

Citation for the 2007 Sir Edward Weary Dunlop Asialink Medal  
Tim Fischer AC

Tim Fisher has long understood the importance of Australia's relationship with Asia and he has made a major contribution to that relationship for over 30 years in good times and in difficult times.

Tim's first experience of Asia was not in easy circumstances. In 1966 he was conscripted into the Australian army and served in the Vietnam War. He could have been forgiven for putting Asia far from his mind on his return but, like "Weary" Dunlop, Tim is not that sort of man. Difficult as that experience might have been it awakened in him an understanding that in this region, despite our great differences in culture, religion and history, we are all connected and our futures are intertwined.

On leaving the army Tim returned to his roots in rural Australia and took up farming at Boree Creek in the Riverina. But public life attracted him and he became active in the Country party, won a seat in the NSW Parliament and in 1984, moved on to Federal Parliament. He became National Party leader in 1990 and when the Howard government won power in 1996 Tim was appointed the 11<sup>th</sup> Deputy Prime Minister of Australia and Minister for Trade.

While in state parliament Tim realised that relations with Asia were vital to Australia's future and he began building knowledge of the region and personal relationships with some of its key people. He decided specialisation was necessary and took a particular interest in Thailand where he visited many times. He also took a liking to Bhutan, a small country that doesn't gain much attention on the world stage. He became its champion, promoting its interests and developing strong relationships there.

As Deputy Prime Minister and Trade minister Tim continued to promote trade and political relationships with Asia but he also took a realistic view of the region's strengths and weaknesses. He felt the trade effort should not be wholly focused on Asia and expanded efforts to develop export markets elsewhere. This policy paid dividends for Australia during the Asian economic crisis of 1997.

However when the crisis came he did not abandon Asia, continuing to give support and encouragement to trade, political and personal ties in the region: a stance that was widely appreciated through South East Asia.

Tim also put himself on the line at another crucial time for Australia – Asia relations. The Coalition came to power in 1996 as the phenomenon of Hansonism appeared as a political force. Its message of insularity and ethnocentricity was widely interpreted in Asia as a return to the bad old days of the white Australia policy and many were shocked, hurt and angry that it appeared to be gaining such wide currency.

Hansonism presented a particular problem for the National Party as it was gaining ground in its rural strongholds, particularly in Queensland. Tim could have soft pedalled hoping to reduce the electoral damage by not alienating voters attracted to Hansonism's credo. But Tim Fischer saw the rise of One Nation as a danger to Australia both internally and internationally and so he chose to speak out. He put his position strongly both inside and outside parliament. He directed the department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to develop a web site showing positive images of Australia to counteract the reputational damage that was being wrought and he continued through his own efforts to build positive regional relationships.

Former staffers say his ability to connect with people was legendary and nick named him "two minute Tim" because that's how long it took him to enter a room and get everyone onside with a word, a touch and a smile. In the worlds of diplomacy and trade which often engender a grey conformity, Tim stood out with his friendly and somewhat informal manner and his iconic wide brimmed Akubra hat.

Tim again demonstrated his support for small players in the region when he led a parliamentary delegation in August 1999 to oversee the ballot that marked the painful birth of the independent nation of East Timor.

Since retiring from parliament in 2001 Tim has continued to lead an active public life and bring his skills and experience to new areas. He maintained his focus on Australia's economic links with the world by serving as chairman of Tourism Australia for three years till June 2007. He helped draw us physically closer to Asia by serving as Special Envoy to the Adelaide to Darwin railway line which opened in 2004. He has also made a significant philanthropic contribution through chairing the ATSE Crawford Fund and working with the St Vincent de Paul Society, the Fred Hollows Foundation and Autism New South Wales.

Tim received Australia's highest civilian honour, the Companion of the Order of Australia, in 2005. He has shared the knowledge and wisdom he has built up throughout his life with publication of four books that reflect his passion and experience in different areas.

They are

*Seven Days in East Timor: ballot and bullets.* – the story of Timor's traumatic independence

*Tim Fisher's Outback Heroes: and communities that count,* co written with Peter Rees – a book that reflects Tim's lifelong connection with life outside the cities

*Transcontinental Train Odyssey: the Ghan, the Khyber, the Globe* – an expression of Tim's understanding and passion for the importance of railways and global connection

*Australia & Asia: tango in trade tourism and transport* - Insights on the Australia- Asia trade relations and connections.

Tim Fischer is a man who has made a significant and lasting contribution to Australia's personal, political and economic relationships with Asia. I am proud to present him with the **2007 Sir Edward Weary Dunlop DUNLOP Asialink MEDAL.**