

# Aussie MPs meet Taiwan leaders

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A bipartisan group of Australian politicians has arrived in Taipei for meetings with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen and her top officials amid warnings from Taiwan's Defence Minister that China's ongoing military drills risked "getting out of hand".

Labor MP Josh Wilson, a member of the parliamentary joint committee on intelligence and security, and Coalition frontbencher Paul Fletcher are leading the eight-member Australian delegation, which began its four-day trip on Monday.

"This visit of cross-party heavyweight parliamentarians to Taiwan shows their support," said a spokesman for Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Taiwan trip – only the second by a group of sitting Australian politicians since 2019 – comes after Taipei expressed concern over the weekend about the People's Liberation Army's activities. Defence Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng warned the PLA's manoeuvring risked "getting out of hand".

Taipei and its security partners are closely monitoring a round of Chinese military exercises at a bay area in coastal Fujian Province. They follow the swarming by unprecedented numbers of PLA air force fighters, drones and bombers in recent weeks, and the operation of PLA navy warships and Chinese aircraft carrier Shandong in waters around Taiwan.

The eight Australian politicians are expected to meet Ms



AFP

Taiwanese special forces demonstrate their skills at an open day in Hsinchu last week

Tsai on Tuesday, followed by briefings with her top security and economic officials, and Foreign Minister Joseph Wu.

Opposition assistant foreign affairs spokeswoman Claire Chandler said it was "an honour to be in Taipei" as part of the cross-party parliamentary delegation. "Many Australian parliamentary delegations have visited Taiwan over the years, and it's important to see these delegations continue with the easing of travel restrictions following the pandemic," Senator Chandler told *The Australian*.

"As an incredibly important trading partner in our region, it's only appropriate that parliamentarians continue to regularly engage with Taiwan."

Before taking over as Labor leader, Anthony Albanese led one of the last Australian delegations before Covid.

This group includes Labor MPs Graham Perrett, David

Smith and David Mulino, Labor senator Catryna Bilyk and Liberal senator Matt O'Sullivan. Their visit comes as Canberra tries to firm up its relations with allies and partners in the region, while continuing to "stabilise" relations with Beijing ahead of a trip to China by Mr Albanese.

Foreign Minister Penny Wong over the weekend met with her counterparts in the Quad, who reiterated their "strong opposition to any unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion" in the South and East China Seas, areas in which Beijing has made assertive claims.

Trade Minister Don Farrell struck a more positive tone on Monday, welcoming the return of Chinese group tours. Chinese visitor arrivals to Australia have surpassed 50 per cent of pre-pandemic levels and are expected to boom over the coming "Golden Week" holiday.