Research Seminar

‘The Diplomacy of a Weak State: Indonesia and the Campaign for Recognition of the Archipelagic Principle’.

By: Associate Professor John Butcher, IBAS, Griffith University

In 1957 the Indonesian government declared its “absolute sovereignty” over all the waters between the islands making up Indonesia. This action, which had the effect of unifying the territory of Indonesia for the first time, outraged the maritime powers, which regarded it as a gross violation of the freedom of the seas enshrined in international law. Having but a miniscule navy at its disposal, the government appeared to be in no position to overcome a challenge to its claim from the maritime powers. And yet eventually, in 1982, the government gained international recognition for this claim when the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea formally recognized the existence of a new category of states known as archipelagic states and declared that these states had sovereignty over their “archipelagic waters”. So how did such an apparently weak state gain acceptance for this radical change in international law? First, the government gradually obtained a degree of acquiescence to its claim by playing on the fear the maritime powers, particularly the United States, had of provoking the Indonesian public as well as the government. Then, starting in the late 1960s, a small group of talented officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs launched a multi-pronged campaign designed to gain international recognition of the archipelagic principle. It was that campaign that eventually achieved the government’s objective.

John Butcher is a member of the Department of International Business and Asian Studies and the Griffith Asia Institute.

→ Thursday 6 August 2009
→ N54 (Bray Centre) Room 2.02
→ Nathan campus
→ 12.30 -1.50pm

To RSVP, please contact Natasha Vary on (07) 3735 5322 or n.vary@griffith.edu.au no later than 5.00pm Tuesday 4 August 2009.