

AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL EXCHANGE COUNCIL
7th AUSTRALIAN DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA
15 JULY 2023 TO 22 JULY 2023



Caption: Group photo at the Korea-Australia forum at the Republic of Korea National Assembly

Delegation

- **Jerome Laxale MP** – Delegation Leader
 - Federal Member for Bennelong
 - Australian Labor Party
- **Dr Gordon Reid MP**
 - Federal Member for Robertson
 - Australian Labor Party
- **Senator Fatima Payman**
 - Senator for Western Australia
 - Australian Labor Party
- **Chantal D'Argaville**
 - Adviser to the Federal Leader of the Opposition
 - Liberal Party of Australia
- **Daniel Gillie**
 - Chief of Staff to the Deputy Premier and Treasurer of Tasmania
 - Liberal Party of Australia
- **Sally Judson**
 - NSW Metropolitan Branch Vice-Chairperson (Nats)
 - National Party of Australia
- **Connor Costello** – Representative of the Australian Political Exchange Council

Executive Summary

This executive summary outlines the key highlights and insights gained during the Australia-Republic of Korea Exchange Delegation's visit from the 15th to the 21st of July, 2023.

The delegation, departing from Sydney, Australia, engaged in a comprehensive exploration of economic, cultural, historical, and political aspects of South Korea. The summary encapsulates each day's activities and the significance of the experiences.

Key Highlights:

- **Economic and Cultural Exploration:** The delegation embarked on a journey to various landmarks that hold economic, historical, and cultural importance to both South Korea and Australia. This included a tour of the Lotte World Tower, symbolizing economic prosperity and parallel development between the two nations.
- **War Memorial and Shared History:** A visit to the War Memorial underscored the deep historical ties between Australia and South Korea, especially the shared sacrifices during the Korean War. Over 17,000 Australians served during the war, and this connection continues to strengthen their alliance.
- **Cultural Exchange and Education:** The delegation immersed themselves in Korean culture through visits to Gyeongbokgung Palace, a showcase of Korean history, and the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History, educating them about key historical events and the exponential growth of Korean industries.
- **Bilateral Relations and Diplomacy:** The delegation had meetings with the Australian Ambassador to Korea, Ms. Catherine Raper, discussing the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP), regional security, and collaboration in technology and energy transition.
- **Academic Insights and Geopolitics:** Engaging discussions at Yonsei University offered insights into technology, standardization, regional security, and the energy transition, fostering optimism about the future of the Australia-South Korea relationship.
- **Political Understanding and Future Prospects:** Visits to the National Assembly and meetings with its members highlighted the political landscape of South Korea. The importance of the relationship between the two nations was emphasized, and potential collaborations were explored.
- **DMZ and Geopolitical Complexities:** The delegation experienced the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), a border barrier dividing the Korean peninsula, and gained an understanding of the complex dynamics and security concerns surrounding it.
- **Presidential Residence and Cultural Heritage:** A visit to Cheong Wa Dae (Blue House) provided insight into South Korea's history and cultural heritage, as well as recent steps towards public engagement by President Yoon Suk-yeol.
- **Cultural Exchange and Farewell:** The delegation participated in a farewell dinner hosted by the President of the Korea Foundation, highlighting the importance of people-to-people exchange and fostering mutual understanding.

Report

15 July 2023

On the 15th of July, 2023, the 7th Delegation to the Republic of Korea departed from Charles Kingsford Smith Airport, Sydney for Seoul, South Korea. The delegation arrived at Incheon International Airport, South Korea on July 15th at approximately 1900 local time. The delegation was warmly greeted by members of the Korea Foundation at the airport who then escorted us to our accommodation in Sogong-Ro, Jung-gu, Seoul where the Korea Foundation provided some brief detail of the agenda for the week in Seoul.

16 July 2023

Day two of the exchange consisted of a tour of three locations, all of which have economic, historic, and cultural importance to the people of South Korea. Furthermore, it was evident that these sites are also of significance to the people of Australia and the bilateral relationship between the two nations.

