

# **ASEAN-AUSTRALIA POLITICAL-SECURITY PARTNERSHIP (APSP)**

## **END-OF-PROGRAM EVALUATION MANAGEMENT RESPONSE**

### **BACKGROUND**

The ASEAN-Australia Political-Security Partnership (APSP) supports ASEAN leadership and centrality in addressing regional political-security challenges. The program engages ASEAN sectoral bodies, the ASEAN Secretariat and ASEAN-led mechanisms, along with Australian Government Agencies and institutions in activities such as regional dialogues, workshops, capacity building, and research. The program focuses on maritime security, cybersecurity, women, peace and security, transnational crime and conflict prevention.

APSP has primarily been delivered by The Asia Foundation (TAF), as the main implementing partner, with a budget of AUD 9.5 million over the period 2019 -2025. A smaller program component focused on combatting marine plastic debris is being implemented by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) with funding of AUD 495,000 from 2022 to 2026. The design for an APSP successor program is being undertaken in 2025.

### **THE EVALUATION**

TAF, with DFAT support, commissioned an end-of-program evaluation as a required component of APSP's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan. The evaluation assessed APSP's effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability, impact, and integration of Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) considerations. It covered APSP's implementation from May 2019 to June 2024, with an extended review of ongoing initiatives through to November 2024. The evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach, including a comprehensive desk review; consultations with 58 key informants; an online survey of 25 participants from APSP activities; in-person observation of an APSP activity (the ASEAN-Australia Workshop on Safe Handling and Disposal of Illicit Drugs and Precursor Chemicals, September 17-18, 2024, Bangkok, Thailand); and two case studies.

The evaluation found APSP to be effective in strengthening ASEAN-Australia engagement; in supporting ASEAN leadership on transnational and regional political-security issues; and in promoting cross-sectoral cooperation. Success was driven by strong partnerships with ASEAN stakeholders and the program's built-in adaptability to evolving priorities.

### **DFAT RESPONSE TO THE EVALUATION**

DFAT has developed a management response to the evaluation's recommendations.

We welcome the findings as valuable insights into APSP's good practices and challenges, which will inform the design and implementation of a successor program.

No	Recommendation	Response	Timeframe
1.	<p><b>Enhance engagement with ASEAN endorsement processes</b></p> <p>Proposed steps to be taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage more directly with ASEAN Secretariat to support endorsement procedures, for example through proactive consultations.</li> <li>Propose clearer timeframes for each approval step.</li> <li>Develop a joint understanding outlining ASEAN endorsement process, and how the project can better support these.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Support in principle – subject to applicable ASEAN guidelines</b></p> <p>The design will consider ways to improve efficiencies, however ASEAN endorsement procedures and timeframes are stipulated in the <i>ASEAN Cooperation Project Design and Management Manual</i>. These processes have been endorsed by ASEAN Member States, and are managed by the ASEAN Secretariat. All dialogue partners, such as Australia, seeking to deliver ASEAN-endorsed activities must follow these processes.</p> <p>In the successor program, DFAT will continue to work closely with the ASEAN Secretariat and ASEAN Member States on endorsement processes and timelines.</p>	September 2025
2.	<p><b>Enhance engagement with Australian Government Departments (OGDs)</b></p> <p>Proposed steps to be taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organise inter-departmental briefings on program objectives and benefits.</li> <li>Share preliminary work plans with OGDs several months ahead to facilitate budgeting and participation.</li> <li>Include OGDs in immediate planning stages to align activities with their priorities.</li> <li>Provide advance notice of upcoming activities.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Support</b></p> <p>DFAT supports this recommendation. The design will consider ways to enhance engagement with Australian Government agencies, including through consultations with agencies. The design will also consider an efficient governance mechanism for strengthened coordination across government.</p> <p>The design will further consider the ‘proposed steps to be taken’.</p>	September 2025

