



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area

SPEECH

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Plibersek, Tanya, MP

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Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (15:42): On behalf of the opposition, I welcome the tabling of the signed First Protocol to Amend the Agreement Establishing the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area and the accompanying national interest analysis. The ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area agreement is a trade liberalisation agreement between 12 countries in the South-East Asia region—namely, Australia, New Zealand, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The agreement is still acknowledged today as the most ambitious free trade agreement negotiated by Australia. It was signed on 27 February 2009 by former Labor trade minister Simon Crean. Since its coming into effect on 1 January 2010, trade between Australia, ASEAN and New Zealand has continued to flourish. In 2013, the parties to this regional free trade agreement accounted for 17.6 per cent of Australian two-way trade in goods and services. The amendments agreed to in this first protocol will further enhance and promote this trade. This protocol aims to reduce red tape and increase harmonisation. Such aims will translate into trade efficiencies for our exporters and increased growth.

The protocol aims to facilitate trade by incorporating the consolidated product-specific rules, using the most recent version of the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System. This system is an international system first established in 1983, pursuant to the International Convention on the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System, commonly referred to as the harmonised system, or HS, code. This system is maintained by the World Customs Organization. Australia signed on to this trade-facilitating international convention during the period of the Hawke Labor government. Australia has continued to seek uniformity in its subsequent trade agreements by utilising the HS system.

Labor welcomes this amendment as well as others made by this first protocol that are aimed at facilitating trade by addressing administrative requirements and implementation issues. These include the removal of the requirement to reflect sensitive commercial information on the free-on-board value in the certificate of origin in cases where the regional value content criteria is not used. Other amendments include simplifying the presentation of the agreement's rules-of-origin provision.

Continuing to increase trade security and cultural relations in our South-East Asia region is crucial for Australia's future prosperity. Forty years ago, under the visionary stewardship of Australia's former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, Australia became ASEAN's first dialogue partner. In 2012 Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard tabled a comprehensive road map for Australia in the form of the white paper *Australia in the Asian century*. It is a shame that the intellectual rigor underpinning the long-term goals of that white paper have been archived by the current government.

The regional trading relationship reflected in the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand free trade area has been successful for Australia and its partners. It has also served as a springboard to wider and deeper regional multilateral trade. As stated by the Minister for Trade and Investment, it was the ASEAN member states that initiated negotiations on the regional comprehensive economic partnership. Former trade minister Dr Craig Emerson participated in the formal launch of the regional comprehensive economic partnership negotiations in November 2012 at the ASEAN summit in Cambodia. Labor has since participated in subsequent negotiation rounds, and we support the government's efforts to make progress on this multilateral trade agreement. In addition, we urge the government to focus its trade negotiations on the more efficient and effective multilateral negotiations in priority of bilateral agreements.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge that trade facilitation measures that make trade easier and more consistent, such as those effected in the first protocol, are not considered controversial and are welcomed by business. I urge the government to properly build on these enhancements in a global context. The WTO's trade facilitation agreement, concluded for Australia by Dr Emerson in Bali in December last year, was a breakthrough on the Doha Round. Prompt implementation of this agreement was a key priority recommendation by the B20 at the recent G20 summit.

We urge the government to proactively work with other WTO members to quickly get this agreement back on track. We can assure the government of Labor's strong bipartisan support on this WTO agreement which will lift economic growth and jobs. Labor welcomes the tabling of the AANZFTA first protocol. We encourage business to become familiar with the terms of the protocol and to make submissions to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties during the committee's inquiry on the protocol.