Lotte World Tower

Day two began with a tour of Lotte World Tower. As the world's 6th tallest tower, measuring at 555m and 123 stories, with 50 million visitors each year, this building has both economic and historical importance to the people of South Korea.

Lotte World Tower is not only a symbol of engineering proficiency, however, represents a significant parallel between Australia and South Korea, that is, economic proficiency through business operating in a supportive domestic environment for the benefit of the community. The Korea Foundation provided a fascinating history of Lotte in South Korea. Founded in June 1948, by the Korean businessperson Shin Kyuk-ho in Tokyo, Japan, Lotte originally sold chewing gum, and has developed to become a major multinational corporation.

War Memorial

This national institution, established in 1989, has a significant purpose; as Article 1 of the War Memorial of Korea Act states, the purpose is to contribute to preventing war and achieving peaceful reunification of the country by learning from the lessons of war. This site is significant for both Australia and South Korea.

The Korean War, spanning from 1950 to 1953, saw 21 nations commit troops, ships, aircraft and medical units to defend South Korea, with Australia becoming the second nation, after the United States, to commit personnel from all three branches of the armed services. Over 17,000 Australians served during the Korean War, of which 340 were killed and over 1,216 wounded. It should be noted that Australia has a significant South Korean community, and further, over

1600 Korean War Veterans live in the Australian community. All members of the delegation paid their respects at the Honour Roll of Fallen Soldiers and at the Australian Memorial. This connection between our two nations is one that will be everlasting as we move forward as allies and friends in the complex and changing world.

The final activity for the delegation included a tour of the Gyeongbokgung Palace. This was a magnificent showcase of Korean history. Built-in 1395, this historic site has significant structures from the Joseon dynasty. This location had on display the technology used during this period, including floor heating. This tour allowed the delegation to experience Korean culture and history and how this is a part of the national fabric of the Republic of Korea.

17 July 2023

Traditional Korean Tea House

Our first visit of the day was to the *Die Blaue Blume* to learn about Korean tea culture and the significance and history of this practice. We were welcomed by the tea master Mr Noh Kab-kyu who taught us about the Korean tea ceremony. Some key takeaways from this lesson included the agricultural seasons of Korea, the cultural traditions of the tea rooms and some insights into Korean philosophy. We also learnt about the key forms of traditional Korean tea ceremony, including *Seoncha*, *Uisikcha*, *Jeonbindarye* and *Heondarye*.

National Museum of Korean Contemporary History

We continued our cultural and historical education by proceeding to visit and tour the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. This museum features four permanent exhibition halls which cover the period from the late 19th century to the present, with the themes of "Prelude to the Republic of Korea", "Foundation of the Republic of Korea", "Development of the Republic of Korea", and "Modernization and Korea's Vision of Future". Here we were educated about key historical events, including the Korean War and the history of the Republic of Korea (ROK) since the War from 1960 and beyond, including the exponential development of manufacturing and the boom of companies such as Samsung, SK, LG, Hyundai, Lotte and POSCO.

Visit to Australian Embassy

Following our visit to the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History, we had the great pleasure of visiting the Australian Embassy and have a meeting with the Australian Ambassador to Korea, Ms Catherine Raper, who has served in this position since February 2021.

We had a highly informative session where Ms Raper briefed us on various topics, including three key themes shaping contemporary relations between Australia and the Republic of Korea (ROK): firstly, the bilateral Australian-Korean relationship, which forged its modern foundations in the 1950s during the Korean War and the following that the formative relationship between Australia and POSCO. Secondly, the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) which represents a multilateral relationship and leadership advanced by Australia and ROK throughout the Indo-Pacific, focusing on strengthening regional security, economic, innovation and technological cooperation, as well as people-to-people links. The third key trend between Australia and ROK the Ambassador highlighted was the focus on the energy transition and processing capability of critical minerals, fuelling the energy transition as global economies shift into the next phase of development.