No	Recommendation	Response	Timeframe
3.	<b>Maintain and enhance program flexibility and adaptability</b> Proposed steps to be taken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue the demand-driven approach.</li> <li>Regularly review and adjust activities to align with emerging challenges.</li> <li>Establish mechanisms to identify and incorporate new themes.</li> <li>Develop tailored strategies to address varying capacities among ASEAN Member States.</li> </ul>	<b>Support</b> DFAT agrees the successor program should maintain APSP's flexibility and adaptability, including to respond to emerging political-security priorities shared by ASEAN and Australia. The design of the successor program will consider a suitable governance framework with oversight of the APSP activity pipeline, including on emerging issues, while maintaining the program's flexibility and adaptability. The design will further consider the 'proposed steps to be taken'.	September 2025
4.	<b>Consider the integration of additional thematic areas (e.g., environmental security)</b> Proposed steps to be taken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult ASEAN stakeholders to identify priority areas.</li> <li>Develop plans to incorporate any new themes.</li> <li>Allocate resources and expertise accordingly.</li> </ul>	<b>Support in-principle – noting consolidation and efficiency will frame consideration or priorities.</b> The design will consider priority areas, including through consulting across Australian Government Agencies and with the ASEAN Secretariat and ASEAN Member States.	September 2025
5.	<b>Strengthen and formalise partnerships with regional organisations</b> Proposed steps to be taken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify potential regional partners (e.g., ASEAN-ISIS, JCLEC, regional universities).</li> <li>Initiate discussions.</li> <li>Plan for formal agreements and collaboration in the next program phase.</li> </ul>	<b>Noted and support-in principle</b> DFAT takes note of the recommendation and will consider the feasibility of the approach during the design. Further details about the type of partnership and purpose are required for consideration. APSP had previously engaged regional partners such as Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in key activities on an ad-hoc basis.	September 2025

No	Recommendation	Response	Timeframe
6.	<b>Further integrate disability inclusion</b> Proposed steps to be taken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with disability-focused CSOs in ASEAN.</li> <li>Include disability topics and representatives in activities.</li> <li>Develop initiatives targeting disability inclusion.</li> </ul>	<b>Support</b> DFAT supports the recommendation and proposed steps to be taken. The design will explore ways to further integrate disability inclusion and, similar to the first phase of APSP, DFAT will ensure adequate resources allocated for disability inclusion (e.g. GEDSI advisor, budget) for the successor program.	September 2025
7.	<b>Establish a consultative mechanism for emerging issues</b> Proposed steps to be taken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Propose forming a consultative committee with ASEAN and OGDs.</li> <li>Define mandate, membership, and schedule.</li> <li>Use the committee for planning the future program and identifying emerging issues.</li> </ul>	<b>Support in-principle</b> The successor program design will consider options for a governance mechanism for engaging Australian Government agencies (see recommendation 2), and a separate mechanism for engaging ASEAN stakeholders on emerging priorities, and activity pipeline management. An integrated consultative mechanism, including both Australian agencies and ASEAN stakeholders would not be suitable, given the size of the program, and the breadth of topics covered.	September 2025
8.	<b>Continue capacity building for ASEAN institutions</b> Proposed steps to be taken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify capacity gaps within ASEAN institutions.</li> <li>Develop targeted capacity-building programs.</li> <li>Monitor and evaluate impact.</li> </ul>	<b>Support</b> In line with Official Development Assistance guidelines, DFAT supports efforts to build the capacity of ASEAN institutions; however, we place particular emphasis on strengthening the capacity of officials from ASEAN Member States which service ASEAN Sectoral Bodies. The design will identify mechanisms to assess capacity gaps – drawing on recommendations from past activities – and enhance the monitoring and evaluation of outcomes and impact.	September 2025

No	Recommendation	Response	Timeframe
9.	<b>Strengthen cross-pillar and cross-sectoral approaches</b> Proposed steps to be taken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design activities involving multiple sectors and pillars.</li> <li>• Encourage diverse stakeholder participation, including civil society and marginalised groups.</li> <li>• Facilitate cross-sector knowledge exchange.</li> </ul>	<b>Support</b> DFAT supports the recommendation and proposed steps to be taken. The governance mechanism and stakeholder consultation will be a key way to facilitate cross-pillar and cross-sectoral approaches.	September 2025
10.	<b>Improve Monitoring and Evaluation (M&amp;E) frameworks</b> Proposed steps to be taken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance M&amp;E frameworks to include qualitative indicators and participant feedback.</li> <li>• Collect and analyse data on long-term outcomes.</li> <li>• Use findings to inform adjustments.</li> <li>• Incorporate participant suggestions for practical applications and inclusivity.</li> </ul>	<b>Support</b> DFAT supports the recommendation and proposed steps to be taken to improve the M&E frameworks for the next phase of APSP.	September 2025
11.	<b>Options for program restructuring to enhance sustainability and effectiveness</b> Proposed steps to be taken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess potential benefits and challenges of different program structures (e.g. consortium model, strategic advisory roles for Australian institutions).</li> <li>• Consult with key stakeholders, including ASEAN, TAF, Australian institutions, and potential regional partners.</li> <li>• Develop a strategic plan outlining the preferred structure for future program phases.</li> </ul>	<b>Support in-principle</b> The design will consider the various options for delivery modality.	September 2025