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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**50th Anniversary of ASEAN**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 14 August 2017**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Brodtmann, Gai, MP

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**Ms BRODTMANN** (Canberra) (18:40): I want to congratulate the member for Bruce for putting forward this motion. About two months ago, I had the great pleasure of spending a morning with the member for Bruce, as well as the member for Bass, who's just joined us. We had an interesting conversation at the Australian National University—that great national institution here in Canberra—on this very issue of the future of ASEAN: where do we go from here, what role will ASEAN play in the future and what is the relationship between Australia and ASEAN? We have had this connection for a long time, but what is the future of that relationship for the next 50 years?

I want to use this opportunity to again thank Professor Michael Wesley as well as Professor John Blaxland, who facilitated the workshop. The workshop was useful because we had a number of brains around the room with different expertise and experience in the various ASEAN countries over many years and in a range of different spheres: economic, political, social and cultural. It was a really worthwhile conversation, and I commend the member for Bruce for organising it. Given we are today honouring the 50th anniversary of ASEAN and its achievements, something that was born of peace and cooperation at a particularly tense time in the region, now, 50 years on, what do we want to achieve with ASEAN? As I said, what role will it play in the region? What role will Australia play in its interconnection with ASEAN? What future do we see for this multilateral body?

I am very keen for us to have a stronger and deeper engagement with ASEAN and for ASEAN, within itself, to have a stronger and deeper engagement. But I ask, when we are having this conversation, that we are truly committed to deepening and strengthening our relationship with ASEAN. As someone who used to be a diplomat in foreign affairs, in a life before this one—I had my small business before and prior to that I was in the foreign service—I saw so many activities where we were engaged in deepening the relationship with Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand. Remember the tiger economies of the mid-to-late nineties, up until the crash? Indonesia was the future for Australia. There was a huge amount of investment and economic and cultural activity. There were trade missions and ministerial visits and such a flurry of activity, and then it was gone. There's this waxing and waning of interest in ASEAN, as there is for the subcontinent, particularly India.

In calling for a deeper and stronger relationship with those countries in ASEAN—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam—we need to acknowledge the differences there, the different dynamics and the different stages of development amongst those countries, but also, if we are to deepen the relationship, please, let's make it sustained. As someone who's been in this space for more than 20 years, I have seen this flurry of activity and excitement—we'll deepen the relationship with Indonesia, India, Singapore, Vietnam and Thailand. Missions go over, economic and banking agreements are signed, social and cultural organisations go over, one or two years pass, and then there's nothing. I ask that, for the next 50 years of our relationship with ASEAN, we be deeply committed to a stronger and deeper engagement at every level, that we sustain that commitment to a stronger and deeper engagement at every level—that we don't just say, 'This is a good thing,' on the 50th anniversary, and then forget about it in a few days time—and that we actually commit to this.

As so many of my colleagues have said, this region is significant in so many ways: population, culture, development opportunities. It's the world's sixth largest economic region and one of our great and key trading partners. There is so much opportunity in this region. I imagine that most of the people here have been to parts—if not all—of it, and there are so many opportunities for not only Australia but also each country in ASEAN. All I ask is that we commit to stronger and deeper engagement and collaboration with those countries and, when we make that commitment, that we sustain that commitment—that we don't see the waxing and waning of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s—and that it's deep, meaningful, strong and sustained.