# Postcards from Post: interview with Dane Roberts, Australia’s agriculture counsellor in Indonesia

(Duration 12 mins 33 secs)

## Transcript

**Tim Dawson [Host]:** Australia exports over 70% of its agriculture, fisheries and forestry produce. And DAFF has a network of agricultural counsellors posted in Australian embassies across the globe to help make that trade happen.

In this series, we'll hear from those counsellors. Welcome to Postcards from Post.

Good afternoon, Dane.

**Dane Roberts [Counsellor Indonesia]:** Hi, Tim. How are you?

**Tim**: In the Indonesian market what are the main products that we export to Indonesia? And where do you see opportunities for Australia to expand?

**Dane**: Thanks, Tim. So, as I mentioned, live cattle is a good example. You know, it's our number one market for that. It's our number 5 market for boxed beef, so we're sending quite a bit of meat here.

It's our number 2 market for wheat at the moment. And that's wheat's a really good example of two-way beneficial trade where, you know, Australia exports a lot of wheat to Indonesia and Indonesia, has a lot of food processing here, where they, you know, they turn our wheat into products like instant noodles and pastas and baker wares and export to around the world, including back to Australia.

So, you know, we've probably all eaten some two-minute noodles in our time, particularly our student days. And, you know, they may have been made here with wheat.

In terms of opportunities, it's a very, you know, mature market. As I mentioned, so there's already pretty good access. But as Indonesia, grows and becomes wealthier and you know it's on track to be sort of a top 5 economy in 15 or 20 years. You know, there's increasing opportunities for premium products from Australia, I think.

And, yeah, there's a lot of potential there.

Tim: I guess, one of the big challenges, of course, because Indonesia is, a major market for our export cattle, live export of cattle has been in maintaining that trade?

Dane: Yeah, that's right. Indonesia is our largest live export, market for cattle. Over half of Australia's live cattle exports come to Indonesia.

So, it's a critical market for that industry. And, particularly during my time here, with, disease outbreaks here and various things like that, it's involved. Quite a lot of work, but I guess what I would say is, you know, it's a very strong relationship between our exporters and the feedlot importers here.

So, it's a real pleasure to work with all the parties involved, and they already have very, strong and long business relationships.

**Tim**: Can you tell us about the scale of the market? I mean, how many people are there in Indonesia and, how keen are they on Australian produce?

**Dane**: So, Indonesia is the world's fourth largest country by population. There's roughly 275 million people. The economy keeps growing at 5% every year. Even during COVID, it grew well. So, there's a lot of opportunity. It's a huge market, and that's one of the fascinating things about living here. Generally, Australian products are, viewed as a premium product. Theoretically, as the economy grows, there'll be increasing opportunity for Australia to sell, premium products here, but as I said, we already do export a lot of products here. But there's a lot of growth opportunity.

**Tim**: What support can you offer exporters from the Australian industry?

**Dane**: So, in our role here, we do a few things. One of the important things we do is advise on Indonesian policy, particularly their regulations for accessing the market, for example, for new businesses.

That can be quite tricky sometimes. It's fairly complex. The regulation here and some of the processes can be fairly involved and lengthy.

So, one thing we do is advise and keep a keep abreast of those policies and any changes to them and give advice on that.

**Dane**: One thing I would say, too is, because we're, you know, one of the closer markets to Australia. We're lucky enough to get a lot of visits here in market, both from industry and from government.

So, we really enjoy that seeing our exporters come to market, it's very important for them to meet with their importers and other business networks, and we are always excited about meeting with those exporters when they when they come to Indonesia and particularly to Jakarta, and we can work with them, to, you know, to facilitate meetings at the embassies, link them up with importers.

We work with Austrade and other agencies here as it's our largest embassy in the world. So, it's a bit of a mini-Canberra in terms of there's a lot of other agencies here, as well as DAFF and DFAT and others. So we also work with other agencies in a Team Australia approach.

**Tim**: You were talking there about visits from industry coming over and making those connections in Indonesia. How important is it to have people on the ground like yourself to keep Australian trade flowing in Indonesia?

**Dane**: It's very important, relationships is really the critical part of this job. And one of the joys of the job is getting to build those relationships with a whole range of people here in the market. And you know, as good as Teams calls are and video calls, it's not the same as sitting down with someone and having a coffee with them or you know, meeting with them in person. And so we, you know, regularly meet with a range of key stakeholders here, such as the Cattle Importers Association and those sort of businesses, and maintain those relationships. So, the other obvious example, I guess, is where something goes wrong. And thankfully, that doesn't happen too often.

But, you know, if there is a detained consignment or an issue with a shipment of product from Australia, being on the ground here and our, highly skilled team of local staff here, we have five local staff that work with Dean and I. So, you know, we're able to, look into what the problem is and try to resolve it.

