

Submission to the General Review of the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement

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Context: To provide further details on opening the Indonesian-Australian creative and entertainment industry, and to the ASEAN region further afield – requested by Justin Brown, former Deputy Secretary (Trade) at DFAT at the Sydney AIBC-Asialink Business consultation on 17 October 2025.

Date: 9 November 2025

Submission:

The media, creative and entertainment industry is an industry that is less explored or supported which in parallel can facilitate trade, skills exchange and align Indonesian-Australian cultures. The creative and entertainment industry has a high potential to open more doors and facilitate in-depth understanding of bilateral trade and business practices; boost investment and business confidence; and promote education interests, especially language studies.

Australia's media presence in Indonesia and in Southeast Asia is less dominant than headliners from the US, UK and Europe, despite the fact Australia's largest embassy is now based in Jakarta. Media and broadcasting are an important conduit in educating and creating interest between Australia-Indonesia across all sectors, trade, business, politics, beauty and health, film and television, and so forth.

Australia's creative and entertainment industry in Indonesia is still in the shadows of Paul Hogan's Hollywood blockbuster, Crocodile Dundee, first aired in 1986. Forty years on, Indonesia remains the closest neighbour by proximity and elevated to a strategic partner in recent years, however the perception of Australia has not shifted from the 80s.

Today, the closest film or tv export by association is Bondi Rescue. Despite its popularity with US, UK and European viewers and tourists alike, the series is less regarded by Asian viewers and tourists. Shows such as Neighbours, Home and Away, and Australia's mainstream broadcasters are less popular because it projects an Australia that is not based in Asia or an Australia reflecting distant narratives with its closest neighbour, Indonesia.

The cultural gap is widening, as is the desire to do business with a country that is less promoted across the mainstream media, creative and entertainment platforms.

A way to fast-track understanding of a culture and across its industries is through the mainstream media, creative and entertainment industry – because it delivers unfamiliar, difficult and dry topics in a creative and entertaining osmosis-like manner.

When South Korea was recovering from the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, it took a giant leap of faith to export K-pop and K-drama to Asia, and then further afield. Today, the Korean Wave also known as Hallyu encompasses Korean culture worldwide with its osmosis-like hype across the globe.

And, all delivered in the Korean language. You don't need to understand Korean to be part of Hallyu.

Language is not a barrier to a major global cultural force or force of soft power.

In fact, global interest in wanting to learn Korean as a language and Korean culture is a by-product of the Korean Wave.

Australia has an opportunity to develop a similar economy based on the Korean Wave phenomenon.

We already have the biggest Hollywood names across the globe such as Chris Hemsworth, Margot Robbie, James Wan, Nicole Kidman, and the list goes on. However, the rest of Asia and the world associate these Australian stars as American.

There are three areas for Australia to invest for further outreach across Indonesia and into Asia and/or collaborate with Indonesia and the rest of Southeast Asia to open up trade, understanding in business practices, enhance cultural influence and to promote language uptake.

Opportunity 1: Australian Wave

Invest in Australian Hollywood celebrities and Indonesian-Australian celebrities to redirect a portion of their time and skillsets to deliver Australian productions with an Indonesian focus.

Culinary shows are easier to create however we also need to create new entertaining, yet educational films and series beyond food adventures to bridge understanding on how to do business with Australia and Indonesia, how to navigate cultural

misunderstanding and how to promote commonalities in people-to-people connections and cultures.

Opportunity 2: Mainstream Australian-Indonesian media and broadcasting

Invest in broadcasting Indonesian news, culture and politics into mainstream Australian prime time news and current affairs. The Australian Government can lay the foundations given both ABC and SBS are owned by the Australian Government. This could also include inviting Indonesian news presenters and journalists on screen. Commercial channels such as channel 7, 9, 10 and SkyNews could be given a quota for Indonesian news during primetime and potentially, exchanges.

This could be replicated for news on Asia in general.

Opportunity 3: Australian-Indonesian Collaborations

Digital series that intersects Australian-Indonesian cultures in the drama and/or comedy categories with a higher consumer rate to learn about difficult and dry topics. Comedians are also an effective way to break down cultural barriers and misunderstanding.

Joint collaborations provide bilateral knowledge and skills transfer, encourage cultural understanding for audiences, can influence interest in language studies, and create curiosity to learn more about a country – whether it is for trade, business or another by-product benefit.

Whilst only a few Australian cabinet ministers and backbenchers speak Bahasa, approximately 20% of the Indonesian cabinet and vice ministers have studied and lived in Australia or an alumnus of Australian-sponsored programs.

There is call for greater synergy between Australia and Indonesia. If we want to fast-track uptake and trade relations between both nations then the media, creative and entertainment industry is the answer. The media, creative and entertainment industry is currently an under-utilised tool or rather under-utilised force of influence, with the potential to open up understanding and interest in all industries and people-to-people links.

The Australian Wave may start in Indonesia, but if delivered well, it could catch on across Asia.