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Prosper or Perish: Asian Poverty and the Australian Economy

Tim Fischer

Paper prepared for presentation at the “Prosper or Perish: Asian Poverty and the Australian Economy” conference conducted by the Crawford Fund for International Agricultural Research, Parliament House, Canberra, Australia, June 28, 2001

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Prosper or Perish: Asian Poverty and the Australian Economy

PREFACE

THE HON. TIM FISCHER

The conference in 2001 was the seventh in an annual series established by the Crawford Fund to help raise awareness of international agricultural research, and of Australia's role in it. The topic may seem at first glance to be slightly off-beat. After all, the Fund was set up in response to a call from the World Bank for the establishment of 'national support organizations' to combat a global decline in funding for international agricultural research.

Why are we talking about business investing in rural Asia?

Our mandate is 'to assist poverty alleviation, increase food production and encourage environmental stability in the developing world through support for international agricultural research and development in agriculture and natural resources management.'

We have a vision of a better world for all through this crucial support, and that support is interpreted in its widest possible sense in order to achieve the vision. We therefore support and encourage Australian business investment in rural Asia for mutual benefit.

Benefits to the developing countries of Asia include increasing personal incomes, creating more jobs, having smaller families, better health and nutrition, increased political and cultural stability and so on. Other contributors to this conference will provide more details about these benefits.

THE HON. TIM FISCHER MP, Chairman, Crawford Fund Board of Governors, Melbourne, is one of Australia's most highly regarded politicians. His long career in politics began after he left the Australian Army in 1970 and he began to raise the profile of rural Australia at the State, and then Federal, level. He was elected Leader of the National Party in 1990 and appointed Shadow Minister for Trade in 1993. In 1996 he was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade. His interest and advocacy for Australia to become a trading super-power, especially in Asia, are well known. Mr Fischer retired as Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Trade and Leader of the National Party in June 1999 and continues to serve his constituents in Farrer, while lending his considerable advocacy and political talents to chair the Crawford Fund's Board of Governors.

At the same time, Australia benefits in many tangible and intangible ways. The tangible ways include increased trade opportunities leading to a better and more prosperous business sector; the intangibles include closer cultural relations and a better understanding of the needs and wants of our neighbours.

If we truly want a better world for all, for the many reasons that other contributors point out, corporate Australia needs to be doing its bit. It will be '*doing well by doing good.*'

I was pleased to welcome Ian Johnson, the Vice President of the World Bank, as keynote speaker. Ian was recently appointed the Chairman of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research. And I was especially pleased to welcome Dr Mechai Viravaidya who was invited here to tell us about the success of his efforts to encourage business to invest in rural Asia. They joined our other distinguished guests to help bring the message that Australia is '*doing well by doing good*' and

that there are far more opportunities for it to *do better*.

I will outline the relationship between The World Bank, the CGIAR, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, and the Crawford Fund.

The World Bank is a cosponsor of the global network of international agricultural research centres called the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). Australia is one of 58 industrial and developing countries that, together with private foundations and regional and international organizations, provide financial assistance and technical support to the CGIAR centres. The CGIAR's mission is *'to achieve sustainable food security and reduce poverty in developing countries through scientific research and research related activities in the fields of agriculture, livestock, forestry, fisheries, policy and natural resources management.'*

Australia is home to the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), a statutory authority operating within the portfolio of Foreign Affairs and Trade. ACIAR's mission is *'to achieve more productive and sustainable agricultural systems for the benefit of developing countries and Australia, through international agricultural research partnerships.'* It brokers research and development projects with partners in developing countries, and Australia. These partners are drawn from mainly the public but also the private sectors. ACIAR also funds training that will help to implement research. About three-quarters of ACIAR's total R&D budget is allocated to its bilateral programs to improve the agricultural systems of developing countries.

Amongst its activities in R&D and training, ACIAR also administers the Australian Government's annual donation to the CGIAR centres that accounts for one quarter of ACIAR's R&D budget. These funds are divided between most of the 16 centres that make up the network. Grants are also provided to a small number of non-affiliated centres. In the 2000-2001 financial year, Australia has contributed A\$9.6 million via ACIAR, and A\$4.5 million via other R&D sources to the CGIAR's research agenda.

Since its establishment the Crawford Fund has been a small but distinctive part of Australia's international development assistance effort. We focus on support for international agricultural research that complements the work of ACIAR and the CGIAR system. We are funded through donations from Federal and State governments and the private sector.

The core activity of the Crawford Fund is raising awareness - which is one of the reasons for the series of conferences I have already mentioned. The Fund has also built strategic alliances with the Australian and international R&D communities in the public and private sectors; together we establish and fund training courses for men and women from developing countries. These courses are held in Australia and overseas; they help to increase the capacity of farmers, scientists and researchers to learn new skills, or build upon existing skills. Building this capacity will help the Third World to achieve economic growth through agricultural development. Many hundreds of men and women have taken part in the Crawford Fund's training program that complements the overall R&D effort in Australia and developing countries.

The activities of the CGIAR, ACIAR and the Crawford Fund are all aimed at reducing poverty in developing countries. The major part of Australia's development assistance program to reduce poverty is administered by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), which, like ACIAR, reports directly to the Minister for Foreign Affairs for all its operations in helping to relieve poverty in developing countries. The annual aid program budget stands at \$1.725 billion.

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Conference supporters

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