

Australia's Experience with Peer Review

By Blair Comley*

Summary of Presentation

Peer review can be thought of as having three aspects – peer learning, peer support and peer pressure. Durable peer review processes focus on mutual peer learning and support as peer pressure rarely works unless countries can be convinced that a policy is in their national interest. Viewed through this lens, successful peer pressure should best be thought of as another form of peer learning – a peer learning where the country may initially be unconvinced of the merits of the case.

This perspective suggests that a number of conditions are required for peer review to work well:

- First, there must be a high degree of trust and respect between the parties to the peer review;
- Second, parties must be prepared to share information freely and openly;
- Third, the peers must have at their disposal sufficient analytical and administrative capacity to conduct the peer reviews.
- Fourth, the peers must be seen to have legitimacy in the eyes of domestic constituents
- Fifth, the reviewed country counterparty must be seen as legitimate in the eyes of domestic constituents.

Establishing sound peer review mechanisms may be more or less difficult in the context of regional integration. Proximity may lead to greater trust and openness, but it may also be associated with long-standing historical differences and grievances. Near neighbours may be seen as informed and legitimate reviewers, or to be too coloured by their own national interests to constructively enter into a dialogue.

In principle peer review could be a useful adjunct to other aspects of a regional integration strategy designed to bring mutual benefit to the participating countries. However, where regional integration projects involve deepening legal and economic commitments it is important to disentangle sanction regimes from peer review to ensure that the free disclosure of information is incentive compatible.

The prospects for peer review in the Asian context do not appear to be hampered by the formal structures of legalistic integration. Accordingly, there appears ample scope for well designed peer review, focussing on respectful peer exchange, to contribute to domestic policy development.

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