

## **Citation for the 2010 Sir Edward “Weary” Dunlop Asialink Medal**

### **Professor Ross Garnaut AO**

One of Australia’s best-known commentators once wrote that Ross Garnaut had achieved “the magic fusion between economics and emotion.”<sup>1</sup>

Prime Ministers have described him as the architect of the modern Australian economy – and his work on Australia’s relationship with China as “a decade ahead of its time.”<sup>2</sup>

Historians, for their part, write that Professor Ross Garnaut AO helped set the course for Australia’s current engagement with Asia.

Such descriptions in connection with Ross are not uncommon. That people write effusively about him tells us something important. In the realm of economics, Professor Garnaut is regarded as one of the most influential Australians of his generation, while in the realm of Australia-Asia engagement, his contribution has been profound.

Well before Asia was an emphatic part of Australian policy consciousness, Professor Garnaut was developing economic cooperation across the Asia Pacific. He was Assistant Chairman of the first Pacific Economic Cooperation Conference, a direct antecedent of APEC, in 1980. In preparation for the meeting, at the request of Prime Ministers Ohira of Japan and Fraser of Australia, he engaged in consultations, at Cabinet and head of government level, in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Korea, Japan, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the United States and Canada.

From 1981 to 1983, he was Research Director of the ASEAN-Australia Economic Relations Research Project, an initiative of Prime Minister Fraser, and was instrumental in establishing the principal networks now linking economists around the region.

As Prime Minister Hawke’s chief economic adviser from 1983 to 1985, there is no question as to the influence he had on the shape and international orientation of major reforms. A fellow adviser later commented that ‘Hawke never took my advice on a single economic issue unless it coincided with that of Ross Garnaut’.<sup>3</sup> Reforms included the Hawke Government’s policy on financial and trade liberalisation, the Australian initiation of Western Pacific regional consultations on international trade issues, and the intensification of relations with China, Japan and other Asia Pacific economies.

Professor Garnaut was a special emissary of the Prime Minister on trade policy issues to Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines, the People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong, Republic of Korea and Japan.

From 1985 to 1988, Ross was the Australian Ambassador to the People’s Republic of China. This was a time known for a considerable expansion and diversification of Sino- Australian economic, educational

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992) p. 58

<sup>2</sup> Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, launch of *The Great Crash of 2008* by Ross Garnaut, Parliament House Canberra, 22 October 2009

<sup>3</sup> Ed Visbord, quoted in Kelly, op.cit

and political relations. Highlights included the beginning of two-way direct foreign investment, notably the negotiation of what were the first large-scale Chinese direct investments abroad, in the Mt Channar iron ore mine (with Hammersley Iron) and the Portland aluminium smelter (with Alcoa), and the beginnings of the successful Australian challenge to American primacy in research and graduate education involving China.

But perhaps of all Professor Garnaut's achievements of this period, and the one which has had the most profound impact on Australia's engagement in the region, was his prescient report of 1989 on *Australia and the Northeast Asian Ascendancy*, better known as the Garnaut Report. This was of critical importance. It marked an historic point of change, in terms of Australia's Asian engagement.

Asialink celebrates 20 years this year – and the organisation drew inspiration from Professor Garnaut's report and the ideas it espoused. The report argued that Australia had matured enough to have intimate people to people relationships with Asian nations. It also urged Australia to decide upon the place it wanted in the emerging region: did we want a worthwhile role aspiring to excellence, or were we content with mediocrity - beginning a couple of rungs below Japan, Korea and others, and falling further?

Professor Garnaut has dedicated a lifetime to urging Australia forward in its relations in the region. Often tied to an economic imperative, his vision for Australia however goes beyond the economic. As a colleague historian has noted, Garnaut has achieved a special place in Australian history for his contribution to the making of national policy on Asian engagement, and for his role in helping to re-orient this country; he has helped us to see more clearly how fundamental the Asian region is to our future.<sup>4</sup>

Currently a distinguished Professor at the Australian National University and Vice Chancellor's Fellow and Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne, Professor Ross Garnaut has been at the centre of major decision-making in Australia and our region for almost four decades.

This award, commemorating the life and vision of a similarly foresighted and dedicated individual, is richly deserved - and we are proud to present you with the **2010 Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop Asialink Medal**.

---

<sup>4</sup> Professor Anthony Milner, Basham Professor of Asian History, ANU, December 5, 2010