Yonsei University

Our final visit of the day was an informative trip to the Centre for Australian Studies at Yonsei University. Here we met two professors: Professor Heejin Lee and Professor Jae Jeok Park. Professor Heejin Lee delivered an insightful lecture regarding technology, standardisation and the importance of geopolitical cooperation. He referenced his paper from “High Tech, High Stakes: How US-China Rivalry is Squeezing Asia’s Middle Powers’. This was very helpful in understanding some of the modern tensions regarding technological and economic development on the one hand and the maintenance of security on the other hand. Professor Jae Jeok Park lectured regarding the relationship between Australia and South Korea, and the importance of collaboration regarding regional security, technology and the energy transition, with a particular focus on critical minerals processing to assist South Korea in the development of their semiconductor industry. He also discussed the collaboration between Yonsei University and Australian Universities in strengthening the Australian-Korean bilateral relationship. This was very heartening to hear of the potential for the relationship between Australia and ROK to continue to thrive into the future.

18 July 2023

SK Telecom – T.um ICT Experience Centre

The Republic of Korea’s culture of innovation and technology was on full display for the delegation at SK Telecom’s T.um demonstration experience. Set in the future it imagines a world with full integration and connection through communications, travel, medicine and production and provides users with a virtual and integrated simulation.

The simulation took the delegation to a future city demonstrating conceptual technology for monitoring and improving the environment of space and Earth and the ecosystem of the Earth. Other demonstrations in the simulation showcased the possible future use of technology and AI in emergency medicine and treatment, food production, and hyper-travel.

The sophisticated display of innovation and technology is also in support of the Republic of Korea's bid to host the World Expo in Busan in 2030.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The delegation was privileged to meet Mr Kim Kihyun, Director of the Asia and Pacific Division. Mr Kim has extensive experience of the Pacific Island nations, including a previous posting to Papua New Guinea. He explained that the focus of much of his career has been in growing the Republic of Korea's relations in the Pacific and, by extension, with Australia.

Consistent with the delegations' other discussions, Mr Kim highlighted the strong trade and economic links between our two countries and the growing importance of Australia's critical minerals and energy transformation to the Republic of Korea.

Mr Kim also highlighted the value of human-to-human exchanges, such as the political exchange delegation, to both countries in building lasting relationships for economic and security ties. He also suggested Australia make greater use of sport to build links between our countries, such as the strong following for soccer in both Australia and the Republic of Korea. This could also lead to an increase in tourism between our countries.

He further highlighted that the Republic of Korea is further specialising in medical technology, agriculture products and cyber security and that there is a growing need for the Republic of Korea to consider increased skilled migration and temporary workers, particularly with the low and decreasing birth rate, currently at 0.78. The low national birth rate was frequently mentioned to the delegation and it was apparent that there is an opportunity here for a further policy response.

ASAN Institute for Policy Studies

The delegation later held a roundtable with the ASAN Institute with Dr Kang Choi, President, Dr Dong Gyu Lee, Director of External Relations, Dr Myong-Hyun Go, Senior Fellow, and Dr Eunmi Choi, Research Fellow.

The roundtable opened with a discussion on the common economic and regional security interests of Australia and the Republic of Korea before moving to an informal question-and-answer format.

The delegation benefitted from a thoughtful discussion on the relationship between the Republic of Korea and China and also with Australia. Particularly as it relates to trade and supply of critical resources and goods.

The roundtable explored some of the barriers to furthering the Republic of Korean investment in Australia, such as the price of goods and labour and differing investment horizons. This is further impacted by a limited knowledge or awareness of Australia in the Republic of Korea, something that could be addressed by further people-to-people exchanges.

Other themes explored in the roundtable included skills shortages, the low birth rate, limited multiculturalism, and societal views on migration.

