

Visit from the Ambassador of Finland

Just before the Winter recess, I was privileged to meet with Her Excellency, Mrs Maija Lahteenmaki, Ambassador of Finland on her First Official visit to Western Australia. The Ambassador was accompanied by Dr Nestor Vargas and Mr David Greatwich, Honorary Consul of Finland in Western Australia.

Her Excellency is a career diplomat with more than three decades of experience with postings including Canada, Sweden, Egypt, Chile, USA and Spain. Ambassador Lahteenmaki was appointed Ambassador to Australia in January 2010, with non-resident accreditation to New Zealand and Fiji.

It was interesting to speak with the Ambassador about the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), which affected both countries. The GFC caused a sharp decline in trade figures between Finland and Western Australia. Trade between Finland and Western Australia in 2008 amounted to almost \$1.1 billion, which then dropped to \$279 million in 2009, which was a result of a lower demand for nickel (98% of Western Australia's total exports to Finland are nickel ores and concentrates). Finland is Australia's second largest market for nickel, importing around 29% of Australia's nickel for stainless steel manufacturing.

Finland has few natural energy resources. As a result, the Finnish Parliament has approved the construction of three new nuclear reactors (Finland currently has four reactors) to meet increasing energy demand. The Ambassador assured me that nuclear power is the cheapest option for Finland. In 2007, all four reactors provided 28.4% of Finland's electricity and they are among the world's most productive. The Ambassador said that Finnish people are among the most nuclear power-friendly nations in the European Union.

It was great to learn from Her Excellency that Dragon Mining is a Western Australian company with successful operations in Finland. Its production facility near Tampere, Finland, produced over 29,000 ounces of gold in 2008. Dragon Mining has several other projects under development in Finland. Finnish companies operating in Western Australia include Outokumpu and Metso Minerals.

The Ambassador also met with the Lord Mayor of the City of Perth, Lieutenant Governor and Administrator of the State of Western Australia, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and a visit to the University of Western Australia.



Picture: Mr David Greatwich, Honorary Consul of Finland in Western Australia, Dr Nestor Vargas, Her Excellency, Mrs Maija Lahteenmaki, Ambassador of Finland, and the President, Hon. Barry House MLC.