law and norms regarding increased grey-zone activities could be achieved through monitoring tactics, joint statements, and coordinated patrols.
- Supporting the ongoing work towards a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea that is consistent with international law to help mitigate regional tensions.
- Next-generation maritime leadership must be included to create sustainable and safe oceans for the future.

These recommendations are a summation of the Maritime Cooperation Forum participants and do not represent the Australian government or partner country government.

SPECIAL SUMMIT MARITIME OUTCOMES

At the Summit, Australia announced over \$500 million in funding to support shared priorities with ASEAN. Many of the initiatives will have positive effects on maritime cooperation, including strengthening business and trade relations, increasing English language skills, education exchanges and partnerships. These will help to drive marine innovation and strengthen people-to-people links. In regards to maritime cooperation, the most significant announcement was **\$64 million for Australia's Southeast Asia Maritime Partnerships Initiative to enhance Australia's practical support for maritime capacity-building, peace and stability in the region.** Alongside this, a series of climate and energy investments will seek to strengthen capacity building and help protect the marine environment. This includes an **additional \$222.5 million to the Mekong-Australia Partnership** to help partner countries in the Mekong subregion address shared challenges, including water security and climate action. Alongside this, a **\$6.9 million Energy Cooperation Package** under the Aus4ASEAN Futures Initiative to support the ASEAN Centre for Energy and the **establishment of the ASEAN Centre for Climate Change and \$10 million Climate and Clean Energy Window** as part of the Southeast Asia Government-to-Government program announced in 2023 to facilitate knowledge sharing and capacity building in addressing climate change.



ASEAN - Australia Special Summit 2024. Delegates sit for the Family Photo at the Maritime Cooperation Forum: Track 1.5 Dialogue event during the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit 2024 in Melbourne, Tuesday, March 05, 2024. Photograph by Penny Stephens/ASEAN

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