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### **Australian Academy of Science submission to the *Inquiry into supporting democracy in our region***

The Australian Academy of Science (the Academy) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade inquiry into supporting democracy in our region.

The Academy submits that:

- Scientific knowledge, grounded in empirical enquiry and established evidence, is vital to discerning facts, informing decision-making, and nurturing civil society and democratic institutions locally and globally.
- The partnership between the Australian Government and the Academy as host of the International Science Council Asia-Pacific Regional Presence has the potential to advance evidence-informed policy in the region.

#### **Regional engagement through the Academy's science networks**

Australia should support evidence-informed policy development in the region through initiatives that build science and science advice capability, international scientific engagement and collaboration. Helping build science mechanisms will allow regional partners to make informed decisions about the future and solutions to local and global challenges. This will require investment in STEM education, fostering regional research collaborations and knowledge sharing, and protecting the freedom and independence of scientists.

Small island developing states may gain data, resources and expertise in sectors such as disaster risk and reduction, environmental stewardship or climate adaptation from relevant international organisations to which they would otherwise have limited access.

Australia has an opportunity to support engagement with regional and global scientific fora, helping to address regional barriers to international engagement, such as geographic remoteness and underdeveloped scientific networks. Linkages with the global scientific community allow nations to draw from international data, policies and experiences, supporting their decision-making with evidence and expertise.

From 2023, the Academy will host a new initiative: the International Science Council (ISC) Regional Presence for the Asia-Pacific region. The Asia-Pacific Regional Presence will strengthen the voice of scientists and social scientists from countries in the region and support targeted action to address regional needs and priorities.

Through the ISC Regional Presence for the Asia-Pacific Region, the Academy can assist Australia's interest in supporting democracy in the region by advancing regional neighbours' engagement with Australia, the ISC and other international bodies.

Promoting international engagement and providing opportunities in our region will allow nation states and territories to access relevant knowledge to inform their sovereign priorities. The Australian Academy of Science has a 69-year membership of the ISC, membership of many international scientific unions and carefully nurtured bilateral and multilateral relationships. The Academy is well-positioned to assist the Australian government and support democracy in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Academy would be pleased to brief the committee on the partnership between the Academy, the Australian Government and the ISC to co-host the ISC Asia-Pacific Regional presence in Australia.

To discuss or clarify any aspect of this submission, please contact Ms Nancy Pritchard, Director International Programs and Awards [REDACTED]