It was clear to the delegation that the Republic of Korea is focused on further engaging in the Indo-Pacific region and sees the NATO Asia-Pacific partners (AP4) as a vehicle of great potential for both Australia and the Republic of Korea.

19 July 2023

Visit to the National Assembly

On day four, the delegation explored this political environment and met with the people that make their political system tick. The day shed light on the intricacies of South Korean politics and proved an enlightening experience for all.

We were welcomed into the Assembly buildings with impressive structures, reflecting both traditional and modern architectural elements. Our first order of business was an Australia-South Korea Economic Forum with panellists and speakers such as the Australian Ambassador to South Korea, Catherine Raper, Assembly members including the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, Oh Youngju and researchers such as Professor Park.

The forum discussed the importance of the relationship between Australia and South Korea. It was constantly noted that we share very similar values and uphold the importance of democracy, freedom, the rule of law and human rights. As such, our relationship should be harnessed to promote stable, prosperous, open and sovereign nations in our region. The rich history between Australia and South Korea was highlighted by PPP Floor Leader, Jaeok Yun, detailing how Australian missionaries formed the relationship over 140 years ago in schools and churches that are still in operation today. The forum participants, including delegate leader, Jerome Laxale MP, discussed ways in which we can continue to grow this relationship. The key themes and challenges focussed on supply chain reliability, economic and political stability in the Indo Pacific, climate change and the move to green economies. The South Korean representatives discussed their desire to move away from reliance on China, and suggested this may be assisted through partnerships with Australia in areas such as defence, critical minerals, hydrogen, and economic immigration.

The delegation was very pleased with the attendance of Members of the Assembly. It was seen as a sign of how strong our relationship is and how important it has become.

Following the forum, we had the opportunity to meet with members of the Assembly from both major parties. We were privileged to meet with a range of representatives in their personal offices including the Secretary General Lee Kwang Jae, Chairman Han Ki Ho of the National Defence Committee and Floor Leader Jaeok Yun. We were able to hear from the members and compare life as an elected representative in South Korea with that of Australia. Most notably, we learnt that in South Korea, parliamentary sitting is every week, with members returning to their constituency only on weekends.

Overall, the tone of these meetings were positive and shared the same sentiment about the importance of the relationship between Australia and South Korea. Topics such as the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue and the upcoming 70th Anniversary of the Armistice cemented the importance of our ongoing bond.

We also had the opportunity to visit the National Library of Korea. Originally opened during the Korea War in Busan, books were donated by the United States. Now, the library has over 2000 visitors per day and 400 employees. The library is open to the public but also provides research and reports to members of the Assembly. The library is also home to PHD students and researchers that produce reports for public consumption, as well as providing services such as the Statistics Data Centre. The library is state of the art with 80 per cent of their books digitised. Most impressively, though, the library operates a conveyor belt system that ensures books are selected and delivered to consumers within 30 minutes.

As South Korea continues to address its challenges and strive for further progress, understanding the role of the National Assembly becomes increasingly essential for both domestic and international observers. A visit to this prominent institution, including a tour of the Assembly floor, left us with a deeper appreciation for the nation's enduring commitment to democratic values. South Korea's political landscape remains a fascinating subject to observe and study. Perhaps most notably, we observed the lack of young people and women represented in the Assembly. As South Korea continues to assert its position on the global stage, we will be interested to see whether the Assembly will become more representative of its people and the rising influence of its diverse population.

20 July 2023

The Korea Foundation today organised a day visit to important historical and cultural sites in the Republic of Korea; the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and the President's Home (the Blue House).

Tour of DMZ

The demilitarized zone is a border barrier that divides the Korean peninsula roughly in half. It was established to serve as a buffer zone between the countries of The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea under the provisions of the Korean Armistice Agreement in 1953, an agreement between the DPRK, China, and the United Nations Command.

