

**Kansanedustaja ja Australian ystävyysryhmän puheenjohtaja Katri Komin puhe
Suomi-Australia –yhdistysten Liitto ry:n organisoimassa
yhteistilaisuudessa eduskunnassa 11.9.2014:**

Your Excellency, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen!

As a chair of the Finnish-Australian Parliamentary Friendship Group it is my honour to welcome you all warmly to this meeting. The Finnish-Australian Friendship Group is one of the Parliament's approximately 60 unofficial friendship groups. The aim of the groups is to maintain relations with the parliaments of various countries as well as to explore the cultures and social systems of these countries. Besides, Finnish-Australian Friendship Group has had cooperation and meetings with The League of Finnish-Australian Societies which has participated in the execution of this event.

In general, Parliamentary friendship groups complement the official international relations of the Parliament of Finland. Particularly important they are when official contacts with some countries don't exist for one reason or another.

Fortunately, that is not the case between Australia and Finland. Both countries are open and willing to co-operate. Our bilateral relations have traditionally been good not to forget to mention strong people-to-people links through the sizeable Finnish community in Australia. Australia and Finland share similar views on most issues in international politics and we are very alike by many standards. We are developed, stable and safe societies, and thus low-risk corporate environment to invest in. Our strong areas lie in an efficient, smoothly functioning society and top-quality expertise.

Many members of our Finnish-Australian friendship group have visited in Australia, have relatives or friends there or are at least interested in the country for one reason or another. My personal introduction to Australia was a world around tour in my 20s, when I also backpacked in Australia. Later on, I have got a chance to get to know both parliamentarians and civil servants from Australia within the Inter-Parliamentary Union. With that said, I just noticed that the speaker of the Australian House of Representatives, The Honourable, Bronwyn Bishop has been nominated for the election of the President of the IPU.

Going back to the relationship between Australia and Finland, it can be said that the interaction between the countries' could be livelier. Due to a long distance, Australia is not necessarily the first destination when Finnish investors, companies or associations look and head abroad. The case is same in Australia. Cooperation in many fields could be increased. About two years ago I met the former Ambassador, the Honourable, Paul Stephens. His message was clear: there could be much more interaction especially in the fields of education and cleantech as well as in mining sector. Bilateral trade and investments as well as sharing the top-quality know-how in these sectors would benefit both parties. As a MP, I have highlighted the importance of investing in all continents, not only in Asia, which seems to be the hot spot in terms of growth and investment flows.

I am happy that both countries constantly work for promoting cooperation. Many high-level visits have occurred both ways. In his former role, as a Minister for European Affairs and International Trade, Prime Minister Alexander Stubb, led a business mission to Australia last December. He for instance met with Foreign Minister, the Honourable, Julie Bishop. The Honourable Brendan O'Connor, member of parliament, then-Minister for Small Business, Minister for Housing and Minister for Homelessness, visited Finland in August 2012. The Honourable Kevin Rudd visited Helsinki as a Foreign Minister in May 2011 for the UN High-level Panel on Global Sustainability. Then-President Tarja Halonen visited Australia in January 2007. In charge of the most recent visits of Parliament of Finland are the Social Affairs and Health Committee, the Agriculture Subcommittee of Finance Committee and The Audit Committee who made their visits to Australia in 2008 and 2009.

Within economic and trade relationship, we have Finpro with its Team Finland partners in Australia which promote the internationalisation of Finnish companies and foreign investments directed at Finland. Very important job is also done by The Finland Australia Chamber of Commerce, which is the other organizer of this event today. You create commercial and cultural ties as well as promote trade for members among the Finnish-Australian business community and the Finnish Community in Australia.

In 2013, total two-way merchandise trade between Australia and Finland was about 900 million Australian dollars. That makes Finland Australia's 46th largest merchandise trade partner. For Finland, Australia is 22nd largest trade partner in exports and 47th largest in imports. Australia's exports to Finland in 2013 totalled A\$69 million comprising mainly coal and alcoholic beverages. Finland's exports to Australia in 2013 totalled A\$825 million, and included for instance paper and paperboard, civil engineering equipment and parts, and specialised machinery and parts.

I am sure we all agree that it is important to promote the cooperation of Australia and Finland. Not only within trade and investments, but also tighten the cultural and social ties between these countries. With that said, I hope we will all find this evening informative and discussion-provoking and also that it creates new ties between the friends of Australia. Once more I welcome you all to this panel discussion and the reception afterwards up in the 7th floor. I wish you all the best of success in your work in promoting the relations between these two great countries.