

ASEAN's Sydney Declaration aired strongest position on South China Sea

Written by vuquangtiep
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Despite the lack of an explicit reference to China's militarization of the West Philippine Sea, the ASEAN and Australia's joint statement brought out the strongest position on the contested waters, an analyst said.



The 10-member regional bloc and Australia released the "Sydney Declaration" at the end of the two-day ASEAN-Australia Special Summit.

In the joint declaration, the leaders reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, stability, maritime safety and freedom of navigation and overflight in the region.

"We emphasise the importance of non-militarisation and the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities and avoid actions that may complicate the situation," the joint statement read.

The ASEAN and Australian leaders also called for an early conclusion of an effective Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

Dindo Manhit, president of independent think tank Stratbase ADR Institute, said that the Sydney Declaration "raised the level of regional cooperation amidst a changing geopolitical environment where the Philippines is a major stakeholder."

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"ASEAN's unequivocal support for the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea and non-militarization springs a new momentum for the government and a strong message against actions that run counter to building regional trust and confidence," Manhit said

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