The DMZ is 250 kilometres long and about 4 kilometres wide. There have been various incidents in and around the DMZ, with military and civilian casualties on both sides. In fact, a few days before our visit [news outlets](#) reported that an American Soldier had 'wilfully' crossed into the DPRK. As such, our delegation was unable to visit the Joint Security Area (JSA) due to heightened security concerns.

The JSA is a recognised meeting point between the two nations, where negotiations take place: the area is near the western end of the zone, which consists of 7 buildings.

Far from a sombre tone, the DMZ appeared to be a tourist attraction with an amusement park, cafes, restaurants, museum, and gift shops, however, with barb wire separating the two boundaries. With plenty of parking and 2 bomb shelters, it was an intriguing experience to see the juxtaposition of how locals promote tourism but also have security measures in case of a state emergency.

The DPRK tried to find a way into the Republic of Korea by digging 4 tunnels, of which we could only visit the 3rd Infiltration tunnel, which was discovered in 1978. Wearing our hard hats and travelling 300 metres-deep on a monorail (no bags or phones allowed) we saw the holes where dynamites blew the tunnel.

Whilst in the DMZ we visited the;

- Unification village. A small town with a population of 450 people, mostly farmers and veterans. The fertile lands are best for growing beans, ginseng and rice.
- Dora Observatory. Located on top of the mountain, looking across the DMZ and is on the South of the 38th parallel. Through the binoculars, we got a glimpse of a village North of the border, the joint industrial site Kaesong Industrial Zone, and the JSA.
- Unification bridge. More commonly known as the Bridge of No Return, it was built in 1998; where prisoners were brought to the bridge and had to decide whether to stay in the country of their captivity or cross the bridge to return to their homeland. Once a decision was made, they were not allowed to change their mind.
- Panmunjom Bridge. Nicknamed the 72-Hour Bridge, as it took the DPRK only 3 days to build frantically in 1976, to have access to the JSA.

Cheong Wa Dae

After the visit to the DMZ, we drove for an hour to arrive at Cheong Wa Dae, also known as the Blue House. It is now a public park that formerly served as the executive office and official residence of the President of the Republic of Korea from 1948 to 2022.

It is located in the Jongno district of the capital Seoul and is built upon the site of the royal garden of the Joseon Dynasty. The latest renovations took place in the 1980s.

Cheong Wa Dae encompasses a complex of multiple buildings, built largely in a traditional Korean architectural style, with some modern architectural elements and facilities.

The complex consists of the Main Office Hall, the Presidential Residence, the State Reception House, Press Hall, the Reception room for the First Lady and the Secretariat Buildings. It is approximately 250,000 square metres.

Interestingly it is the first time in 74 years that the compound has been open to the public. As one of his first acts, the new Republic of Korea President Yoon Suk-yeol moved the presidential offices from the Blue House and opened its gates to the public, allowing a maximum of 39,000 people a day to visit.

Farewell Dinner

In the evening, the President of the Korea Foundation Gheewhan Kim hosted the delegation for a farewell dinner. President Kim highlighted the work of the foundation in facilitating the export of Korean culture across the world.

The Korea Foundation was established in 1991 to promote a better understanding of Korea and strengthen friendships across the globe. The foundation supports Korean language studies, arts and cultural exhibitions, and the publication of Korean material and multimedia.

President Kim was pleased that delegations between Australia and the Republic of Korea had recommenced and stressed the importance of continued people-to-people exchange to complement the political and economic relationship upgrades our two countries had recently experienced.

21 July 2023

The delegation travelled home.

Conclusion

The Australia-Republic of Korea Exchange Delegation's visit offered valuable insights into the multifaceted relationship between the two nations.

Through economic exploration, historical commemorations, cultural experiences, and diplomatic engagements, the delegation deepened their understanding of the shared history, values, and aspirations.

These experiences underscored the enduring friendship and alliance between Australia and South Korea, fostering a commitment to continued collaboration in various sectors, including economics, diplomacy, technology, and culture.

The delegation returned to Australia with a renewed sense of appreciation for the bond between the nations and the potential for a prosperous future together.