

**Chief of Navy Address at the International Maritime Security
Symposium**

24 August 2017

Bali, Indonesia

**Developing Multilateral Co-operation in support of good order at
sea to address modern maritime security threats**

Good Morning — it is a pleasure to be here today.

The subject of this symposium is of the utmost importance for all of us who lead and serve in the region's maritime forces. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this topic from the perspective of the Royal Australian Navy.

I would first like to thank the Chief of the Indonesian Navy, Admiral Supandi, for the invitation to this symposium.

Many of us have met many times this year — Malaysia, Singapore and now here in Indonesia. I feel as I am among friends — only I hope you feel the same way about me.

It is through symposiums such as this one, that we are able to explore, as maritime stakeholders, how we can improve good order at sea in our region so as to reduce the potential for miscalculation.

I would also like to acknowledge the insights made by Vice Admiral Phil Sawyer and Rear Admiral Ryo Sakai.

We are fortunate to have their insights. What struck me was that they provided a common theme.

We all have a vested interest in regional peace and stability, unimpeded trade, and freedom of navigation and overflight in our region. We might say this is axiomatic.

We share a common interest in maintaining and advancing an international system based on the rule of law, backed up by dialogue and cooperation, and a transparent approach to strategic interests, particularly in situations where countries may be in dispute over the maritime domain.

On occasion we may disagree, but we should not be disagreeable.

Because without good order at sea there is the increased risk of a regional maritime dispute escalation and the potential for armed confrontations at sea.

This is certainly not in the interests of the region.

But it is not merely a regional issue. I recently spoke at a maritime conference in Europe on a similar theme. It came as a surprise to many in the audience when I recited the volume and value of their trade that passes through these waters. This is a global issue.

And with the ever-increasing regional and global interdependence, no country can truly expect to act alone to solve the maritime challenges which are faced in our region, whether those challenges arise from terrorism to transnational crime, or to environmental damage, or to marine resource exploitation.

Good order at sea is also the primary enabler of trade. The maritime trading system, especially the massive economic trading artery that runs from the Middle East, across the Indian Ocean, through the Strait of Malacca, and increasingly the Sunda Strait, into the South China Sea, past Japan, China and Korea and eastwards to North America benefits all but it cannot be regulated by any one nation.

We all have a real interest in good order at sea.

However, the necessity for working together and making it the normal mode of engagement has become ever more apparent as the complexity of the challenges faced by our region increase.

Changing national circumstances, power shifts and the rise of transnational crime and terrorism has altered the patterns we have relied on for the past 70 plus years.

For these reasons Australia is a strong supporter and advocate of multilateral cooperation to ensure good order at sea.

We support multilateral measures that lower concern, and support the peaceful resolution of differences.

We support measures that can be employed to avert or manage crises, and in doing so assist in the settlement of regional disputes without the use of force.

In this light I would like to consider, from an Australian Navy perspective, how we can practically work together on a multilateral basis to implement good order at sea.

I think above all else we should focus on those aspects of maritime operations that better enable us to cooperate.

In my mind they are principally: sharing of expertise, best practice and lessons learned; collaboratively developing doctrinal approaches and mechanisms to avoid confusion in situations like unplanned encounters at sea; and knowing, in general terms at least, each others capabilities.

It is by focussing on those aspects that navies can best contribute to good order at sea.

I think this focus on the means of cooperation has another important outcome – that is, that cooperation increases our understanding.

By increasing understanding, we achieve greater transparency.

Transparency in the sense that there is more clarity around strategic intent.

If there is a clear view of the strategic intent which is matched by actual behaviours, confidence and eventually trust can be built.

We cannot afford for this understanding and transparency to be held just at senior levels, it must also extend to the middle ranking and junior operational levels as well.

We must interact at all levels and we must exercise together in scenarios that challenge us.

But ultimately we need a collective willingness to act, borne out of a shared understanding of the common challenges that we face.

For the Royal Australian Navy, that collective, multilateral willingness to act is often enabled by established multilateral maritime co-operation forums, initiatives and capacity building programs.

We all know about many of these multilateral forums and initiatives such as the Western Pacific Naval Symposium, the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia, and the Information Fusion Centre in Singapore to name just a few.

Each of these are good examples of where multilateral cooperation through exercising together; sharing information and operational experiences; jointly building our response capacities; and discussing maritime issues of mutual interest — have benefited good order at sea.

But, we must continue to take all suitable opportunities to develop multilateral cooperation, share expertise, best practice and lessons learned, and exercise together.

And I do believe this has been occurring in our region.

I note the official launch of the Trilateral Maritime Patrol arrangements between Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines to undertake patrols in the Sulu-Sulawesi seas aimed at addressing security challenges in that region - given there have been increased incidences of armed robbery at sea, kidnapping and other transnational crimes along the shared areas.

Along with this initiative, the three participating nations established an agreed set of procedures in relation to a range of matters including to information sharing and improved communications.

This development is not just significant for the just the Sulu-Sulawesi seas, but more broadly in the context of the other challenges faced in Southeast Asia.

Importantly, I understand that each participating nation has left room open for the initiative to broaden in terms of its scope and possibly even membership.

Similarly, the ASEAN-led multilateral frameworks continue to make a significant contribution to regional security and stability by building trust, transparency and habits of cooperation.

Australia applauds the work of ASEAN navies in developing these measures.

These frameworks have helped keep peace between neighbours of very different ethno-cultural, religious and political traditions, producing a remarkable pace of development, and lifting tens of millions of its citizens out of poverty.

I was also pleased to see that recently the ASEAN Foreign Ministers adopted a negotiating framework for the code of conduct in the South China Sea.

This is an important step in maintaining good order at sea in the region.

But the Australian Government believes that it is important that the Code of Conduct be finalised in a timely manner and that it be binding, meaningful, effective and consistent with international law including the Arbitral Tribunal decision in July 2016.

However, here is my caution; timeliness should not be prioritised over effectiveness.

Finally, I have been encouraged by the successful work that has been undertaken at the Navy to Navy level within the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus framework.

One such example is last year's combined Maritime Security and Counter-Terrorism Exercise in Brunei and Singapore where Australia and New Zealand worked closely with the host nations to deliver this major exercise.

Such successes have fostered practical cooperation, constructive multilateral engagement between regional nations, and help ensure good order at sea.

My theme has been that this cooperation is essential to support good order at sea.

By cooperating through transparent and predictable maritime arrangements we can ensure that we who serve in the navies of the region do not cause tensions or difficulties through miscommunications.

That increase in trust has real benefits.

And it leaves us better able to cooperate for the benefit of our shared future.

The Australian Government, in its 2016 Defence White Paper recognised this need for greater cooperation and has committed significant resources for this to be done.

As a result, the Australian Defence Force and the Australian Navy that I lead, will more regularly engage with our regional neighbours, both at sea and ashore, and make more effective and meaningful contributions during those engagements to support good order at sea.

For example, we will have a Task Group which includes HMAS Adelaide for much of the remainder of this year undertaking exercises in the region and engaging with regional neighbours.

We will do this because we know that with good order at sea, which the nations represented here today can collectively provide, our region can continue to grow in peace and prosperity, and that is the objective of us all.