



Senate Estimates – 27 February 2025

Opening statement

Chair, at a challenging time for the global trading landscape, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is focused on positioning Australia as strongly as possible on its trade and economic interests.

This means maintaining strong partnerships, strong influence and networks – including through our activist trade diplomacy – and strong resilience at home in our economy and institutions.

These are the assets Australia has brought to bear in engaging closely with the new US Administration. We've put forward at the highest levels Australia's significant contribution to US prosperity and the mutual benefit our deep and longstanding economic partnership delivers.

Australia's patient and steadfast diplomacy has allowed us to work cooperatively with China to wind back around \$20 billion worth of trade impediments on Australian exports.

Australia's live rock lobster trade to China restarted in December 2024. This followed the removal of Chinese impediments on Australian wine, red meat, barley, oaten hay, cotton, timber, coal, and copper ores and concentrates.

We are working closely with businesses and the community at large to diversify Australia's trading markets – while our industries diversify the products and services they offer to the world.

We finalised a deal with the United Arab Emirates in November 2024, expected to increase Australian exports by around \$700 million a year to our largest trade and investment partner in the Middle East – and a key security partner.

As you know, this agreement followed a completed deal with the United Kingdom, which entered into force in May 2023 and secures duty-free access to the UK for 99 per cent of Australian products.

We have upgraded the free trade agreement between Australia, New Zealand and ASEAN. This upgrade, which Australia ratified on 20 February this year, will further reduce barriers for Australian trade.

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We have strengthened our economic partnerships and links in our own region, through our Southeast Asia Economic Strategy. As part of this strategy we are reviewing our network of trade agreements in Southeast Asia to identify opportunities to upgrade and ensure they keep expanding business opportunities in the region.

Australia has benefited greatly from rules-based trade.

We are leading work in the WTO to drive reform to that institution because we know that it urgently needs to respond to the concerns of its members if it is to remain relevant. We are also driving new rules to meet the needs of a new economic era, including to deliver new global rules on digital trade.

We have opened up consultation on trade policy through a variety of new mechanisms such as the Trade 2040 Task Force, which brings a range of business, union and civil society representatives into policy making efforts to chart a course for Australia's trading future.

We are advancing First Nations trade and investment for Australia, bringing together First Nations business leaders, industry groups and experts in international trade for the first time earlier this month. And we played a lead role in finalising a landmark global treaty that protects First Nations intellectual property in May last year – an historic practical step that helps First Nations businesses and exporters share in the economic benefits of trade.

Australia's activism in trade diplomacy shapes a safer world for our economy, creating jobs, delivering better outcomes for consumers, and boosting our national prosperity.

Chair, embracing global trade and investment has always been at the heart of Australia's security and prosperity.

Trade supports 31 percent of Australia's economic output and 3 million Australian jobs.

There is no doubt we are living through a challenging time for Australia's trade interests.

As the Prime Minister says, Australia is a trading nation.

In navigating this challenging time we need a pragmatic blend of dealing with the world as it is and hewing towards our bearings – our commitment to openness and rules in global trade – to the greatest extent possible.

We will continue to use all of our assets – including our strong partnerships around the world and our first class trade policy expertise in the Department – to continue our steadfast activism in favour of Australian interests.

I look forward to your questions.