



**THE TWENTY-FIFTH AEM-CER CONSULTATIONS  
29 August 2020, Video Conference Meeting**

**JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT**

1. Economic Ministers from the ten ASEAN Member States, Australia and New Zealand (Closer Economic Relations – CER) virtually met on 29 August 2020 for the Twenty-Fifth AEM-CER Consultations. The Consultations were co-chaired by H.E. Tran Tuan Anh, Minister of Industry and Trade, Viet Nam; the Hon Senator Simon Birmingham, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Australia; and Mr. Vangelis Vitalis, Deputy Secretary Trade and Economic Group, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand (representing Hon. David Parker, Minister for Trade and Export Growth, New Zealand).
2. The Ministers noted the 1.2 per cent increase in ASEAN’s total trade with Australia from AUD 120.7 billion in 2018 to AUD 122.2 billion in 2019, based on Australia’s data. The Ministers also noted the 6.6 per cent increase in ASEAN’s total trade with New Zealand from AUD 15.95 billion to AUD 16.99 billion in 2019. According to Australia’s and New Zealand’s data, Australia’s direct investment in ASEAN in 2019 accounted for 5.5 per cent of Australia’s total direct investment abroad – valued at AUD 45.4 billion, while New Zealand’s direct investment in ASEAN for the same year was valued at AUD 855 million accounting for 3.2 per cent of New Zealand’s total investment abroad.
3. The Ministers expressed deep concern over the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which has affected the lives and livelihood of peoples as well as economies around the world. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of keeping markets open for trade and investment to strengthen resiliency and sustainability of regional supply chains and maintain necessary flow of goods and services. The Ministers agreed to refrain from imposing measures, including non-tariff measures that could disrupt the flow of essential goods and services to address the COVID-19 pandemic, while ensuring that any measures introduced are targeted, proportionate, transparent and temporary, do not create unnecessary barriers to trade, and comply with the existing WTO rules. The Ministers also agreed to pursue facilitative measures that will expedite a sustainable economic recovery from this crisis.
4. The Ministers noted the efforts made in the implementation of the Agreement on the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA) and Work Plan for the AANZFTA Upgrade Negotiations even though the first round of negotiations for the upgrade of the AANZFTA could not take place as scheduled in June 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. In light of the ongoing disruption and impact of COVID-19, the Ministers resolved to take forward the upgrade negotiations with urgency to ensure that AANZFTA remains fit for purpose, and to provide a signal of AANZFTA Parties' commitment to regional integration. The Ministers encouraged lead negotiators to meet as soon as possible, in order to explore creative ways to expedite and take forward the AANZFTA Upgrade Negotiations, in light of the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with a view to concluding the Second Protocol to Amend the AANZFTA in an expedited timeframe. The Ministers noted that upgrade discussions would be held virtually until such time as in person meetings could be held. The Ministers also encouraged officials to consider incorporating provisions that could facilitate trade and investment to remove unnecessary barriers to restore confidence among businesses and consumers so that the region can emerge together strongly in post-pandemic environment.

6. The Ministers welcomed the full implementation of the AANZFTA Tariff Reduction Schedules (TRS) and the Product Specific Rule Schedule (PSR) in HS 2017 by all AANZFTA Parties.

7. The Ministers looked forward to the holding of the 12<sup>th</sup> AANZFTA Joint Committee and the 9<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-CER Integration Partnership Forum at the earliest possible time.

8. The Ministers appreciated the commitment from Australia and New Zealand for the continued support to the ANZFTA Economic Cooperation Support Programme (AECSP) until 2021. Noting the success of the AECSP, the Ministers welcomed Australia's and New Zealand's commitment to introduce a successor programme for economic cooperation under the AANZFTA beyond 2021. The Ministers noted the Economic Cooperation Work Programme (ECWP) Prioritization Plan (EPP), and encouraged the effective implementation of the economic cooperation activities under the EPP, particularly in expediting the AANZFTA Upgrade Negotiations and contributing to the economic recovery of the AANZFTA Parties from the impact of COVID-19.