**Tim**: Are there many opportunities for our fisheries industry for fishing or for aquaculture in exports to Indonesia?

**Dane**: Yeah, absolutely. Salmon is a really great example where we have a good trade of salmon coming to Indonesia, and it has really grown over the last few years. So, there's a lot of opportunity for seafood products, particularly salmon, and over time, we're starting to see some interest here as well from some other fisheries products, even things such as lobster, for example.

And I think, as the Indonesia's taste for these products, continues to grow there's opportunity for more exports from Australia. The challenge, of course, is noting that Indonesia, you know, is also a country with an enormous fisheries industry. So, there is good competition there, of course.

In the forestry sector, again, Indonesia has an enormous forestry industry and exports, considerable amounts of processed forestry product, particularly to Australia. But again, we work with Indonesia in the forestry space, particularly in, some of the international areas such as, measures to combat illegal forestry. And, that's yeah. Well, I, work on both those parts of our work.

**Tim**: That's actually interesting to hear about that. Working together with Indonesia to combat the illegal forestry. What other programs are you involved in where we might, work collaboratively out of the embassy with Indonesia?

**Dane**: Indonesia still receives development assistance. It's still an ODA country for Australia. So what that means is, DFAT’s development programs in the embassy - yeah, there's a there's a number of them – it's a large development spend. And some of those, of course, touch on rural and regional areas, agriculture, and, I guess an easy example is, attempts to combat animal diseases.

So, when Indonesia had its outbreaks of foot and mouth disease and lumpy skin disease in 2022, Australia donated a lot of vaccines to assist, and we provided a range of other support. So, they're obvious examples of development assistance where Australia's assistance was greatly appreciated by Indonesia.

And as agriculture counsellor, you know I've been involved in attending am whole range of events for vaccination training. Or, you know, I've held core flute signs where we've donated millions of doses of vaccines to Indonesia, so yeah.

**Tim**: Yeah, so as a very close neighbour and with that, chain of islands that almost connect us they're not very far away. And with disease outbreaks, you mentioned foot and mouth and so on. But there's also rabies and I believe Australia and our department's been involved in helping Indonesia in combating Rabies?

**Dane**: Yeah, that's right, Tim, rabies, is you know, a problem in Indonesia as it is in many countries, and Australia's worked closely with Indonesia to combat the spread of Rabies. A really, good example is DAFF has donated 600,000 doses of rabies canine vaccine over the past three years, which have all gone to Bali and are intended to help control and get on top of Rabies in Bali.

We also at the embassy here we I work quite closely with DFAT colleagues in the animal health areas there, and they've had quite a focus on West Timor of late and in that whole sort of Timor region again to combat Rabies.

Everything from assistance with vaccinations to doses of vaccine and planning. So, e all work very closely with, um, Indonesia's Directorate of Animal Health, for example, their animal health area in the Ministry of Agriculture. And, hopefully you know, um, we'll make some progress on that with Indonesia and help them where it's helpful to combat Rabies.

**Tim**: So, then would it be fair to say that the DAFF Agricultural Counsellor network is not only there to support and facilitate trade, but also to actually protect our agriculture from a biosecurity standpoint?

**Dane**: Absolutely. And, you know it's been one of the one of the things that in my time here when I started at the start of 2022 I knew biosecurity would be part of the work, but certainly, a lot of the pre-posting discussions were in the trade side of things.

However, then soon after I arrived in 2022 there were outbreaks of foot and mouth disease and lumpy skin disease. And, more recently, Rabies had has spread a bit within Indonesia. So, the biosecurity side of things is quite a part of our work. But it's a very important part, obviously, try to, work with Indonesia to combat these diseases and stop the spread of them. So, the work is far more, it's far broader than just trade. And that's one of the enjoyable things about the work. I think that it's so diverse and varied.

**Tim**: And given that it is so broad, I guess a lot of it goes to the general relationship between our two countries as near neighbours?

**Dane**: Yeah, that's right. Australia and Indonesia are neighbours. And that relationship's critical. Obviously, at the bilateral level. And it's much more than trade. So, I get to play, you know, a small but hopefully helpful part in in that relationship, particularly in the agriculture space, and hopefully that that has a range of benefits for both countries.

[Video ends]

**Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

© Commonwealth of Australia 2024

Unless otherwise noted, copyright (and any other intellectual property rights) in this publication is owned by the Commonwealth of Australia (referred to as the Commonwealth).

All material in this publication is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode) except content supplied by third parties, logos and the Commonwealth Coat of Arms.

The Australian Government acting through the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has exercised due care and skill in preparing and compiling the information and data in this publication. Notwithstanding, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, its employees and advisers disclaim all liability, including liability for negligence and for any loss, damage, injury, expense or cost incurred by any person as a result of accessing, using or relying on any of the information or data in this publication to the maximum extent permitted by law.