9. The Ministers acknowledged that the importance of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) continues to grow in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, the Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to sign the RCEP Agreement in 2020, which will serve as a clear signal of the region's unwavering support for the multilateral trading system, regional integration as well as economic development across the region. The Ministers also underscored the importance of bringing back business confidence to facilitate post-pandemic recovery and agreed to intensify coordinated efforts in promoting economic and social resilience in the region.

10. The Ministers reiterated their strong support for the rules-based multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its core to lay the foundations for a strong, sustained and socially inclusive recovery in global trade. The Ministers recognized the urgent need for WTO reform and agreed to work together to seek meaningful and timely progress to achieve more open trade and balanced and sustainable development objectives.

11. The Ministers reaffirmed their support for ASEAN centrality and the ASEAN centred regional architecture, including the importance of open markets, standing firm against protectionism, and supporting the rules-based multilateral trading system. The Ministers looked forward to promoting cooperation between ASEAN, Australia and New Zealand, in line with the principles and objectives set out in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), including cooperation in areas of economic cooperation, maritime cooperation, sustainable development and connectivity identified in the AOIP, in order to help promote economic recovery and contribute to longer-term peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

12. The Ministers were briefed by representatives of the Australia-ASEAN Chamber of Commerce (AustCham ASEAN), ASEAN-Australia Business Council and the ASEAN-New Zealand Business Council (ANZBC) on current business outlook amidst the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministers noted various feedback on expectations for the region to strengthen economic integration efforts through the AEC, AANZFTA as well as RCEP. The Ministers took note of the results of the Australian Business in ASEAN Survey 2020 conducted by the AustCham ASEAN and various recommendations from the AABC and ANZBC. The Ministers further noted the challenges that the businesses are facing at the ground level during this COVID-19 pandemic and encouraged the private sector to work side-by-side with the governments in the region to overcome those challenges.

## LIST OF MINISTERS

1. **Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham**, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Australia;
2. **H.E. Dato Dr. Amin Liew Abdullah**, Minister at the Prime Minister's Office and Minister of Finance and Economy II, Brunei Darussalam;
3. **H.E. Pan Sorasak**, Minister of Commerce, Cambodia;
4. **H.E. Agus Suparmanto**, Minister of Trade, Indonesia;
5. **H.E. Mrs. Khemmani Pholsena**, Minister of Industry and Commerce, Lao PDR;
6. **H.E. Datuk Lim Ban Hong**, Deputy Minister of International Trade and Industry (representing H.E. Dato' Seri Mohamed Azmin Ali, Senior Minister, Minister of International Trade and Industry), Malaysia;
7. **Mr. Than Aung Kyaw**, Director General, Foreign Economic Relations Department, Ministry of Investment and Foreign Economic Relations (representing H.E. Thaung Tun, Union Minister for Investment and Foreign Economic Relations, Myanmar);
8. **Mr. Vangelis Vitalis**, Deputy Secretary Trade and Economic Group, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand (representing Hon. David Parker, Minister for Trade and Export Growth, New Zealand);
9. **Mr. Allan B. Gepty**, Assistant Secretary, Department of Trade and Industry, Philippines (representing H.E. Ramon M. Lopez, Secretary of Trade and Industry, Philippines);
10. **H.E. Chan Chun Sing**, Minister for Trade and Industry, Singapore;
11. **Mrs. Auramon Supthaweethum**, Director General ,Department of Trade Negotiations, Ministry of Commerce, Thailand (representing H.E. Jurin Laksanawisit, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Commerce, Thailand);
12. **H.E. Tran Tuan Anh**, Minister of Industry and Trade, Viet Nam; and
13. **H.E. Dato Lim Jock Hoi**, Secretary-General of ASEAN.